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Workplace and community: workers' politics of representation in Semarang and Pekalongan, Central Java

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Hari Nugroho

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Workplace and Community

Workers' Politics of Representation in Semarang and Pekalongan, Central Java

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Glossary

ABKS	*Aliansi Buruh Kabupaten Semarang*; Semarang Regency Workers Alliance
ABM	*Aliansi Buruh Menggugat*; Workers' Challenge Alliance
ACFTA	ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement
ACILS	American Center for International Labor Solidarity (Solidarity Center)
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
APINDO	*Asosiasi Pengusaha Indonesia*; Indonesian Employers Association
ASPSB-Serang	*Aliansi Serikat Pekerja Serikat Buruh Serang*; Alliance for Serang Workers' Unions
BBI	*Barisan Buruh Indonesia*; Indonesian Workers Front (established in 1945)
BPJS	*Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial;* Social Security Agency (for health care and manpower services)
BWI	Better Work Indonesia; a joint program of International Labour Organisation (ILO) and International Finance Corporation (IFC/World Bank Group) for assessing the companies' compliance of labour standard
Disnaker	*Dinas Tenaga Kerja; Regional Manpower Office*
DPR	*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat;* People's Representative Council
DPRD	*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah;* Regional People's Representative Council
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; Friedrich Ebert Foundation
FKRM	*Forum Komunikasi Remaja Masjid*; Communication Forum for Mosque Youth

FPBN	*Forum Pendampingan Buruh Nasional*; Forum for National Workers Advocacy
FSBS	*Forum Solidaritas Buruh Serang*; Serang Workers Solidarity Forum
FSP Farkes Reformasi	*Federasi Serikat Pekerja Farmasi dan Kesehatan Reformasi*; Federation of Reformed Pharmacy and Health Workers Unions
FSP KAHUT SPSI	*Federasi Serikat Pekerja Perkayuan dan kehutanan*; Federation of Wood and Forestry Workers Unions – SPSI
FSP KEP	*Federasi Serikat Pekerja Kimia, Energi dan Pertambangan*; Federation of Chemical, Energy, and Mining Workers Unions.
FSP KEP SPSI	*Federasi Serikat Pekerja Kimia, Energi dan Pertambangan* – SPSI; Federation of Chemical, Energy, and Mining Workers Unions – SPSI.
FSP NIBA SPSI	*Federasi Serikat Pekerja Niaga, Bank, Jasa dan Asuransi;* Federation of Commercial, Bank, Service and Insurance Workers Unions – SPSI
FSP PAR SPSI	*Federasi Serikat Pekerja Pariwisata*; Tourism Workers Union Federation – SPSI
FSP RTMM SPSI	*Federasi Serikat Pekerja Rokok, Tembakau, Makanan dan Minuman - SPSI*; Federation of Cigarette, Tobacco, Food and Beverage Workers Unions – SPSI.
FSP TSK SPSI	*Federasi Serikat Pekerja Tekstil, Sandang, Kulit*; Federation of Textile, Garment, Leather Workers Unions.
FSPMI	*Federasi Serikat Pekerja Metal Indonesia*; Federation of Indonesian Metal Workers Union
GASBI	*Gabungan Serikat Buruh Indonesina;* Amalgamated Trade Unions of Indonesia
GSBVI	*Gabungan Serikat Buruh Vertikal Indonesia;* Amalgamated Vertical Trade Unions of Indonesia

GASBIINDO	*Gabungan Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia*; Indonesian Islamic Trade Union Amalgamated
GEMPUR	*Gerakan Masyarakat Pekerja Ungaran*; Ungaran Workers Community Movement
GERBANG	*Gerakan Buruh Berjuang Jawa Tengah*; Central Java Workers Struggle Movement
Gerindra	*Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya*; Great Indonesia Movement Party
GOBSII	*Gabungan Serikat Buruh Sjarikat Islam Indonesia*; Amalgamated Indonesian Islamic Workers' Organisation
GOLKAR	*Golongan Karya;* Functional Group Party
GP Ansor	*Gerakan Pemuda Ansor*; Ansor Youth Movement
HISSBI	*Himpunan Serikat-Serikat Buruh Indonesia*; Indonesian Workers' Unions Federation
HIVOS	*Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking;* Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation (Netherlands-based donor organisation)
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JABURTANI (PKS)	*Jaringan Buruh Tani Nelayan*; Networks of Workers, Farmers, Fishers (a division of PKS - Prosperous Justice Party)
Jamkesda	*Jaminan Kesehatan Daerah;* Regional Health Insurance
Jamsostek	*Jaminan Sosial Tenaga Kerja*; Workers' Social Insurance
KAJS	*Komite Aksi Jaminan Sosial*; Social Security Action Committee
KBIM	*Kongres Buruh Islam Merdeka*; Independent Islamic Labour Congress
KBKI	*Kesatuan Buruh Kerakyatan Indonesia*; Indonesian Populist Workers' Union

KBSI	*Kongres Buruh Seluruh Indonesia*; All-Indonesia Workers' Congress
KHL	*Kebutuhan Hidup Layak*; Decent Living Needs (Index)
Kongkarbu SOKSI	*Konsentrasi Golongan Karya Buruh;* Workers' Functional Group Concentration (a labour organisation establish by SOKSI)
KPPOD	*Komite Pemantauan Pelaksanaan Otonomi Daerah*; Regional Autonomy Implementation Monitoring Committee
KPUD	*Komisi Pemilihan Umum Daerah*; Regional General Elections Commission.
KSBSI	*Konfederasi Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia*; Confederation of Indonesia Prosperous Labour Unions
KSPI	*Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Indonesia*; Confederation of Indonesian Workers' Unions
KSPN	*Kesatuan Serikat Pekerja Nasional*; National Workers' Union Unity
LIPS	*Lembaga Informasi Perburuhan Sedane*; Sedane Labour Information Institute
Masyumi	*Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia*; Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims (Muslim Party of the 1950s
MPBI	*Majelis Pekerja Buruh Indonesia*; Indonesian Assembly of Workers – a workers alliance for consolidating the movement among different unions.
MPBI	*Majelis Permusyawaratan Buruh Indonesia*; Indonesian Labour Consultative Council (an institution established by Indonesian government during the New Order era (1971) to accommodate the different interests of unions.
Murba-SOBRI	Proletarian Party established by Non-PKI communists
Nahdliyin Center	Nahdliyin Center (community centre affiliated to NU)

NU	*Nahdlatul Ulama*; Revival of Religious Scholars (Indonesia's largest Islamic Organisation)
Omah Tani	*Omah Tani*; Farmers' House
PAN	*Partai Amanat Nasional*; National Mandate Party
PATTIRO	*Pusat Telaah dan Informasi Regional*; Centre for Regional Information and Studies (NGO)
PBSD	*Partai Buruh Sosial Demokrat*; Democratic Social Labour Party
PDIP	*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*: Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle
PGRI	*Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia*; Indonesian Teachers Association
PKB	*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*; National Awakening Party
PKI	*Partai Komunis Indonesia*; Indonesian Communist Party
PKS	*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*; Prosperous Justice Party
PPP	*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*; United Development Party
SARBUMUSI	*Serikat Buruh Muslimin Indonesia*; Indonesian Muslim Labour Union (linked to NU)
SBII	*Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia*; Indonesian Islamic Trade Union
SBKI	*Serikat Buruh Kristen Indonesia*; Indonesian Cristian Workers' Union
SBY	*Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono* (the 6th President of the Republic of Indonesia)
SEKBER-Buruh	*Sekretariat Bersama Buruh; Workers' Joint Secretariat*
Sekber-Golkar	*Sekretariat Bersama Golongan Karya*; Functional Group Joint Secretariat
SI	*Sarekat Islam;* Islamic Union/Association
SJSN	*Sistem Jaminan Sosial Nasional*; National Social Security System

SMID	*Solidaritas Mahasiswa Indonesia untuk Demokrasi;* Indonesian Students Solidarity for Democracy
SOBRI	*Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia*; Central All-Indonesian Workers Organisation
SOKSI	*Sentral Organisasi Karyawan Sosialis Indonesia;* Central Organisation of Indonesian Socialist Employee
SOB Pantjasila	*Sentral Organisasi Buruh Pantjasila*; Pantjasila Central Workers Organisation (linked to Catholic Party)
SP BUN	*Serikat Pekerja Perkebunan Nusantara*; Nusantara Plantation Workers Union
SP KAHUTINDO	*Serikat Pekerja Perkayuan, Kehutanan, dan Umum, Indonesia*; Indonesian Wood, Forestry, General Workers Unions
SPN	*Serikat Pekerja Nasional*; National Workers' Union
SPSI	*Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia;* All Indonesia's Workers Union (currently a confederation: KSPSI)
TURC	Trade Union Rights Centre (NGO)
UMK	*Upah Minimum Kota/Kabupaten*; Regional (City/Regency) Minimum Wage
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
Yasanti	*Yayasan Annisa Swasti;* Annisa Swasti Foundation (NGO for women workers)
Yawas	*Yayasan Wahyu Sosial*; Wahyu Sosial Foundation (NGO)
VSTP	*Vereeniging van Spoor-en Tramweg Personeel;* Rail and Tram Workers' Union (established in Dutch colonial era)

PART I WORKERS' MOVEMENTS AND HETEROGENOUS CONSTITUENCY

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1. The Local Movements[1]

It was nearly half past seven in the evening when I encountered three women who were cycling along the road in a fishing village, in the northern coastal area of Pekalongan city, in the Province of Central Java. They were workers of a nearby fish canning factory. Arriving at the house in the corner of a residential street, they entered a yard, and joined dozens of their fellows who had gathered in a meeting for a political training workshop held by union branch leaders from the National Workers' Union (SPN). The workshop targeted female workers. Opening with the union salutations, the union leaders – mainly men – took turns delivering speeches about the 2014 Legislative Elections that would be held in the following two months. They spoke about labour candidates who would run for the Legislative Elections, about their programs and the merits of the candidates in fighting for local wage increase. The leaders also brought to mind the services of the candidates who had advocated for the rights of the workers and their families, to access healthcare services provided by the local government. Therefore, they suggested strongly to the workers and their families to vote for the legislative candidates from the union. During the closing speech, the union leaders emphasised the significance of these political actions at the regional legislative body for improving the workers' life. Both the unionists and majority of workers recognised the experiment as a valuable experience despite the union's candidates eventually failing to win the parliamentary seats in the 2014 Legislative Elections finally.

A different response to a similar experience was expressed by the labour activists who were affiliated with the same organisation (SPN) in Semarang, an industrial region close to Pekalongan, a few days after the 2014 Legislative Elections ended. When I attended a regular meeting of this local trade union, the atmosphere of

1 This study focuses on labour union activism in two regions: Pekalongan City and Semarang Regency. While 'City' and 'Regency' serve as administrative categories, I will henceforth use 'Pekalongan' and 'Semarang' without specifying the administrative statuses for the practical purpose of this writing. Complete regional designations will only be used for comparisons requiring detailed information on these differences.

the meeting was calm. There were only a few people in a relatively small room at the union's regional branch office of Semarang. When the union leader started the meeting, he made an announcement about the local labour candidates who failed to gain significant votes in the Legislative Elections. The announcement was brief. The leader explicitly requested the unionists not to discuss it further, without giving any clear reasons. All who attended in the meeting followed the leader's request. As if nothing significantly happened, they turned to discuss other labour issues such as wage negotiation, preparation for annually union's branch level meeting, and union's plan to join the celebration of May Day. Over the following days, when I met other unionists and workers in the factories and in the neighbourhood, the topic of the local union experiments in electoral politics nearly disappeared, swallowed up by their stories about the day-to-day works in the factories.

The above illustration depicts the trade union events that highlight contrasting experiences of workers and labour activists in electoral politics across two industrial regions. While unions of both regions equally relied on their own respective organisations rather than political parties to mobilise workers to vote for union-backed legislative candidates, they differed significantly in several ways. In Pekalongan, the workers' political experiment was deeply rooted in a community-oriented movement. The unionists extended their outreach beyond the workplace, engaging with constituents from the broader community and combining workplace-based interests with larger social concerns (Dahana and Arifin 2017). Conversely, the Semarang unionists' political experience lacked integration within their primary organisational structure. They primarily focused on a traditional form of labour movement, placing strong emphasis on workplace-based interests as the main goal of struggle, rather than embracing broader societal interests (Juliawan 2010).

This thesis explores the dynamics of representation of workers who are organised under different forms of movements – the community-oriented unionism and the workplace-based unionism – in different industrial regions in Central Java, Indonesia. The questions I explore are: how do the workers in each region develop strategies that led to different kind of unionism despite some similar underlying conditions? To what extent do the chosen strategies adequately serve the interests of each constituent they mobilised under the existing social, cultural and economic-political contexts? [2] I argue that the character of each union in

2 I define the constituent as the people whose voices and interests are championed by their representatives or leaders through the movement. The people are not limited to workers as being shown by the case of unions in Pekalongan which extend the target of activism to various marginalised groups in the local communities.

each location and the way that character is exercised to serve the interests of its constituents are shaped by, firstly, the way in which the unionists, as the main actors of the movements, respond to the existing local economic and political regimes, but also, secondly, by their subjective experiences and the interactions of the unionists and the constituents they claimed in fulfilling their collective interests. This thesis, thereby, primarily emphasises the interactional processes of the movement actors in different social, economic and political contexts.

Community unionism, as exemplified in Pekalongan, was arguably uncommon among unionists in many industrial areas during the first decade of Indonesia's Reformation (Törnquist 2004, 385; Törnquist 2022; Caraway and Ford 2020, 36-38). While most local trade unions maintained the workplace as the core arena of activism, the union activists and workers in Pekalongan sought to integrate workplace-based struggles and various forms of broader socio-political activism with diverse groups of constituents. Despite the fact that Pekalongan alone is only a small town with a minor industrial area, the workers have demonstrated themselves as a militant force seeking to transcend conventional form of unionism. It challenges the common premise saying that the emergence of such militant labour movements is influenced by the extensive industrialisation (Silver 2003; Seidman 1994, 15).

The expansion of unions' activism into broader community poses some highly complex issues due to the heterogeneity of their constituencies. It confronts unions to a high degree of differentiation of social groups, whose interests and identities are defined by varying economic activities, social and political affiliations, and cultural values.[3] The making of a common interest becomes a critical point in organising heterogeneous constituencies. It requires strategies

3 Industrial labour encompasses a wide range of categories, with workers being legally and structurally classified. These categories include permanent workers, temporary workers in various roles such as short-term contractors, outsourced workers, casual workers, and even homeworkers. Production organisation often give rise to diverse relationships based on social identities such as gender, skill, age, regional origin, and positions within the work hierarchy. Some of these identities and positions intersect with the workers' role as part of a larger social community beyond the workplace. Gender identity, age, religion, and class position interact with regional affiliations, political preferences, and more. The heterogeneous nature of the workforce, whether acknowledged or not, influences how labour unions manage this diversity. Therefore, when union organisations in Semarang, especially in Pekalongan, attempted to establish connections with non-worker communities, they encountered a complex web of heterogeneity. In Pekalongan, for instance, activists strove to mobilise groups such as fishers, street vendors, residents affected by regional infrastructure projects, as well as, established networks with religious organisations, students, political parties, and others. Consequently, the diversity of identities, interests, and political orientations becomes an inevitable aspect that must be navigated.

and prerequisites to bind all these diverse groups into a common consciousness and identity that serves as the foundation of the collective interest.

Conventional unionism that emphasises workplace-based activism with economic orientation also poses another problem related to their constituents. This is particularly evident in the unions in Semarang. Workers in this region grew out of a manufacturing industrial economy that was built by large-scale globalised enterprises, against the backdrop of an agrarian economic region as illustrated by Wolf's extensive study (Wolf 1992) on the same region three decades ago. The core goal of the unions' struggle was an economic welfare gained from jobs in industrial sector. They organised unions that were close to the character of business unionism (Taft 1963), emphasising workplace as the core terrain of struggle. They were certainly not isolated from activism beyond the workplace. They also had chances to compete in legislative elections, and were also involved in organising community advocacies. However, the interest in electoral politics in Semarang remained marginal in these unions and workers' activities. The community-based activism they organised was fragmentary and short-lived.

Even though these unions in Semarang usually claim that the working class is a unified constituency, the facts show that it has never been homogenous. Workers' heterogeneity is formed by various types of labour which have long been reproduced by labour markets and capital forces of labour processes and the maximisation of capital accumulation (Saptari 2000, 149-150; Teal 1985, 8). The current reproduction of labour types has resulted in the growth of precarious non-standard labour (Standing 2011). The reproduction of such labour in Semarang, including elsewhere in Indonesia, is facilitated by pro-market labour policies, which create the increased marginalisation of this category of labour in particular and the working-class in general (Islam 2001; Juliawan 2010, 26). Precarious non-standard labour, such as short-term contract workers, outsourced workers, home-based workers and other various kinds of casual labour, have grown significantly everywhere. Female workers are frequently the most affected group by the increasing size of this non-standard labour (Ledwith 2012; Kabeer 2018). The growth of these kinds of labour has put unions in difficult situations in organising their membership – largely due to high turn-over rates of workforce. It is this condition that has resulted in unions claiming that factory workers are their main constituents, as being evident in the case of Semarang. By contrast, it has increasingly strengthened the grip of capital and state control over non-standard labour, excluding them from the bulk of stable, protected, permanent industrial workers.

Thus, I argue that workers in Semarang and Pekalongan have faced equally complex problems of heterogeneity that was reproduced by economic organisations, and social and political differentiation in communities. This is regardless of any choice of organisational form of movements – whether workplace-based or community-oriented unionism. The movement in each region created its own complexity in the relationships between organisations, leaders, and constituents. The constituents – both workers and other community groups – had multiple identities and interests that were shaped by differences in gender, employment status, union membership, locality, political preferences, religious affiliation, etc. Consequently, synchronisation of interests among the heterogeneous constituents became a critical democratic issue within movement organisations.

The most potential issue of representation may arise since most constituents were subjects with less power to define their own collective interests, let alone the formal interests of the organisation. In contrast, key actors of the movements, such as unionists and other labour activists, played dominant roles. They established and asserted collective goals and interests primarily by extracting resources available in the local and broader contexts throughout the development process of the movements over time: from the initial formation of a unionism to the subsequent representation practices.[4]

The problem arose when the unifying instrument they used to bind all constituents under the same set of interests does not recognise the constituents' heterogeneity. In fact, the formation of movement agencies is inevitable in the making and maintaining of the movement, which requires a complex social process. For instance, the strategies that the unionists choose in defending the constituents' interests are influenced by the way they define the conception of workers' movements and the unionists' biographical experiences in previous movements.

4 Nevertheless, a categorical separation of constituents and the key actors of movements should be examined carefully. In practice, these categories are sometimes inseparable, depending on different times and context. The cases in Pekalongan and Semarang have shown that some ordinary workers at the rank-and-file have emerged as prominent key activist as the movement progressed. By contrast, a labour activist who played a vital role in building a movement might eventually face elimination and lose their leadership position when the movement organisation faced ongoing challenges from company management or hostile political attacks. These shifts in position are often accelerated by strategic missteps in collective actions, changes in local political support, shifts in employers' attitudes, and even internal conflicts within the union itself.

Thus, a socio-anthropological approach makes pivotal contributions to the illumination of social and cultural process of movements, filling in the gaps in the accounts of social structure and the political-economic analysis of the institutions behind them. The character of a movement is basically the product of interactions among actors over a certain period of time and space. Thereby, the relations of constructed types of movement and the heterogeneous constituencies would be also critical.

Although labour unions in Semarang and Pekalongan share some similarities and are located in close proximity, it is essential to explore the conditions that led workers to engage in different types of movements. Despite their similarities in terms of organisational affiliation, historical union legacy, and available political opportunities, this exploration aims to explain their differences. Furthermore, and most importantly, the analysis emphasises the consequences of these differences for the relationship between unions – represented by leadership circles – and diverse constituencies.

1.2. Workplace and Community in Trade Unionism

The comparison of workplace-based unionism and community-based unionism can be perceived as an analytical rather than strictly empirical distinction, as labour activism typically involves a mix of community and workplace elements despite different emphasis (Mollona 2009, 664). Nevertheless, a brief exploration of these analytical categories is necessary for understanding the conceptual landscape (Eimer 1999).

Workplace unionism refers to unions employing collective bargaining institutions in employment relations as the primary instrument to defend workers' traditional interests: such as better working conditions and welfare schemes that emphasise the significance of wage (Eimer 1999; Taft 1963, 21). Workplace unionism remains the dominant form of labour organisations (Wang 2005; Pringle and Meng 2018; Murray, et al. 2010), although globalisation has dispersed production sites geographically through supply chains and thus undermining workers and unions' bargaining power (Mosley 2011).

For workplace-based unionism, workers are the main source from which this union mobilise its collective force. External entities like communities, political organisations, and NGOs are only deemed a supporting structure. The ideological adherents of this movement assume that the main tasks of the workers' struggle to be within the economic sphere rather than the political fields, although it does not entirely preclude it (Mollona 2009; Walsh 2012). Several studies show that

some workplace-based unions in Europe and Asia have undertaken political actions that includes lobbying and campaigns against government's policy (Beale 2003; Chan and Hui 2012). Likewise, as commonly observed in Indonesia, trade unions have entered political agreements with local political parties in exchange for support during annual minimum wage negotiations. Nevertheless, such political actions never outweigh the unions' core principles in economic struggles.

In contrast, community unionism, often connected with social movement unionism (Waterman 1993; Moody 1997; Stewart, et al. 2009, 6, 12), has been growing extensively in many countries over the last few decades. Community unionism refers to unions work with communities and community organisations over issues of interest to either or both (Stewart et al. 2009, 3).[5] This unionism exhibits varieties that are shaped by the process of its emergence. One variant emerges as a strong response to the impasse in the face of contemporary capitalism which results in the growth of precarious labour that is excluded from standard protection system (non-standard labour) due to decomposition of production structure and labour market liberalisation (Fine 2007, 36). These unions build alternative forces by incorporating precarious labour. This includes informal labour employed under community base occupations while retaining its traditional constituency in the workplace (Kamath and Ramanathan 2017; Philips 2005; Li 2017).

Aside from the aforementioned expanded trade-unionism that remains centred on work-based interests (Fine 2007, 44; Collins 2006), another form of community unionism focuses on broader issues, merging citizenship issues into labour concerns such as healthcare and educational access, housing and public transportation. These forms of unionism collaboration with broader and more diverse constituents and networks beyond industrial working-class such as, NGOs in diverse issues, religious and cultural communities, farmers communities, etc (Collins 2006; Holgate, et al. 2012, Lee 2015). Some notable exemplars have been shown by workers' movements or popular movements in Brazil and South Africa during 1970s–1980s (Seidman 1994), and in The Philippines (Scipes 2018, 350), Argentine (Serdar 2015) and India (Nowak 2017) during the early 2000s.

5 There has been a wide range of perspectives in defining "community" within the concept of unionism. Stewart (2009, 4-12) has presented a complex landscape, demonstrating how scholars have defined it based on geographical settings, as well as social relations shaped by various interests and identities.

These categorical classifications, however, are not absolute. The aforementioned unions in Semarang, for instance, were also involved in limited community-based social and political experiments, while political experiments in Pekalongan were intertwined with their workplace struggles as well. The intersectionality between workplace and community activities underscores the fluidity and interdependence of these categories despite their primary strategic focus.

1.3. Diverse Trade Unionism and Social Movement perspectives

Numerous studies link the emergence of the diverse types of unionism to factors derived from both the political-economic structure of capitalism.[6] These explanations, however, fall short in comprehensively elucidating the social and political processes that shape a specific form of labour organisation. As a result, they do not sufficiently allow for an in-depth exploration of the ramifications arising from the emerging process of each type of unions, and the dynamic relations between movement actors and the economic and political structure, for movement constituents.

While acknowledging the validity of political-economic variables in the capitalist economy remains useful, the adoption of social movements theories provides more room for the discussions on the social processes operated under the political-economic structures.[7] The application of these theories into studies on community unionism, for instance, have contributed valuable insights on political processes, historical relevance, and socio-cultural factors as crucial elements of analysis (Waterman 1993; von Holdt 2002). It reveals

6 The political-economic approaches emphasise the capitalists' organisations of productions, like corporate accommodative politics, as factors that keep workers adhering to traditional strategies that represents conventional organising models of movement, despite globalization pressures (Heckscher 1996; Gindin 2012; Chan and Hui 2012). Likewise, the emergence of community unionism is also attributed to factors such as strong the pressures of neoliberal capitalism that limit channels for workers and unions expression, exacerbated by bureaucratic union constraints (Moody 1997, Geer 2008, Barchiesy and Kenny 2008).

7 The labour movement, as the 'old' form of social movement, has developed its own theoretical tradition. Its approach, based on material relations (Losada et al. 2014, 104), emphasises the connection between employment relations and the capitalist economic surplus (Kelly 1998, 4; Blyton and Turnbull 1998, 28-31), setting it apart from the explanatory models embedded in social movement theories that many non-material movements contribute to. While political economy explanations of material relations remain valuable in this study, social movement theories that highlight individual actors, organisations, and networks as central elements of movement agency prove particularly useful in explaining the circulation of unionism.

the peculiarity of the movements and the complex contextual nuances as being shown by studies on the emergence of these movements against authoritarian regimes in developing countries (Seidman 1994; Schiavone 2007; Scipes 2018). The contextuality becomes even more significant since these movements are increasingly spreading at the local level (Agarwala 2013; Nowak 2017). Mollona also argues that understanding the social and political process of how each form of movement was formed is useful to present a historical and anthropological reflection of the moral economy of the workers in different place and time (Mollona 2009, 663). Therefore, similar benefits are also found in explaining the tendency of workers to maintain traditional workplace-based union models. Although they may limit themselves to political actions, workplace unions are not separable from political influences, including political ideologies (Hyman 2001; Beale 2003).

1.3.1. Agency in Workers' Movements

Various theories of movements have accorded equal attention to individual autonomy (Eidlin and Kerrissey 2019, 518), aiming to balance the predominant structural analysis in studying social movements such as exemplified by theories of mobilisation (Tilly 1978; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Some scholars have integrated the role of individuals and groups into the concept of structure, as evident in opportunity structure theorists, allowing subjectivity within the overarching framework. This integration encourages a deeper exploration of the agency roles, not only in the emergence of organisational forms of the movements but also in the relationships between activists and their constituents. Agency serves as a bridge that fills the gap between the macro and micro levels of analysis, resolving what Burawoy and Von Holdt term a false opposition between determinism and voluntarism (2012, 52).

The relationship between structure, social process of mobilisations, and key actors of movements, particularly in the working-class movements, holds a central position in Gramsci's concept of the intellectuals of movements (Tarrow 2011; Annunziato 2011). According to Gramsci, the transformation of a mass into a movement is impossible without the roles of key actors whom he calls 'intellectuals' (Gramsci 1971). In this context, intellectuals include not only thinkers, but also those who undertake organisational responsibilities (Gramsci 1971: 97).

These key actors emerge from the natural need of the masses for leadership capable of guiding them. Gramsci assumes the masses have a limited capacity to understand themselves due to the obstruction of the hegemonic power that

historically subordinates them through forces and consents (Green 2011, 68-70; Denning 2009, 70). The masses can feel the situation of which they are complaining, but the feelings are incoherent and fragmentary (Crehan 2002, 129-130). They can feel but they are not be able to comprehend the hegemonic power relations that subordinate them, and therefore, are difficult to formulate and organise their own will. Thus, the role of the driving actors is to perform a counter-hegemony. They unite the incoherent feelings, produce and instil counter-knowledge (Crehan 2002, 132). This notion clearly dismantles Marx's idea of economic determinism that considers culture as the product of the political-economic structure. Gramsci contends that cultural reproduction is necessary for exposing the political-economic dominations that are embedded in the minds of the masses (hegemony) (Crehan 2002, 139).

The actors derive their capacity to understand and represent the masses from their experiences in the class to which they belong. Although Gramsci strongly opposes Marx's economic determinism, he accepts the idea that the economy shapes classes in which actors belong to certain social position and find experiences of class antagonism. It is this experience that transforms their consciousness giving them the potential to become a movement actor (Gramsci 1971, 6-8; Crehan 2002, 144). What distinguishes him from Marx is that the struggle is not carried out in the economic sphere, but in the realm of politics and ideology instead (Burawoy and Von Holdt 2012, 57).

The transformation from the ordinary people into the a conscious actor does not occur in a mechanical way. The social process to learn the class antagonism is essential particularly for the working class, as evident in the experiences of some key unionists in Semarang and Pekalongan (see chapter 4 and 6). This social process of learning can be linked to Bourdieu's *habitus* (Husu 2013), which unfolds the social and cultural process of the formation of movement agency in more detail, enriching Gramsci's concept of movement agents. Although Bourdieu and Gramsci differ in their views of social classes, and Bourdieu alone never discusses specifically social movements, and did not even believe in class struggle, both share many similarities (Burawoy and Von Holdt 2012, 52-53, 58). Thus, Bourdieu's fundamental concept is useful for understanding the essential relations between learning to be the agents of movements and class belongness (Crossley 2002, 177).

Bourdieu's habitus of actors refers to any schemas of perception, forms of know-how and competence, disposition, and actions that are derived from the actor's biographical roots that embedded in their social class (Bourdieu 1992, 54; Crossley 2002, 174-175). Habitus of social movements explains how the

capacity of movement actors to practice as agents is historically shaped. Bourdieu defines it as the capacity to feel for the game (Bourdieu 1992, 66; Maton 2008, 54). Therefore, the degree to which actors engage in past contentious politics influences how they perceive existing social problems and utilise their skills in organising the movement (Passy and Monsch 2019, 501-502). Habitus also explains why some individuals who belong to the same social class, and emerged from the same social institutions such as families, educational institutions may appear to be competent actors while the others do not.

The process of 'selection' of these agents resembles the way in which Gramsci perceives the emergence of intellectuals in movements (Gramsci 1971, 9; Crehan 2002, 131-132). In the case of Pekalongan and Semarang, not everyone from the working class appeared as militant unionists or political activists who are able to mobilise the others (see chapter 4 and 6). Those who became activists also operated at different levels of movements. Some led at the regional level, organising wider-scale movements that brought them to broader networks of actors, while others become key figures either only in the factories or the communities, or even in smaller groups. This also confirms how Bourdieu defines the scope of agency[8] (Maton 2008, 51) and how Gramsci assumes that the term intellectual that does not only refer to individuals. Instead, it refers to a group or a network that has the capacity for agency (Crehan 2002, 133). He even refers to the intellectuals' force can be institutionalised into an organisation. Organisations such as trade unions and political parties are the structured authority of the workers' agency.

Departing from this assumption, I argue that the networks built by actors – both formal and informal, are an essential element of agency; the network is not a mechanical structure that mobilises a movement, but rather a collection of actors who have interests, values, and various resources that are synchronized with the movement's goals. They circulate new knowledge, instil new interpretations, build counter-hegemonic narratives that form a new collective consciousness. In other words, the actors in a movement cannot act alone in mobilising the resources. Instead, they mobilise the resources through interactions with networks, alignment of values and goals, and the formation of a cultural framing that becomes a collective ideology. But this is certainly different from the accounts of resource mobilisations theory that focus on organisational resources per se (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Edwards, McCarthy and Mataic 2019), setting aside

8 Bourdieu defines habitus as a property that is attributed to agents. However, these agents are not limited to individuals; they can also encompass groups or even institutions (Maton 2008, 51).

the social process by which the individual actors develop their capacity and make connections between the class orientation and the present actions in the movements.

1.3.2. Movement Actors and Structures

Stemming from these assumptions of agency capacity, any form of organisational development involves the complex roles of unionists and their networks and the interpretation process of the existing structural conditions and the constituents they represent. They perceive the meaning of threats and opportunities that lead to certain strategies, determining the emergence of particular form of organised movements and its development.

In the analysis of political process, threats propelling the movement and political opportunity structure appear as crucial elements influencing the circulation of a movement (Tarrow 2011). Political opportunity refers to the objective social and political conditions that enable the mobilisation or the success of collective actions or social movements in general (Tilly 1978, 133-138; Porta and Diani 2020). As any social movement inherently challenges the status-quo or ruling regime, its mobilisation carries political implications, and therefore, its success hinges on the prevailing political opportunities or barriers. The opportunities manifest through factors such as the availability of institutional access or the openness to new actors; the stability of political alignments and inter-elite conflicts; the Influential allies; changes in repression or facilitation (McAdam and Tarrow 2019, 25-26). The movements flourish and evolve when these variables favour the mobilisation attempts.

The opportunities will not result in mobilisation of movements without the individuals' subjectivity. The mobilisation depends on the individual interpretation of the availability of opportunities, which is called perceived or attributed opportunities (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2004, 43). This element of subjectivity also requires interactional processes such as communication and learning how to interpret opportunities (Tarrow 2011, 164). The concept of opportunity structure, admittedly, focuses mainly on political institutions, excluding economic relations where workers can also access their opportunities (Seidman 1994, 93; Schurman 2004, 246). Nevertheless, this opportunity structure remains useful for explaining the rise and the limitations of the working-class movements in various places over multiple periods of history, as also extensively found in the works on Indonesian labour movements (Caraway and Ford 2020; Tornquist 2004; 2004).

Although individual roles still take a smaller portion than structural accounts in this theory, the individual element has given a wider space for further analysis on subjective and interactional processes, particularly on the existence of agency (Husu 2013, 266). The role of agents in mobilisations is essential in the learning process to perceive the availability of opportunities to develop a particular strategy of movement. The agents assist the people in movements to learn and to define their interests, to interpret the meaning of the opportunities and to transform individual resources of the mass into a collective power through organised mobilisation (Ganz and McKenna 2019, 185). A collective movement is impossible to run in a mechanistic way in order to respond the threats and the opportunities. Otherwise, it only becomes an irrational crowd behaviour without any specific goal and organisation (McPhail 2007). Thus, roles of key actors who organise mobilisation are essential. They are not simply reactive to the sources of discontents, but they mobilise rationally the restless people.

A threat, on the other hand, is a situation where discontent is poised to escalate unless a defensive collective action is taken (Almeida 2019, 44). In workers' movements, the primary threat is inherent in the existing industrial economy, which erodes union capacity and hinders workers from demanding better socio-economic and living conditions. The economic threat is a useful concept compensating the over-emphasis of the concept of political opportunity structure that focuses mainly on political institutions that excludes economic relations where workers are obviously in effect (Seidman 1994, 93; Schurman 2004, 246). Schurman (2010) links the economic situation with the concept of industrial opportunity structures: a concept that shows an economic dimension of opportunity decisive for movements. Since Schurman does not elaborate further on what distinguishes the industry as a threat with the absence of industry opportunity, I prefer to use threat in this conceptual framework.

The dynamic interplay of threats, opportunities and the roles of activists should be recognised as pertinent not only during the emergence of an organisational form, but throughout the entire trajectory of a movement. It proves crucial for comprehending the implications for their relationship with constituents. This is where the representational problems become essential.

1.4. Representation Task in Movements and Its Limitations

As I have argued above, any form of movement organisation, mobilised by key actors, potentially creates vulnerabilities due to the heterogeneity of its constituents and inherent power relations within the movement. Scholars have framed this as the problem of democratic representation (Gumbrell-McCormick

and Hyman 2019; Pitkin 1967; Laclau 2007; Durrenberger and Reichart 2010). The central question is: what constitutes vulnerabilities in democracy of the mass movements, particularly in labour movements? Various studies define democratic practices in labour movements through institutional measures (Morris and Fosh 2000), power concentration versus constituent participation through employment-related institutions (Stephan-Norris 1997), or complex behavioural and structural measures (Martin 1968). These studies, however, often overlook the fundamental social and cultural processes that underlie democratic representation, sparking a debate about whether the focal point should be on the "represented" or the "representative."

The fundamental debates of this issue centre around the discussion in which Ernesto Laclau challenges Pitkin's premises on democratic representation. Pitkin, a key figure in modern political representation studies, asserts that people or the represented is the central subject of democratic representation (Pitkin 1967). Pitkin argues that those who 'act for others' are democratic, as they deliver the will of the represented and act in their interests. She deems symbolic representation, based solely on shared identities, without concrete actions for the represented, as irrational and impure (Disch 2012, 210).

By contrast, Laclau, influenced strongly by Gramsci, gives emphasis more on the roles of representatives as the primary democratic actors. For him, Pitkin gives less attention to complex social and cultural process that underlies the making process of representation, in which constituents are mostly unable to express their will on their own, and therefore they rely on the actors – which Gramsci calls as intellectuals – to assist them articulating and bringing out their voice (Disch 2012). Laclau emphasises the essential roles of agencies in constructing people and defining collective interests through a dynamic two-way process between the represented and the representative (Laclau 2012, 392; 2007; 161-162). It is the task of movement leaders to communicate with the constituents they claim and build the meaning of the existing threats and opportunities to define the collective interests and a particular strategy to organise the movement. In this process, Laclau points out the importance of how representatives or movement leaders creating symbols through rhetoric, narratives, or discourse that attach to the people as an instrument to understand their own will or interest as well as a unifying identity in a particular context (Laclau 2007: 68-72, 161).[9] This constructed symbol serves as a counter-hegemonic stance against

9 The existence of representatives is constitutive as they are not simply passive agents. Their task goes beyond delivering the will of the represented, but also giving the credibility to their will in different environments (Laclau 2007: 158). To add 'something' to the will of the represented, the

the opposition, forming a collective consciousness (Thomassen 2017, 547; Laclau 1996: 40; Disch 2012: 215).

Such a symbol unifies diverse constituents, serving as a chain of equivalence that connects various social demands under a common political identity. This allows for the construction of a collective identity by connecting diverse social demands with different origins and interests. Laclau asserts that such symbolic representation becomes the means of homogenizing a heterogeneous mass (2007: 159). it is a cultural process that makes a counter-hegemony becomes the essence of democratic representation in mobilising the constituents (Mouffe 2003, 126). Nevertheless, it's certainly crucial to note eventually that this homogenization is a strategic action, and does not imply a loss of real heterogeneity (Laclau, 2007: 158-159).

Therefore, it is also crucial to consider critically the problematic issues of the gap between the constituents' heterogeneity and the representative's homogenization in their relationship. Laclau acknowledges that, after all, the demands of the represented people remain essential in the representation. In the dynamic two-way process, by which the representatives play a significant constitutive role, they learn the feelings, the needs, and the perceptions of the diverse constituents (Laclau 2007: 158). A shared consciousness is formed when the representatives assist the constituents to understand who they are in a social order or in production relations (in an economic system), and what distinguishes them from each other and what constitutes a common identity. These attempts are enabled especially by the key actors who come from the same class or social category and have similar general identities (Kamath and Ramanathan 2017, 254). As Buraway and Von Holdt assert, "This is not a matter of bringing consciousness to the working class from without, which marks Gramsci off from Lenin, but of building on what already lies within it." (Burawoy and Von Holdt 2012, 64).

Nevertheless, such attempts are still constrained by some inevitable conditions. Hardt and Negri (2012, 28-29) even sceptically argue that the will of the people cannot be fully represented in a homogeneously framed identity and interest, as collective heterogeneity is inherently fundamental. According to both, representation diametrically opposes democracy (Thomassen 2017, 547). In

representatives use an 'empty signifier' a symbol that represent the represented as a uniting identity. This constructed signifier is not a 'neutral' commonality. Instead, this is made under the idea of antagonism of the people vis-à-vis the opposition from different class. The idea is created to form a collective consciousness against the hegemony of the regime (Laclau 1996: 40; Disch 2012: 215).

essence, they claim that representation will inevitably result in flawed democracy under any condition, challenging the empirical premise of perfect democratic representation.

In labour movements, the diverse groups within the working class indicates the roles of other forces that are influential in the formation of workers heterogeneity, which may limit the unionists' representation tasks. A labour regime, particularly the capital, is a significant force that deliberately divides labour into different occupational groups based on different level of skill, task and wage structure, gender, and age groups (Bowles and Gintis 1977). The capitalists, facilitated by labour policies, divide workers in these categories through labour process in order to create maximum capital accumulation (Bowles and Gintis 1977, 174; Smith 2016, 209). Engles (1987) have even argued that capitalists have forced these different groups of working class into competition in order to maximise the extraction of surplus value from the labour. The labour process does not even only divided workers into different categories within the production structure but also influence the segmentation in labour markets (Gordon, Edwards and Reich 1982).

These divisions within the working-class result in a highly fragmented labour, leading to diverse identities and conflicting interests among workers (Teal 1985, 2), as exemplified in the interactions between factory workers and home-based workers in Semarang (see Chapter 4). Such a production politics and its consequences on labour fragmentation highlights the shortcomings of Marx's notions that oversimplify the prospects of developing a shared class consciousness and collective mobilisation for resistance to capital through concentrated labour within industry (Teal 1985, 7-9). This condition presents a significant challenge for union leaders aiming to represent the interests of the workers, especially considering that capitalists deliberately create this fragmentation to prevent the formation of collective working-class power (Bowles and Gintis 1977, 178-179). Thus, the shaping of labour heterogeneity and the establishment of working-class homogeneity become the battleground between unions and capitalists.

The utilisation of social identities and other culturally-derived categorisations instigates complexity into the dynamics of union representation. For instance, ethnic minorities the UK face limited access to union advocacy (Holgate, et al. 2012). Female workers in Asian countries often find themselves underrepresented in trade unionism due to the persistence of a masculine organisational culture perpetuated by political institutions (Cooke 2011; Broadbent and Ford 2008). Therefore, community-oriented unions face higher complexity in representation as they contend with intricate forces that shape the heterogeneity of their

constituencies. These unions grapple capital-formed categories of labour that are combined with identities socio-politically constructed by political forces, local economic structure, and other social forces (Waterman 1993, 260; Brown 2007; Glenn 2016).

Another limitation lies on the vulnerable power relations between the unionists, as the key actor of labour movements, and the union constituents. The vulnerabilities become more pronounced since trade unions legitimise organisationally the power of those receiving the mandate from constituents to be leaders or representatives. Robert Michels (1999) warns against the undemocratic consequences of bureaucratic institutions, countering Gramsci's emphasis on organisations as the political vehicle of the movement agency. Larger and more bureaucratic institutions may incline leaders toward oligarchy, undermining their representational roles. While Michels' view is structurally over-deterministic (Lipset, 1999), it offers insight into the limits of hegemonic representation. For instance, in Pekalongan, union leaders accepted an agreement with employers on unsatisfactory severance payments for laid-off workers in exchange for long-term political interests. This agreement led to divergent interpretations between the workers and organisational leaders regarding the meaning of workers' political interests.

However, bureaucratic oligarchic constraints also shape the opportunities for unexpected actors to emerge through informal structures within the movement organisation. In highly bureaucratised movements, the possibilities for new actors may be limited, yet factions within a movement can succeed by leveraging their own resources, as seen in the case of Semarang workers (see chapter 4), and an anthropological study of labour in the mining sector (Reichart 2010). This situation underscores that movement organisations do not consistently achieve perfect internal hegemony. Organised movements often experience rivalries (Taylor 2018; Rokhani 2008), differences between groups based on cultural identities and layers within the working class (Lazar 2022), and changes in attitudes resulting from compromises made by organisational or informal leaders at the grassroots level to defend strategic advantages (Wright 2000).

To conclude this section, I argue that the emergence of leaders within the movements – the labour movements in particular – is an inevitable social process. Their dominance over the reproduction of ideas in the movement is also a logical consequence of the historical development of the mobilisation itself. They have a major role in determining the direction of the movement, collective hegemonic values, relevant actions and interactions with constituents and other actors in the movement network. But therein also lies the limits

of agency. Along with the institutionalisation of the movement that accords the movement leaders a power to mobilise the movement, they deal with the structural and cultural consequences of the heterogeneity of its constituents.

1.5. Contextualising Fieldwork: The Methodology

Numerous studies on Indonesian workers' movements in the post-colonial era have predominantly focused on labour unrest and organised activism in densely industrialized regions, notably western Java (Kammen 1997; Hadiz 2001; Saptari 2008; Silvey 2003; Caraway and Ford 2019), with a few examining Sumatra and Eastern Java (Kammen 1997; Weix 2002; Ford 2014). However, little attention has been given to the workers' movements in the industrial areas of Central Java following the collapse of leftist movements during the New Order era (Juliawan 2010, 23). This region is often referenced mainly to signify the initial awakening of organised labour during the colonial and early post-colonial periods, viewed as the embryo of modern Indonesia's labour (Ingelson 1986; Supriyono 2013).

Nevertheless, the lack of contemporary studies on workers' movements in Central Java does not imply the absence of dynamic labour activism in this region. While unionists, workers, and NGO activists have primarily focused on labour unrest and activism in Jakarta and surrounding regions in addressing national labour issues in the first decade of the 2000s, local workers and unionists in some areas responded with their own strategies. They have leveraged local resources and engaged with various actors in factories, communities, and local politics.

These differences significantly influenced my perspective as a researcher in labour studies. Initially preoccupied with workers' movements at the national level and major industrial regions in western Java, my viewpoint gradually shifted after interacting with some NGO activists and unionists from Central Java. Learning about the workers' movements in Semarang and Pekalongan highlighted the local complexities in these regions, challenging my previous perspective that had overlooked the crucial connections of the movements with the local context, especially in Central Java

My interactions with labour activists during fieldwork brought to the fore the distinctive characteristics of workers in Semarang and Pekalongan, revealing the intricate labour dynamics in each region. The first distinction lies in the orientation of the movements. Unionists in Semarang consistently adhered to narratives, discourses, and actions that upheld the traditions of conventional unionism, emphasising the essentiality of workplace and welfare. In contrast, unionists in Pekalongan displayed a strong interest in community activism and

actively engaged in local political struggles. The second distinction pertains to the economic context in which the movements developed. Workers and unions in Semarang organised within the framework of a large-scale and globalised industrial economy. Conversely, workers and activists in Pekalongan initiated their movements within the context of a smaller-scale industrial economy. The third distinction revolves around the movements' constituents: the people whose interests the unions were fighting for. In Pekalongan, workers' activism dealt with highly diverse constituents, including local community groups and the local working class. In Semarang, workplace unionism faced the challenge of the diverse industrial workforce, both inside and outside the factory, shaped by the production structure. Finally, the leadership structure differed between the two regions. In Pekalongan, leaders of the branch union, supported by other activists, played a central role in initiating, organising, and building the movements. In Semarang, the development of the workers' movement lacked strong leadership from the regional branch union, and fragmented leadership was evident across various levels of the organisation.

This distinct pattern of leadership influenced my fieldwork approach. In Pekalongan, where the main union leaders at the branch level union-management took a leading role in transforming movements, observations began from this circle to investigate how they defined and shaped the development of the movement organisation. This observation then extended to union members and other constituents to examine impacts and responses. In Semarang, with a relatively more decentralised distribution of power among various actors within the layers of movements, the approach took a reverse path. Stronger initiatives to mobilise actions and defend the interests of specific groups of workers, including union members and non-unionised workers, emerged at the rank and file, making them the essential starting point in the observation stages

The primary phase of my fieldwork commenced in January 2014 and concluded in June 2015. Additionally, several short visits were conducted in 2016 for complementary data collection. During the initial four months of 2014, Pekalongan was prioritised as the primary research site, allowing me to closely follow the experiences of local unionists and workers leading up to and during the General Elections in April 2014. The workers' active involvement in the political competition to secure candidacy for the local parliament (DPRD) members was a crucial aspect of studying this region, given the political nature of their movement.

Throughout this period, I lived at the research site, providing ample opportunities to engage with unionists, local activists, political elites, workers, and community

members. Living in the area enabled a more in-depth understanding of how unionists navigated the complexities of incorporating political interests and experimenting with community engagement in their day-to-day activities at work. This fieldwork phase also allowed for the observation of how union members at the rank and file, along with other constituents in the communities, responded to the ideas and actions of the unionists.

While my official fieldwork in Pekalongan began in 2014, my engagements with local trade unionists began as early as 2010. During this period, I had the opportunity to attend various meetings and discussions with local activists and participate in several union activities. Initially, these interactions were not part of a well-planned long-term research project. At that time, like many other Indonesian labour scholars and activists, my focus was still on the contentious national disputes surrounding the controversial new labour law (no. 13 of 2003), which sparked massive protests from trade unions due to its articles which positioned workers in even more precarious positions. While the public's attention was directed towards national media coverage and street protests surrounding this issue, a different perspective emerged through interactions with NGO activists. They shared insights into what was happening in Pekalongan, highlighting local unionists experimenting with a new form of unionism that integrated workplace-based interests with community-related concerns. It took a few weeks for them to convince me of the significance of this development and encourage me to visit Pekalongan. Eventually, I made the trip to this small industrial town and discovered a distinct landscape within the local workers' movements.

Through several visits to the location, I had the opportunity to build relationships with key actors in the local movements. These interactions allowed me to conduct informal preliminary observations and interviews, resulting in early descriptions of the historical processes of founding the local unions and the formation of local community activism. The insights gained during these interactions contributed valuable supporting field notes for the current study, complementing other written documents such as organisational minutes of meetings, local mass media clippings, and regional statistics.

My longstanding interactions also provided me with broader access to engage in active participant observation during subsequent fieldwork. Establishing bonds with the people in the research sites enabled me to immerse myself deeply in various local formal and informal activities, including personal social settings. This approach allowed me to closely follow the process by which certain workers transitioned into union leaders at the factory and branch levels, and conversely,

how a leader might become an outsider. These relationships also facilitated close observation of critical events, including a labour dispute leading to the confinement of corporate management officials at the local mayor's office, a street vendor protest involving union officials, intense debates between activists regarding the dilemma between unionism tasks and union political agenda, and the circulation of rumours among the community, union members, and local activists.

My fieldwork activities in the Regency of Semarang commenced in February 2015 and extended over four months. In contrast to my initial engagement in Pekalongan, where relationships with union activists were pivotal, the entry point for my access to the Semarang site was through local NGO activists advocating for women workers in the informal occupation. This initial access served as a gateway to dozens of local factory workers, particularly those in the rank-and-file, including home-based workers who formed a part of the local industrial workforce.

Further access was facilitated by union key leaders in the Semarang branch of SPN, guiding me to unionists at the factory level. However, my observations of union leaders at the branch level in Semarang were admittedly more limited compared to those of the unionists in Pekalongan. This limitation was a consequence of the existing power structure within the local unions. As mentioned earlier, Semarang movements were characterised by a dispersed distribution of power among local unionists, with relationships among leaders at different layers coloured by conflicts. This situation became more apparent, especially after the split of the local unions, indicated by the foundation of another new union, called KSPN, that significantly altered the union patronage (see chapter 4). These conditions posed challenges in maintaining equal access to all potential research participants. Consequently, working mainly at the grassroots level, collecting stories from ordinary workers and mid-level unionists under such circumstances, not only provided me with wider access but also offered a broader understanding of the existing informal and formal power structures within the unions.

The strong emphasis on workplace activism in Semarang and the decentralised distribution of power to mobilise diverse interests among workers in various layers prompted the selection of a specific company for in-depth exploration. The objective of this selection was to investigate more detailed unionists' experiences within organisations in the workplace and understand the relationships between unionists and workers in that setting. A large-scale, export-oriented company, namely Tapak (pseudonym), a European shoe-making company, was carefully chosen for a specific case study of the workplace unionism.

The reasons of selecting the company is as follows: firstly, the workers in this company portrayed dynamic activism in the region, reflecting efforts to break away from traditional corporatism's legacy and challenges in resisting corporate strategies. Secondly, the primary focus on workplace activism confronts complex realities of defining the workplace and union constituency, dealing with both in-factory and out-of-factory labour, challenging the heterogeneity concept of union constituencies. Thirdly, worker leadership emerges across various layers of the production structure, including workplaces in the communities. Lastly, some unionists in this company aim to influence transformation at the branch organisation level (Semarang) but face divisive organisational politics. Therefore, given the intricate employment structure in this shoe manufacturer, a deeper discussion is given for the relationships between different types of labour, corporate managerial apparatus, and unionists.

In total, in both regions, I conducted interviews with 28 local union leaders and officials, 31 ordinary workers - a few of whom were then emerging as either new union leaders or informal worker leaders - and 16 NGO activists. I interviewed several local union leaders and NGO activists on more than one occasion. Additionally, I interviewed dozens of other relevant people: including government officials, employers and business owners, journalists, politicians and academics. I also interviewed people at the national level, who also occupied similar positions - including ILO officials. The research also involved observing specific social settings, such as union official meetings, workers' strikes or demonstrations, political campaigns, community gatherings, factory sites, home-based production sites, workers' community settlement areas, and numerous informal settings where research participants interacted and engaged in relevant activities. Numerous government documents were collected to provide insights into the economic, social, and political resources available in both regions, including unions' documents that recorded the history of their collective bargaining and dispute cases.

Examining the internal dynamics of the labour movement presented a complex situation, given the heterogeneous groups within the different movements. Specific contexts, such as political campaigns requiring unionists to mobilise their base, often generated conflicts and competition within the movement organisations or between unionists and constituents. In a union with a strong centralisation of power, like the one in Pekalongan, conflicts were evident both overtly and covertly, manifesting through interpersonal conversations or rumours. In movements where mobilisation of forces spread across various groups and organisational hierarchies, wider conflicts were inevitable, complicating my role

as a researcher. This was particularly evident in union splits in Semarang and the fragmentation among homeworkers at the grassroots level.

Such situations impacted the strategies of data collection, as suspicions of partiality to one side restricted flexibility. Building trust with conflicting groups took time and the role of research assistants, including NGO activists and some unionists, was significant in managing these situations and maintaining relationships. The longstanding interactions with these actors were crucial in managing interpersonal relationships during data collection and beyond. These relationships, however, also influenced my evolving perspective on the meaning of each movement. For instance, in Pekalongan, optimistic views about the significance of community-based movements gradually shifted to a more reflective understanding. Moreover, my personal interactions with research assistants helped overcome initial tendencies to oversimplify classifications within the labour movement.

Finally, two crucial methodological notes, closely intertwined with the subject of this study, deserve attention that I have discussed elsewhere (Nugroho 2019). Firstly, the ethical dilemma emerged as a prominent concern. As an active participant in the observation of these social movements, I found myself in dual positions – both as an independent researcher and as an intellectual claimed by the participants (movement actors) as their potential network and resource. Unionists from both regions often expected more involvement than just a researcher, asking for opinions on collective actions, political moves, organisational suggestions, and the fundamental ideas of their movements. Resisting such requests risked creating a distance that could complicate the researcher-participant relationship, while deeper involvement might introduce bias, blurring the line between the movement's ideas and the researcher's intervention. This dilemma persisted throughout my fieldwork and interactions with the unionists. However, I eventually discovered that my presence as an 'intellectual' merely affirmed the ideas they had already developed. My role did not change the history they had shaped themselves.

The second note pertains to changes in my perspective on the dichotomies within the movement and their impact on my analysis. The research commenced with a view of a contrast between community unionism and workplace unionism, anticipating that this dichotomy would be consistently reflected in the organisations, forms of action, and narratives of the movements. The expectation was that each form of unionism would be isolated from the other in both reality and analysis. However, both field exploration and the analytical process revealed that these typologies of movement cannot be seen as strictly

dichotomous. Instead, they require similar elements of comparison because, in reality, the two case studies do not exhibit an absolute separation from each other. Studying community unionism needs an understanding of the social processes occurring in the workplace, and workplace unionism is intertwined with strategies at the community level. The differentiating factor ultimately lies in what Mollona (2009) regards as the 'morale of the movement.' This realisation significantly influenced the way I analysed this study and structured this dissertation

1.6. Organisation of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organised into four parts, with the first part encompassing two chapters, including this introduction. Chapter Two offers an overview of the historical development of labour movements in Indonesia. After a brief illustration of the movements in the colonial and early-post colonial era, an important attention is given to historical trajectory faced a thirty-year interruption during Suharto's New Order regime, implementing a state-corporatism approach to trade unionism, eradicating political orientation and community networks. This legacy still characterises the organisational culture of labour movements in Indonesia's democratic era. The dominance of workplace unionism persists. Some embryos of community-oriented unionism emerged despite their unstable bases.

Part two explores the experiences of workers in Semarang in organising workplace-based movements, comprising two chapters. Chapter Three outlines the socio-economic context of the movement in this region, characterised by a large-scale industrial economy integrated into global production chains. Abundant job opportunities have arisen, but social supports from existing agricultural and modern industrial economies also serve as structures of control. Chapter Four describes the most active union in the region attempting to break away from corporatist unionism legacies but facing fragmentation. Experiments in electoral politics and community-based activism had short-lived impacts, with the workplace remaining the main arena of struggle. Industrial production expansion into community areas created pockets of home-based workers, leading to informal movements supported by NGOs.

Part three discusses the development of union movements in Pekalongan, consisting also of two chapters. Chapter Five provides the regional context, illustrating how workers' social and economic life in Pekalongan was shaped by a longstanding history of an industrial economy that developed in limited scale. Social tensions due to regional economic growth limits ignited political struggles, forming the ground for broadened movements. Chapter Six details

how local unions transformed the legacy of workplace unionism into community unionism but have faced impasses due to political obstacles and difficulties in building social and cultural ties among heterogeneous constituencies. The final section presents the discussion and conclusions, addressing the conceptual discussion linking agency and structural forces in explaining the characterization of different movements and their evolving relationship with constituents.

Chapter 2
Changing Formation of Workers' Movements

Introduction

This chapter traces the evolution of workers' movements in Indonesia, concentrating on Java, the largest industrial region, through a socio-historical lens. The exploration encompasses the contextual elements that frame the current dynamics of movements in Semarang and Pekalongan, subjects further discussed in subsequent chapters. By examining the organisational strategies of unions across various political-economic regimes, I emphasise that the co-existence of workplace-oriented unionism and community-oriented unionism in Indonesia is not a new phenomenon. This duality has characterised the entire Indonesia's historical phases, each with distinct nuances.

Although the historical roots of Indonesia's labour movements can be related back to the colonial era, two other historical phases are crucial to the study: the period of the authoritarian New Order and the era of Indonesia's Reformation. I focus on these eras in this chapter. This focus is needed for two reasons. Firstly, the New Order regime disrupted the historical continuity of labour movements, by severing the link between the early post-colonial period's militant labour movements and the contemporary resurgence of workers' movements. Secondly, the New Order regime dismantled the basis and ideological foundations of the working class in response to prior political and social conflicts, exerting control over all aspects of labour life and activism. Consequently, this social and political context continues to influence the traditions of today's workers' movements.

The final section of this chapter, therefore, offers an overview of the contemporary labour movement's efforts to rebound after the collapse of the authoritarian labour control regime. The unions have grappled with the dual challenges of dismantling past legacies while also addressing new challenges posed by the market-driven labour regime, which brings various complexities of political-economic pressures. Unions are engaged in diverse experiments, with some persisting in preserving workplace-based struggles, while others explore broader forms of activism.

2.1. Workers Movements: From Colonial to Early Post-Colonial Era

A common thread links the historical trajectory of the labour movements that emerged at the beginning of Indonesian independence. These movements had their roots in colonial era structures. The factions that emerged in the early independence era had strong roots in the organisations of the labour movements that flourished during the Dutch colonial era. Although this thread was broken during the New Order period, understanding this historical glimpse is crucial to understand why the New Order regime sought to dismantle it. This has had a lasting impact on more recent incarnations of labour movements.

During the early 20th century, the emergence of independent organised labour was a response to increasing discontent towards working conditions. This tension became intertwined with anti-colonial sentiment (Shiraishi 1990, 109; Saptari 1995, 44-45; Ingelson 1986: 26). The Dutch Ethical Policy, which fuelled the Dutch colonial government's political sympathy for nascent nationalism among Indonesians (Shiraishi 1990: 91-98), also provided workers with a political opportunity to establish new organisations.

These early trade unions initially served Dutch employees[10] and then later served indigenous workers, becoming vehicle for engagement with nationalist leaders' activism (Ford 2009, 21). These organisations played a crucial role in anti-colonial movements and this was exemplified by their activities within Sarekat Islam.[11]

Sarekat Islam (SI) played a major role in fostering the emergence of labour leaders and various other workers' organisations. This leads to two major streams with conflicting ideological bases: the religious-nationalist and the left (Tedjasukmana 1958). Influential leaders like Semaoen, a prominent communist activist, played pivotal role in the development of the branch organisation in Semarang into an aggressive anti-colonial base, which stimulated the emergence of radical resistances in other regions (Shiraishi 1990: 103). Other SI leaders, such as Sosrokardono, Soerjopranoto and Tjokroaminoto, focused on labour organisations with a nationalist-Islamic identity. Simultaneously, they also

10 There were actually no workers' unions for indigenous membership until the early 1900s. It was a union that was established in 1908 in the railway transportation, named VSTP (*Vereeniging van Spoor-en Tramweg Personeel*), which began to recruit Indonesian workers (Shiraishi 1990: 98-99).

11 Sarekat Islam (SI) is a trading association that was established in 1912 by the indigenous Islamic small traders in order to counter the domination of Chinese business particularly in Java, and functioned as a nationalist vehicle against colonialism (Hadiz 1997).

established unions like PPPB (Perserikatan Pegawai Pegadaian Bumiputera, Native Pawnshop Workers' Union) and PFB (Personeel Fabriek Bond, Sugar Factory Workers' Union) (Shiraishi 1990: 109-110).

The ideological discord among these leaders led to rivalries and debates about the principles of movements and strategies in dealing with claimed opponents. SI activists viewed socialism as being crucial in the Islamic struggle against capitalism (Tedjasukmana 1958, 9). However, they rejected the leftist notion of class struggle due to concerns about radical working-class politics threatening the interests of SI leaders as petty bourgeois traders (Hadiz 1997: 44). Meanwhile, the leftist unions were more straightforward and radical than non-communist unions as they were not interested in workplace-based negotiations, which the colonial government indeed expected from the union activism to moderate the workers' radicalism (Ingelson, 2000: 480). For the left, massive strikes for higher wages intertwined with the fights against colonial regimes were the central goals of working-class movements.

Ingelson, however, argues that, despite being labelled as radical, Indonesian workers during this period were not truly revolutionaries (1968: 8-12). Their resistance against employers' attitudes, policies, and the colonial labour regime, stemmed from what he defines as a 'moral economy'—a sense of injustice in production relations (Thompson 1966, 63)—rather than a well-established working-class consciousness. Consequently, workers' activism aimed at improving working conditions rather than challenging the fundamental structure of colonial capitalism (Ingelson, 1981: 493). It was still simply an organised socio-economic collective interest.

Ingelson highlights the structural conditions of the urban working classes that hindered potential class consciousness. Although a small section of workers, especially those in skilled sectors like railway transportation, printing, metal, and government administration, managed to build radical organisations, they were constrained by racial aspects of production relations. The majority of urban workers, mainly unskilled and reliant on rural families, worked in primary production chains. This posed a challenge for union leaders to foster political character among them.

In the early post-colonial period in Indonesia, labour movements gained momentum in an independent political climate (King 1982, 95). Factionalism from the Dutch colonial era, however, still significantly influenced the configuration. The shaping of nationalism continued to be a major political characteristic, with political and ideological motives often taking precedence over welfare concerns

(Hawkins 1971, 196). Most unions, consequently, established strong links with political organisations.

One of the most notable labour organisations was SOBSI (All-Indonesia Central Organisation of Workers). SOBSI, which was founded in 1946 by socialist and communist union leaders, grew into the largest union federation with links to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). In the 1960s, total union membership was almost six million members, but SOBSI remained the largest union federation, claiming 2.7 million members nationally. Although the figures might be exaggerated (Hearman 2016, 38), a rough estimation based on statistics from 1957-1958 suggests that SOBSI had around one million members, with another million affiliated with various other unions. SOBSI particularly dominated many sectors, especially the manufacturing sector, where 530,000 out of 596,000 members of all unions were located (Hawkins 1971, 214-215).

The significant influence of this left-wing faction led to tensions and rivalries among unions and political factions, resulting in the growth of counter-organisations by non-communist groups.[12] Masyumi, the Islamic faction, for instance, established GASBINDO. The nationalist and socialist factions also formed unions like KBKI, GSBI, and KSBI (Hadiz 1997, 50). However, the most notable response was the military's involvement to restrain the moves of the communists by establishing counter organisations. The military formed some counter-organisations like BKS-BUMI, later replaced by SOKSI (Central Organisation of Socialist *Karyawan* of Indonesia), which drew members mostly from the state enterprises (Hadiz 1997, 54).

In order to counter the domination of leftist unions, the government and military not only established rival-organisations, but also employed institutional and symbolic measures in the domain of labour relations. Encouraging the use of the term "Karyawan" (employee) instead of "Buruh" (labourer) as the official appellation for workers was one such move (Ford 2009, 55). The term "Buruh" was particularly favoured by communists as it conveyed a sense of class antagonism (Hadiz 1997, 54-55). In 1958, the government modified mediation and arbitration system to provide equal opportunities for all tripartite members

12 The increased political rivalry triggered particularly by the Madiun violence affair in 1948. It was a violent rebellion instigated by political rivalries and conflicts between nationalist and leftist political forces, leading to the formation of military factions. Numerous SOBSI activists participated in this uprising through forces mobilised by the Socialist Party, the PKI, and other leftist political organisations collectively known as the FDR (Front Demokratik Rakyat; People Democratic Front) (Ann 1989)

to settle, aiming to confine union pressures during disputes, especially with political support disputes (King 1982, 128).[13]

Regardless, the impact of political involvement on the representational functions of unions during this era, there have been diverse scholarly perspectives in viewing these conditions. Some major studies argue that existing workers' organisations indeed overlooked organisational aspects directly contributing to the economic interests of their members due to the dominance of political interests. For instance, Tedjasukmana (1958) observes that unions neglected it as focusing excessively on state politics due to the politics of nation-building. Hasibuan (1968, 57) also contends that union federations resembled political parties more than traditional unions. Workers were treated more as political constituents than individuals for whom the union should provide services and defend their interests before employers and the state. Union leaders also used federation membership as a strategic ladder to become members of political parties.

Scholars like Suryomenggolo (2013, 31), however, argue that those perspectives don't reflect the diversity of Indonesian unionism. Those studies focus solely on national-level union activism preoccupied by the national interest in state building (Suryomenggolo 2013, 30-37) and the politics of decolonisation (Saptari 2013, 2-3), overlooking the activism of regional unions and the everyday local stories of ordinary workers. These regional unions successfully integrated political passion into concrete actions that directly benefited workers at the workplace. For example, workers in various regions took over former colonial companies, restructuring workers' organisations to control capital assets (Suryomenggolo 2013, 56-64) and achieve economic redistribution (Razif 2013) (Sulistyo 2013). Ford (2009, 27) also adds that some of the political manoeuvres of union elites remained strategic for workers. Union leaders leveraged political connections with relevant ministries at the national level to draft pro-worker legislation, contributing to Indonesia's industrial relations framework. Having representatives in parliaments allowed federations, particularly SOBSI, to

13 The government's attempts to control labour unrest included the establishment of P4P/P4D to institutionalise the dispute settlement system, incorporating government officials in the process to mitigate the likelihood of strikes. Concurrently, President Soekarno also implemented measures to weaken union power by creating the Dewan Perusahaan (enterprise council), which the military used to curb the expansion of communist unions. Under Soekarno's directive, the authority of the council was limited to advisory functions, affording workers a voice in production and supervision, but crucial decisions remained firmly in the hands of management. This institutional framework provided the military with a means to interact with representatives from SOKSI and other anti-communist unions, effectively restraining the dominance of SOBSI.

take strategic positions for influencing pro-worker legal products, which were deemed highly protective of labour given the circumstances of being a young state (Tjandra 2016, 40).

Despite these varying perspectives, politic interests were ingrained in union activities at different levels. While, at the national and regional levels, union politics significantly contributed to the establishment of a pro-worker regulatory system, fostering economic redistribution that benefits workers, political tensions among factions were on the rise. The conflicts between SOBSI and non-communist unions reflected escalating tensions between political factions and eventually led to political turmoil and violence in 1965. This resulted in the dismantling of the left movement, the prohibition of organisations like SOBSI, and the establishment of a new state-controlled labour system, suppressing union political activism and impeding the growth of independent worker organisations. This is how the era of the New Order began.

2.2. The Voices that have Disappeared: Workers and Unions under the Authoritarian Regime

The 1965 Tragedy of mass killings marked a critical juncture in the decline of militant workers' movements in Indonesia. The escalating political conflicts between leftists and the alliance of the military, nationalist factions, and religious-based factions culminated in a severe political crisis with brutal violence during the latter half of the 1960s. This crisis had two major outcomes: firstly, the banning of PKI and its affiliated organisations, as they were accused of instigating the political turmoil; and secondly, the collapse of Soekarno's regime in 1966, as he failed to contain the national political and economic crisis.[14] The destruction of the PKI's base had a significant impact on SOBSI. The militant workers' unions, particularly those associated with PKI, were banned, and their bases were violently crushed (Melvin 2017). While workers' unions under nationalist and religious-based parties remained, they were not as powerful and militant as SOBSI's unions.

14 The downfall of Sukarno was hastened by the collapse of the national economy. Soekarno's Guided Economy program, which heavily relied on the legacies of colonial enterprises, particularly in the estates, mining, and manufacturing sectors that the state had taken control of, struggled to maintain capital accumulation. Many enterprises lacked managerial capacities, failed to create extensive markets, and were further hampered by internal political strife (Robison 1986, 71-78). Economic stagnation, the absence of an independent entrepreneurial class as a robust capitalist force, and Sukarno's administration's failure to address the national financial crisis plunged the country into its most severe economic turmoil in history.

This crisis led to economic and political changes. In 1966, Suharto and his military faction assumed national leadership, ushering in an era marked by technocracy and militarism focused on economic revival and political stability (Barker 2005, 713). Against the Cold War backdrop, the fall of PKI garnered Western sympathy, leading to substantial economic aid. Under the New Order regime, Suharto introduced a developmentalist approach by prioritising state-controlled economic modernisation and political stability (Moertopo 1975) (Hadiz 1997, 64-64).[15] Economic recovery attracted foreign investment, transitioning from Soekarno's policies limiting cooperation with Western countries (Robison 1986, 176-178). The New Order initially emphasised import substitution, raw mineral production, and agriculture, later shifting to manufacturing sector with private enterprise support (Robison 1986, 143). This transformative development had impacted employment, decreasing agricultural workers from 74% to 55% (1961-1985) and increasing industrial workers from 10% to 16% (Manning 1993, 66-67).

Concurrently, a fundamental labour regime reform became integral to this broader economic and political changes. The government centralised control over the national labour system. The government's actions, particularly in ideological alignment and restructuring workers' representation, marked the end of the political labour movement. The emphasis shifted towards a corporatist economic unionism model (Ford 2009, 30-33). This model represents a concrete fulfilment of workers' interests through economic power and the state-directed harmony between labour and capital (Hyman 2001, 8; Wiarda 2010, 5).

2.2.1. Ideological Alignment

The government established the ideological framework of Hubungan Perburuhan Pancasila (HPP-Pancasila Labour Relations). The use of the term "Pancasila" was intended to assert the exclusion of other ideological principles, such as pluralist-liberalism[16] and Marxism, which were deemed incompatible with the regime's vision of industrial relations (Moertopo 1975, 17-20).[17] HPP was developed

15 Developmentalism is the ideology of socio-economic and political change that have been embraced by many developing countries which are trying to catch up in development by following western modernisation as a model. Economic growth is believed as the only way to modernize, and the practice of democracy is necessary to guarantee political stability. The ideology, thereby, has been vastly chosen in a political climate where the regime needs to stem the ideology of communism. (Johson 2010). However, in most developing countries, the strong drive of modernization in developing countries have placed the state as the only dominant – authoritarian – institution (Sahu 2010).

16 international labour organisations such as ILO, FES of Germany, ICFTU and ACL-FIO of the US strongly support the labour reform, promoting the adoption of liberal-pluralist labour relations approach (Tjandra 2016, 103) (Setiakawan 2003, 165) (Hadiz 1997, 72-74).

17 The liberal-pluralism paradigm is a widely embraced approach to labour-relations and union

under the unitary principle of industrial relations, suggesting that there is only one common interest for all actors involved in production relations: the pursuit of common welfare and, therefore, the necessity of harmonious social relations for industrial peace (*Asas Kekeluargaan*, familial principle) (Moertopo 1975, 19). This framework, therefore, also aimed to facilitate state control over the harmony of labour relations, considering conflicts of interest as a failure of this common goal and, consequently, something to be avoided. Within this framework, strikes and mass protests were considered unacceptable in labour dispute settlements. This belief led to the official prohibition of strikes through national regulation, a policy that persisted until at least 1990 when the government finally revoked it, largely due to international pressures (Kammen 1997, 124). The implementation of this coercive principle, coupled with leadership restructuring in unions across industries, proved effective in constraining the space for tempering workers' militancy.

The New Order regime continued the legacy of Soekarno's Guided Democracy by systematically replacing terms containing the word "buruh" (labourer), both in formal and informal usage, with other words that had similar meanings but different connotations (Ford 2009, 55-56). The term "buruh" was often associated with leftist ideologies representing the oppressed social class (Hadiz 1997: 90). The regime aimed to avoid the perpetuation of consciousness of class antagonism among workers, which could potentially lead to the resurgence of militant organised labour (Ford 2009, 57). This cultural strategy was employed to impede any potential revival of leftist ideology (Capizzi 1974, 41). As part of this language strategy the term "pekerja" (workers) was extensively introduced as a more acceptable appellation.[18] This shift mirrored the prior regime's replacement of "buruh" with "karyawan" (employee). The nomenclature of the Ministry of Labour was also altered to the Department of Manpower, and HPP was promptly changed to HIP (Hubungan Industrial Pancasila; Pancasila Industrial Relations).

organisation that gained prominence during the Cold War era. Originating in North America and Western Europe, it emerged alongside the development of liberal democratic politics as a rejection of radical socialist ideologies. The paradigm emphasises a non-revolutionary approach to addressing the challenges of capitalism. It recognises the inherent conflicts of interest between employers and the working-class, while also advocating for the institutionalisation of these conflicts through mechanisms like collective bargaining and dispute resolution, while also contributing to the country's overall economic transformation (Garcia 2010) (Hyman 2001)

18 Siegel also illustrates how the Suharto's New Order regime consistently avoided using words associated to Leftists cultural narratives as being evident in the preference for the term "Rakyat" (people) over "Massa" (Mass) that is commonly used by the Left organisations (Siegel 2001, 45)

2.2.2. Institutional Re-organisation

Institutional restructuring was the New-Order regime's most effective measure in dismantling the influences of Leftist workers' policies. This restructuring received support from international labour organisations such as ILO, ICFTU, ACL-FIO of the US, and FES of Germany (Tjandra 2016, 103) (Setiakawan 2003, 165; Hadiz 1997, 72). In addition to their concerns on labour issues, this support was part of a Cold War framework in which Western capitalist countries sought to halt the expansion of communism in Southeast Asia (Hadiz 1997, 72-74) (Hutchison and Brown 2001, 6). These organisations actively advocated a liberal-pluralist approach to labour relations, introducing a model of institutional design for labour governance and providing training in union organisation. However, the New Order government perceived that this liberal-pluralist model not entirely align with the its preference for the HIP unitarist model: an approach that promoted industrial peace, avoided politically oriented activism, and ensured state intervention in labour relations (Hadiz 1997, 74).

This initial reform began through organisations that played major roles in mobilising workers against communist trade unions during the Soekarno era. Under the umbrella of SEKBER-GOLKAR and SEKBER Buruh, several the anti-communist leaders established a labour organisation called KABI (*Kesatuan Aksi Buruh Indonesia*; Indonesian Workers' United Action) in 1966 (Hadiz 1978, 71-72).[19] The formation of KABI aimed to diminish the remaining influence of SOBSI and strengthen the political position of the New Order among the working class.[20] KABI, representing a gradual attempt by the state to encourage the formation of a single labour organisation, was later replaced by Labour Consultative Council (MPBI, *Majelis Permusyawaratan Buruh Indonesia*) to accommodate other unions, including the Sarbumusi (an Islamic oriented union) which previously refused SEKBER *Buruh* (Tjandra 2016, 103; Hadiz 1997, 74-76; Rohmawati, Alfanny and Sudjatmiko 2015, 34-51).

Due to the slow progress of this new organisation, the government, initiated by the non-trade unionists of the military faction, facilitated the establishment of a new labour federation in 1973: FBSI (Federasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia, Indonesian Labour Federation). General Ali Murtopo, one of the prominent

19 Sekber Golkar (Sekretariat Bersama Golongan Karya, Joint Secretariat of Golongan Karya) is a military-formed organisation that was the embryo of the party which later came to power in the Suharto's New Order: Golkar. The party had been the major Suharto's political engine in ruling the country (Tomsa 2008, 36)

20 A number of anti-communist organisations of the prior era joined this initiative, such as SOKSI, KBKI, SOP Pancasila, PGRI, Murba-SOBRI links, including KONGKARBU-SOKSI and GASBIINDO

New Order's architects of political transformation, inaugurated the official formation of FBSI at the BAKIN office (the National Intelligence Coordinating Body), symbolising the major role of military in this field (Hadiz 1997, 77). All unions embraced the formation and received it as a new umbrella to which all the existing unions affiliated. The formation of FBSI marked the beginning of a new landscape of labour regime, leading to the development of a single unionism with the state taking a leading role in controlling its direction.

The creation of HIP as a new ideology and the government's efforts to consolidate all unions into a single federation, FBSI, reflected how the state subdued working-class activism and shaped the character of labour organisations during this era. The unitary ideological basis and the centralisation of unionism marked the initial step of regime in demobilising labour unions (Hadiz 1997,92). The depoliticization and demobilisation continued through various organisational restructuring, ensuring the state's complete control over the working class. After the success of forming a single unionism that dismantled the factionalism legacy from Sukarno's period, internal restructuring persisted, aiming to reduce resistance potential within the federation. By 1985, FBSI transformed from an organisation comprising political entities to a union federation focused on industrial sectors. Initially forming twenty-one sectoral unions, it later contracted to only ten sectoral unions after the transition to SPSI (Indonesian Workers' Union). The organisational structural changes aimed to minimize political factionalism and reinforce the government's influence over the unions (Hadiz 1997, 93-95)

Despite this sectoral autonomy within the union structure, the hierarchical leadership from local to central levels played more a decisive role. The structural design resembles the organisational hierarchy found in state bureaucracy, military and political parties. Sectoral leaders in each region were accountable to regional union branch leaders, who, in turn, answered to union leaders at the higher level in the province, and so forth up to the national level. Given that highest ranks at the national and many regional organisations were also occupied by (either retired or active) bureaucrats and security officials, the union structure closely represented that of the state control, undermining the union's democratic internal representation (Kammen 1997, 81).[21] With 268 regional branches of SPSI organising nearly nine thousand unions at enterprise level

21 Similar stories were unfolded by the senior unionists in Pekalongan and Semarang. The SPSI branch leader of Pekalongan during the New Order era was held by the head of the local-Manpower office. In the same era, the SPSI branch leader of Semarang had a very close relationship the local-Manpower officials.

in early '90s (Manning 1993, 69), the structure indicates a heavily embedded state control. Such a design facilitated state intervention in various labour affairs, ranging from union elections to dispute resolutions.

Similar conditions were observed in regional representative institutions. Tripartite institutions at the regional level, composed of representatives of workers, employers, and government, functioned merely a consultative and communication body (Hadiz 1997, 91). Wage council institution, for instance, consisting of five government representatives, five workers representatives (mainly FBSI/SPSI members typically selected by local government officials), and another five from employer's association, operated in similar manner. A parallel development occurred in representatives in dispute settlement institutions (P4D/P) who still adhered old regulations of 1957, maintaining similar composition with that of the wage council.

The representative structure, part of the state's strategy to politically demobilise the working class, had significant economic ramifications. While Hadiz (1997, 82-83) argues that this labour control aimed at depoliticising labour rather than ensuring New Order's industrial economic growth, Manning (1993, 88) contends that the control was evidently intended to create a cheap labour force, leading to economic consequences on capital accumulation. This labour control restricted collective bargaining rights and adequate representation in unions and tripartite institutions, ultimately benefiting and strengthening employers' positions against workers in the process of capital accumulation. Wages, a crucial parameter, remained consistently low during the New Order regime, including in regions like Semarang and Pekalongan, where labour-intensive sectors dominated. Industrial sectors such as textiles, garments, footwear, tobacco, and beverages, especially in the feminised manufacturing sector, employed low-wage workers (Caraway 2007, 57; Manning 1993, 86-87).[22]

2.2.3. Labour NGOs and the Rise of Resistance amidst Changing Economic Orientation

Entering 1980s, Indonesia's economic policies were pushed to a deeper integration into the global economy (Hofman, Rodrick-Jones and Wie 2004, 27). This was spurred by the pressure to replace the emphasis of import substitution industries (ISI) with the development of export-oriented industries (EOI) in order to recover the domestic market saturation, and to reduce state

22 Caraway (2007, 155-126) asserts that the feminisation tendencies with precarious working conditions were prevalent in sectors where organised labour was weak.

dependence on extractive economies especially due to the fall of oil prices (Wie 1989, 150). The pressure to follow this path was also induced by the increased new international division of labour system that led to market regionalisation and production (Moody 1997, 73-75). The economic regionalisation had pushed capital mobilisation into the regions in order to make a more efficient production and marketization. Within this global development, Suharto shifted the targeted market of national industries from domestic to global markets, followed by the increased investments in labour-intensive industries such as textile, garments, electronics, etc (Robison 1986, 126).

One the one hand, the global economic shift towards EOI prompted the disciplining of labour (Robison 125). However, international and national attentions to labour rights violations and human rights issues also increased. Low wages and the restrictions on freedom of labour associations in Indonesia gained broad scrutiny from international trade unions activists and human rights organisations (Tjandra 2016, 61) Domestically, similar criticisms arose with the emergence of NGOs that sought to reinitiate the workers' organisations and advocate labour rights. Primarily led by middle-class individuals, particularly university students and graduates concerned with human rights issues, these activities were inspired by the organised labour in tandem with students' movements in European countries and some east Asian countries challenging capitalism (Ford 2009, 63-64). The result was the eruption of labour unrests in industrial regions, most notably in Java, including some regions In Sumatera.

Kammen (1997) recorded a rising occurrence of industrial strikes throughout 1990s, many of which faced violent responses from state security apparatus, including the notorious case of Marsinah.[23] While the widespread labour protests were enabled by the revocation of the strike-ban regulation in 1990 (Kammen 1997, 124), they also indicate the limits of the institutionalised control over informal mass mobilisations and small groups resistance in workplaces. Labour actions occurred on both small or larger scales, organised by seizing the union leadership (Kamen 1997) or community-based workers' organisations (Hadiz 2001, 122), or through by informal individual or group tactics (*siasat*) (Saptari 1995, 217) (Wibawanto, Baskara and Jirnadara 1998, 142-149).

23 The Marsinah case was an incident involving the murder of a female worker activist at a watch factory in Sidoarjo, East Java, following a demonstration that she and other fellows staged to demand an increase in wages. This murder involved local security forces. This case later became a symbol of the New Order state violence against workers which attracted national and international attention (YLBHI 1995)(Kamen 1997, 168-169).

NGO activists played important roles in facilitating the workers' mobilisation, filling the gap left by the absence of independent trade union leadership in workplaces since factories became unfavourable place to establish independent unions (Ford 2009, 3). NGOs used communities as alternative space beyond workplace and other semi-clandestine tactics to rebuild organisational bases and trade-union consciousness among workers (Hadiz 2001, 122-124, 137). Through regular meetings in workers' settlement, activists shared knowledge of labour regulations, exchanged workers experiences in factories, encouraged workers to contest the management, assisted in organising strikes, and sometimes conducted art performances that articulated working-class consciousness.

During the authoritarian era, however, the relationships between workers, unionists, and the NGO activists posed some complicated issues of representation.[24] Debates and questions about how NGOs should be positioned in labour movements under this regime. Hadiz (1997, 134-136) draw historical lessons from advanced industrial countries, arguing that trade unions are true vehicle of workers' interest. Thus, the engagement of the NGO activists or non-working-class actors in New Order's Indonesia needs to be positioned as *the others*. They mostly belonged to the middle class and lacked social and cultural experiences in production relations, despite the acknowledged roles in laying the ground for the development of independent labour movements. By contrast, Ford (2001) argues that the absence of political opportunities for the development of an independent working-class movement mush be considered in defining the essential actors of labour movement. Despite these debates, the roles of NGO activists were inevitable and dominant during the New Order period (Ford 2009, 181-198), similar to the labour movements in Brazil in the 70-80s and South Africa during the apartheid era (Seidman 1994). The labour movements had received extensive supports from various social movements. This discussion is essential given the significant roles played by the actors in the labour movement in Semarang and Pekalongan as presented in chapters four and six.

2.3. The revival of Workers Movements under a Market-driven Labour Regime

Suharto's authoritarian rule met its demise as the national economy that had underpinned the regime collapsed. This downfall was exacerbated by a severe

24 There had been various forms of NGOs' engagement, but they can be broadly divided into two at least: firstly, those who were directly involved in the formation of alternative labour organisations, and secondly, those who choose to remain in the position of supporting agents.

political crisis in 1998, preceded by the East Asian economic crisis in the 1990s, which swept countries across the region. Indonesia was also hit by the fall of Indonesian currency up to eighty five percent devaluated within a year, spurring hyperinflation and swelling foreign debt. The economic collapse severely limited people's purchasing power and ignited massive corporate-shutdowns (Nasution 1998; Sadli 1998). Eighteen private banks were liquidated, and dozens of financial institutions and manufacturing industries were also closed down (Nasution 2000, 153). The national Statistical Bureau reported that unemployment rate continued to rise, peaking at 11.24% in 2005. The national crisis sparked immediately a wave of social protests across country, leading to a political crisis that overthrew Suharto– one of the longest-ruling leaders in modern Asia – and his New Oder regime. The strong demands of economic and political reform were inevitable.

The reform led to substantial changes, ranging from interventions in state authoritarianism to liberal democracy and the market-driven economy. Democratic elections became one of the major milestones of the political reform. The general election was reinstated in 1999 and in which 48 new political parties including three old parties of the New Order era took part. Although the number of political parties fluctuated in the elections of the subsequent years, some new major political parties – such as PDIP, Gerindra, PKB, PAN, Partai Demokrat, PKS – have been successful in constantly gaining larger constituents.[25] Grass-root mass organisations also grew rapidly, especially induced by an atmosphere where the freedom of association became more possible. The growth of local organisations was also boosted by the political and administrative decentralisation that was commenced in 1999. The decentralisation policy was a massive government administrative reform, which the World Bank called a big-bang for its radical transfer of central government's authority to the regions (White and Smoke 2005, 6).[26] It provided greater opportunities for the locals, such as the working-classes, local ethnic communities, local business and political elites, to take part in local political competitions that affected changes in local power structure.

25 Most parties in the Reformation Era are the splits or the re-organisations of parties that were officially established in the New Order era. The fall of the New Order's regime has opened the ways to the restoration of old parties that were founded prior to the reign of Suharto in the New Order era, and the formation of new parties by using the old identities and political bases. For example, the cadres of PPP, the party that was formed from the fusion of Islamic parties in the New Ode era, established new Islamic parties such as PKB, PKS, PAN, Masyumi, etc.

26 The world Bank used the word 'big bang' the first time to refer a rapidly massive decentralisation that marked the beginning of Indonesia's reformation (White and Smoke 2005). This a very typical Indonesia's democracy in comparison to many other countries which took decades for setting up such a big program especially for countries with large number of provinces and subregions.

The democratisation was undertaken in parallel with the economic reform. This reform was strongly urged by international institutions concerned with Indonesia's economic recovery. Under the supervision of the international Monetary Fund (IMF)), the cabinet of Habibie – the Suharto's successor, and the subsequent administrations were pushed towards the optimalisation of market liberalisation and the dismantling of the networks of business nepotism as the imperative route to economic recovery in line with the direction of global economic development (Hadiz and Robison 2003). This combined set of policies marks the shift of state position to be a regulatory force that ensures the optimal operation of markets for capital accumulation. The policies resulted in the privatisation of major state-owned companies and the restructuring of financial institutions (Prasetiantono 2004) since state monopolies and protectionism had been deemed inefficient for stimulating the markets and the investments.

2.3.1. The Paradox of Transformation

Labour was a crucial element in economic restructuring and political reform. While democratisation encouraged freedom to unionise, a market-based labour flexibility was also promoted by the economists and the international agencies such as the World Bank and IMF. It was recommended for decreasing the pressure of unemployment on the one hand, and restoring the business climate on the other hand (Bank 2004) (Bernal-Verdugo, Furceri and Guillaume 2012) The labour market flexibility refers to a typical form of market where a certain characteristic and the quantity of labour are recruited and laid-off flexibly according to demand of production and commodity in fluctuated markets (Wood 1989, 1-2; Meulders and Wilkin 1991).[27] The flexibility is an emerging idea that is derived from a neoliberal perspective on the significance of a highly adjustable labour market and production relations system in the face of globalised free market (Leiva 2006). This notion has been extensively believed by the Indonesian government as the key exit strategy from the economic crisis particularly in regards to employment matters (Mustasya 2005, 3-4). It is this

27 I define flexibility by numerical aspect of employment as it refers to the most common and contested practice of flexibility in Indonesia (Tjandraningsih and Nugroho 2008). The numerical aspect is indicated by the quantity of flexible labour employed in economic activity that consequently generates the category of workforce such as short-term contract labour, outsourced labour, home-workers. The concept of flexibility itself contain problematic definitions as scholars have constructed in different ways and meanings. Piore and Sabel (1984) define it by focusing on flexible specialization, while others emphasise different dimensions such as functional flexibility (Mathews 1989, 37), wage flexibility and working time flexibility (Freeman 2005). These forms of flexibility have been certainly applied in various enterprises in Indonesia, but workers and unions have paid much attention on the problems of numerical flexibility as it gives fundamental impact on job insecurity.

notion that went into political process of making policies that ignited tensions between unions, employers, government and politicians.

A set of new labour policies was introduced during the first half decade of Indonesia's reformation era (1999 to 2004). Two of labour policies, which I discuss here, are the Trade Union Act (Labour Law no.21 on the freedom of association) enacted in 2001, and the Employment Act or commonly known as the Manpower Act (Labour Law no.13 on employment) passed in 2003.[28] Together with other sets of economic policies, these labour laws impacted the national economy. The unemployment rate decreased gradually into from its peak of 10.9% in 2005 to its lowest level at 5.7% in 2014. The growth of Indonesia's foreign direct investment (FDI) also recovered, although it came later than neighbouring Southeast-Asian countries, particularly Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. This growth indirectly helped created a mutual effect on the employment opportunities (ASEAN 2016, 27, 143)

The new labour policies, nonetheless, posed some paradoxes. The first paradox concerns the protective character of the law. The second one refers to the democratic character of the labour law. The paradoxes show that, regardless of some kinds of progress, the new labour policies – particularly in regards to several contested articles – provided contradictions and controversies that ignited new tensions among workers, unions, employers, and governments. The tensions even resulted in multi-layered conflicts in various political economy arenas, from workplace level, street collective-actions in various regions throughout Indonesia, to regional and national parliaments.

The Manpower Act was one of the most contested labour laws as it produced a paradox that affected the structure of the labour force, the labour market and the power of trade unions. Despite the protective articles that retained, several articles of the act have been controversial for the loosely use of the concept of temporary labour. This category refers to any form of labour beyond permanent contract system or what ILO calls a non-standard employment. This includes short-term contract labour, outsourced labour, home-based labour, etc. Academic studies and NGO reports found that the increasingly widespread use of this type of labour had indicated the massive replacement of permanent labour into temporary ones, making the employment become more precarious (Chris and Roesad 2007, 73; Tjandraningsih 2012).[29]

28 The set of new labour policies consists of three new labour acts that includes those two acts I mentioned above, and the industrial dispute settlement act.

29 Precariousness of labour that is generated by the liberal practice of labour relations is indicated by the

Although the use of temporary labour is certainly not new, the legalisation serves an important ground for the expansion of this type of labour in various economic activities, both in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors (Matsumoto and Verick 2011, 8-9). The growth of this type of workforce increased rapidly particularly in labour-intensive industries such as garment (Pratiwi and Arfandi 2019), footwear (Gardener 2012, 62), electronics (LIPS 2018, 10), where mostly women are employed.[30] The legalisation of the outsourced workers also boosted the formal and informal business of labour suppliers (Juliawan 2010).[31] It had made their situation even more vulnerable given the existing weak labour inspection system (Nugroho, Gultom and Rokhani 2018).[32]

This widespread use of these labour had even extended beyond its regulatory boundaries. Surveys conducted by unions, NGOs, and scholars often found the excessive use of this workforce, such as the use of short contract workers that exceeds the legal standard of employment length, the use of outsourced labour in prohibited categories of work.[33] This degradation of labour protection had been the central point of contention between the proponents and the opponents of this policy. The debates had circulated extensively among workers, employers, government officials and parliamentarians, and triggered strong criticism from activists and academics (Tjandrasari and Nugroho 2008).

The increase of such a temporary labour workforce threatened trade union membership and bargaining power. Since stable size of union membership determines union's bargaining power, unions generally rely mostly on permanent

increased job insecurity, the decline of union bargaining position, the flexible wages that create income uncertainty, and the increased working hours and job tension (see also (Standing 2011)

30 Female labour characterizes labour intensive industries. The massive employment of female labour in modern industrial sectors is influenced by a multitude of complex factors, wherein companies exploit the patriarchal culture and social structure to acquire docile and low-cost labour (Saptari 2000) (Caraway 2007)((N. Warouw 2008)

31 Massive use of outsourced labour has been also accelerated by the emergence of various range of labour supplier in labour market: from official labour supply agencies to informal suppliers that include factory managers, community leaders living around factories and local thugs (Juliawan 2010).

32 The study conducted by Nugroho et al (2018) shows institutional fragility that is exacerbated by local political environment has led to failures in labour inspection. These failures have resulted in the widespread disregard for labour law, with companies exploiting short-contract workers to exceed the legally mandated length of employment. Additionally, the companies have been utilising various forms of low-wage labour with inadequate benefits.

33 This law No.13 of 2003 confines the use of outsourced labour only for supporting tasks such as cleaning services, security guards, and catering. However, in practice, many companies have used this labour beyond the limit of these criteria (Tjandraningsih & Nugroho, 2008). There was extensive use of short-term contract workers that exceeded the length of employment.

workers who retain longer membership rather than temporary workers who have high labour turnover. Consequently, the decrease of permanent workforce that is replaced by temporary workers reduces the union size, and thereby, union's bargaining power becomes susceptible. Furthermore, most of temporary workers hesitated to join unions, regardless the needs of protection. Union membership often ran a risk losing their job because most management were against the involvement of these workers in union activities. Any participation of these workers in union activities often resulted in termination of contracts. Consequently, the widespread use of non-standard workforce had made great concern for both union officials and workers.

Since the beginning of the drafting of this bill, unions had mobilized their forces to respond it. Among all unionists, K-SPSI – the largest union[34], thanks to the political connection of its national leader with the ruling party, PDIP (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan – Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle), had a great influence on the process of drafting.[35] Despite no structural link between K-SPSI and the ruling party (PDIP), Jakob Nuwawea as the union national leader, was one of the party elites; and most importantly, was the then Minister of Manpower (Suryomenggolo 2004). This elite political relationship situated KSPSI in an inseparable position with the state's economic and political agenda, regardless of regime changes. Therefore, in order to gain political acceptance and legitimacy, the government also suggested more representatives from unions to join the dialogue, and set up a small forum that is called *the Small Team* (*Tim Kecil*) that consist of major trade unions representative from K-SPSI, KSPI, etc.[36]

However, most of the team's recommendation were not accommodated by government and the parliament (DPR). Instead of accommodating trade

34 The union was initially established during the New Order Era as SPSI, designated as the sole official labour organisation recognised by the government. It subsequently transformed into a confederation (K-SPSI) through the amalgamation of union federations, following the enactment of the freedom of labour associations in 2000.

35 The escalation of workers' and unions' resistance to the widespread flexible labour increased sharply in the era of Susilo Bambang Yudoyono's (SBY) presidency. However, protests had surfaced since the proposal of the bill of employment in the presidential era of Megawati Sukarnoputri. Although there has been no strong structural relationship between labour movements and political parties, workers and unions had demonstrated unprecedented political responses to this set of labour laws. The political links between factions of unions, political parties, parliamentarians and groups of government officials played important roles in the responses (See, Tjandra 2014)

36 The small team consisted of representatives from a number of unions such as Metal workers union (FSPMI, SPSI Reformasi, FSPTSK, SBSI, etc. However, many other factions of the labour movement refused to be involved in the dialogue process.

unions' expectation, employers' associations applied stronger pressures and urged the government to reduce layoff barriers that would relax the labour protection. Although the employers' demands were not finally endorsed due to strong protests from the unions, the policy and the implementations of the flexible labour continued. The use of the temporary or non-standard labour was even more diverse. NGOs reported that the use of home-based labour and the apprentices have been currently increasing in labour intensive industries in West Java and Central Java (Pratiwi and Arfandi 2019), despite the benefits which most married women workers have taken for combining wage labour and domestic activities as was evident especially in the case of home-based workers in Semarang (see Chapter Four). The rapid growth of this type labour is mutually influenced by the union's limited capacity to control. While the regime of flexibility has increasingly confined the union bargaining power (Tjandraningsih & Nugroho 2008), the organisational constraints also exacerbated their capacity to deal with the labour conditions. This comes to the next paradox.

The second paradox is related with the democratic nature of the Trade Union Act. Union development in Indonesia has been threatened by the fragmentation within the movement itself. Labour activists and scholars view that the threat stems from the nature of the Trade Union Act itself (Caraway 2006). The emergence of this law, on the one hand, was a part of democratic reform that threw off the shackle of the New Order's authoritarianism, but in reality, it has stimulated organisational splits.[37] The law has arguably provided opportunities to the growth of labour organisations and abolished the dependence of workers on SPSI as the representative vehicle of workers' interest. The Trade Union Act provides the ease of establishing union at the workplace by at least ten members, and union federation by at least five unions. As a result, since 1999, dozens of new unions have sprung up at the national level, followed by thousands of branches at the local and workplace levels. The emergence of new organisations prompted millions of SPSI members in the regions to migrate to these new organisations (Mizuno, Tjandraningsih and Herawati 2007). Although the membership of SPSI remains the largest to date, the new organisations have successfully generated significant membership. This new law stimulated the emergence of other new organisations which have no links to SPSI that were largely driven by NGO labour activists, despite their small membership.

37 A gradually organisational secession within the body of SPSI had begun shortly after the fall of the Suharto's New Order regime, when workers from eleven sectoral organisations of this union established a new organisation in 1998 called SPSI Reformasi (Mizuno et al. 2007, 288). Larger scale of splits continued after the enactment of the Act of the Freedom of Association in 2000. However, the split of SPSI is different from that of the new organisations.

However, workers and union leaders then realized that the rapid growth was not followed by a parallel increase in membership. While the union growth reaches 83% from 2005 to 2016, the union membership declines dramatically to 24% within the same period of years.[38] This signifies a serious split within the labour movement, rather than leading to a strong consolidation. The extreme ease of unionising has stimulated competitions among workers to form unions in the workplace as well as at regional and national levels. The competitions have been vulnerable to elite conflicts that led to union splits. When the leaders formed a new organisation, they usually brought some groups or even large number of members. Although members at the rank and file have the rights to choose their own affiliation, but they are not the subject in the union competition. In most cases, the split, the establishment of new union, and the transfers were carried out without any consent from the members at the grass roots as it was founded in the split of union in Semarang in 2014.

Nonetheless, the trade union act is not the sole cause of the fragmentation because it only refers to the socio-legal consequence. Another cause is the legacy of past political regime that leads to divisive resources struggle within the labour movements. While the emergence of new organisations that seceded from SPSI represents workers' democratic measures, the next splits that swept over continuously these new organisations in the following periods could be seen differently. The deep fragmentations that occurred among the new organisations were mostly ignited by conflicts within union elite circles both at federation level and the lower levels (Rokhani 2008). Most of conflicts were indirectly related to the interests at the grassroots level. Under such conflicts, union leaders would easily set up new organisations that are enabled by the Trade Union Act. The splits were often followed by the war of claims on union resources such as office, fund, NGOs' supports like the one I found in Semarang (See Chapter Four). But the most critical one is the claim on members. The union leaders who left the one union and move to another often brought along a large number of members without any consent.

The problem of fragmentation within the labour movement is indicative of issues related to internal democracy and the cultural legacy of past unionism (Ford, 2012: 186-190). Lane (2019, 18-19) argues that the passivity inherited from older generations of unionists has hindered the new generation of unionists from the uptake of militant ideas necessary for the development of working-class organisation. He asserts that the lack of organisational experience

38 The official data is taken from the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration presented by the Trade Union Rights Centre at Discussion at kedai Ka Pe RI, 18 December 2017.

and ideas, essential for establishing grassroots-oriented unions, contributes to fragmentation. It also hampers the emergence of leaders who strongly represent and gain popularity among the constituents. By contrast, many union leaders are preoccupied with resource allocation for short-term needs, such as securing NGO support, funding sources, centralising power, driven by pragmatic interests (Törnquist 2004, 388). This situation is particularly prevalent in new unions that are grappling with finding adequate organisational format amidst continuous pressures of changing economic and political conditions. The concentration of power in the elite layers of unions has created distance between union leaders and their members. Limited elite circulation, slow regeneration of leadership, weak effective communication between leaders and members at the grassroots level indicate the increasingly dominant union elite power over their members. Such divisions often reduce the bargaining power of the union in bipartite and tripartite negotiations. In wage negotiations, for example, union fragmentation results in splitting the voice of workers' representatives in the wage council. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs maintain a consistently solid representation through a single organisation, namely APINDO (Asosiasi Pengusaha Indonesia – Indonesian Employers Association).

2.3.2. Bringing the workplace-based interest into political fields

The paradox of labour transformation has presented complex challenges for workers and unionists. While political opportunities have allowed the freedom to develop labour organisations, they are confronted with new challenges arising from precarious working conditions reproduced by the liberalisation of labour relations and the market economy. Internal challenges, such as rivalries and fragmentation, further complicate their efforts to consolidate a significant collective power. Amid these challenges, workers were continuously looking for alternative ways to face these conditions forces. Recognising their own vulnerability, they took several strategic measures. The first one was to build coalitions or alliances at the national and local levels in order to reconsolidate the effects of the fragmentation (Tjandra 2010, 129). The second one was to expand the field of activism beyond the workplace-related issues.

Most coalitions, during the first decade of the freedom of association, were established and mainly aimed for workplace-based interests such as minimum wage increase and resistance to flexible employment system. However, as the spaces of workers' struggle in the workplace-based economic issues, were increasingly confined by the growing capital domination, they began to expand their moves into broader political fields. Workers began to realise that the state

was necessarily to be seen as an arena of political forces that can be seized for the benefits of the working class.

Coalition refers to a form of cooperation among trade unions in order to achieve a short-term goal that is beneficial to workers and wider constituents. The making of coalition is mainly taken as the strategy of temporary-reconsolidation to overcome the effects of union fragmentation. It is often used as a forum or collective control mechanism among trade unions to avoid harmful competition for membership (Cahyono 2010, 29). Coalitions were generally informal and organisationally non-binding (Tarrow 2011, 191; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). Some coalitions took the form of organisations with explicit structure of leadership that was decided collectively among the union leaders and NGO activists, but many others involve fluid networks or secondary alliances with less structured leadership. Through each form of organisation, they synchronise interpretations of an issue, exchange knowledges, and establish a common strategy to negotiate and pressure the government or businesses, through negotiations and collective actions.[39]

Coalitions at the national level involved broader and multi-layered civil movement actors. They became references for regional labour movements which soon followed suit. The existence of these coalitions illustrates a transformative development of the labour movement. For more than a decade since 1999, there have been at least four notable national-level coalition organisations, namely ABM, KAJS, MPBI, and alliances in the Go-Politics action.[40] The emergence of each coalition and alliance at different times represents a transformation of movements with changing interests from workplace issues to broader political issues that involve diverse elements of civil society. The struggles of a coalition in earlier period provided an impetus, either directly or indirectly, to the emergence subsequent coalitions.[41]

39 Coalition have been a common forum for unions to establish a common understanding especially on controversial articles of law or government regulations such as new regulations on minimum wage determination and components of decent living needs, including the contentious articles on non-permanent labour at the Manpower Act. Unions also exchange information about valuable resources useful for supporting their common understanding.

40 There were, however, more coalitions established at the national level such as KNGB (Labour Movements National Consolidation (Caraway and Ford 2020, 56-57; Lane 2019, 69).

41 Each coalition did not always have the same membership. Some unions were involved in almost all coalitions, but others were not. The change in composition was determined by the political process that involved the relationship of organisational leaders and their networks such as political parties, personal relationships with political elites. The composition was also affected by the interest of union elite leaders over sources of power or finances that originated from labour institutions that strategic, ideological movements, and personal competitions among leaders.

Early Coalitions

ABM (Aliansi Buruh Menggugat – Workers Challenge Alliance) was the first coalition of a labour movement in the Reformation era to resonate with labour policy politics (Mufakhir 2017, 263).[42] ABM was established by some small new unions, particularly the leftist, to respond to the controversy over the Employment Act (Caraway and Ford 2020).[43] Despite being smaller than other alliances, the emergence of ABM marked an initiative of a militant mass force. They had successfully provoked other larger unions to join and mobilise mass protests on the street against the government's and APINDO's.

The escalation of workers' protests was triggered by President Yudhoyono's (also known as SBY) plan to issue another new draft bill that revised the existing Manpower Act (UU no.13 of 2003) to meet the employers' demand. APINDO, the national organisation of employers, demanded further relaxation on the lay-offs regulation that unionists actually wanted to defend. As the government leaned toward the entrepreneurs, it encouraged all unions to unite in opposition to government's disposition. Ironically, it led unionists into a contrasting standpoint, that is, defending the existing Manpower act. In order to express their refusal, the ABM coalition, together with other major union confederations, organised large demonstrations in April and May, 2006. Hundreds of thousands of workers took to the streets to protest against the act. The action nearly even turned into clashes between workers and security forces on the streets in Jakarta on 3rd May, 2006. The demonstrations finally ended as SBY decided to put the Employment act into status quo. The workers celebrated their victory although, it is also noteworthy that the success of this action was accelerated by the fierce political rivalry between the ruling party and the oppositional parties. PDIP which strongly supported workers' voice, took oppositional position to Democrat Party – the then ruling party. With the support of the PKS and PPP, the pressure of the PDIP helped to articulate the resistance of the workers on the streets.

Regardless of the workers' victory in rejecting the government's plan to cater the business demands, the existing problems remained. The effects of controversial

42 ABM was established by small left unions such as FNPBI (Front Nasional Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia – National Front for Indonesian Workers' Struggle), KASBI (Kongres Aliansi Serikat Buruh Indonesia – Indonesian Labour Union Congress) and the right ones such as PPMI (Persaudaraan Pekerja Muslim Indonesia – Indonesian Muslim Workers' Brotherhood).

43 There are no organisational links between the small left new unions and the left unions prior the New Order era. These new unions were established by young generations of workers and labour activists who were inspired by socialist-Marxism.

articles of labour law, particularly regarding the use of short-term contracts and outsourced labour, continued to be prevalent on the ground. Excessively illegal practices took place across places and sectors. As mentioned above, the most frequently encountered violations were the use of contract labour beyond the regulated time limit, the use of outsourced workers in prohibited types of work, and deceptive mass layoffs aimed at replacing permanent workers with temporary ones. While national statistics do not provide detailed data of this particular workforce, as they are typically categorised as casual labour (Matsumoto and Verick 2011), numerous complaints have been extensively reported in meeting with union leaders and workers in workplaces, union offices, and discussion forums.

Regional Coalitions

As labour conditions became increasingly precarious, alternative strategies by making coalitions began to evolve at the regional level where workers and unionists grappled with harsh realities in the everyday work life. The strategies were shaped by the opportunities provided by decentralisation and regional autonomy. The strategies have four objectives. The first one is mainly to bridge the gap between local and national union leadership in responding to the distinctive characters of capitals and political configuration in each region. The diverse local political-economic conditions make local joint efforts more beneficial for workers, providing an alternative to relying solely on the central leadership of the union in determining appropriate strategies. The workers coalitions in the Serang industrial region in the Province of Banten, for instance, were initially established to address the violent attacks launched by companies using local thugs (*preman*) to intimidate militant unionists (Cahyono 2010, 30-32). In Pekalongan, local unionists of SPN formed a pluralistic alliance to counter the dominant model of local political leadership. This alliance included various elements of social groups such as fishers, street vendors, and other urban poor groups. In Semarang, SPN and other local unions joined forces to confront global corporate influences on local employment policies set by local governments.

These examples also assert another three objectives: to re-consolidate the fragmented forces of the unions into a single front in the face of local businesses which were represented by only one organisation, that is APINDO; to overcome the weak capacity and bargaining power of workers representatives in the local wage councils (Caraway & Ford 2020, 67); and to form a larger mass force by mobilising collectively the members of each union. In Central Java of November 2014, for example, unionists under GERBANG coalition (Gerakan Buruh Berjuang Jawa Tengah – Central Java Workers' Struggle Movement) mobilised

thousands of unionised workers, blocking the north-coast highway connecting the western and eastern regions of northern Java. The five-minute block, which was able to create a five-kilometre- long traffic jam, was deliberately carried out to force the Governor of Central Java to revise the decision on the following year's minimum wage. Likewise, the unionists of Pekalongan and neighbouring regions, which affiliated to SPN and KSPSI, initiated the formation of the Western North-Cost Labour Movements for wage negotiations. In 2013, they took action by blocking the north coast road which resulted in ten-kilometre of traffic jams to force the city governments to revise the decisions of minimum wage which was too low.

Coalitions had been reliable workers' vehicles for regional collective actions hitherto primarily for two major workplace-related demands - primarily wage increase and regional regulation of employment. This is an example of the politicization of wages. Politicization of wage refers to the workers' attempts to acquire supports from local political forces in order to increase their leverage in minimum wage negotiations (Caraway, Ford and Nguyen 2019, 252-253; Tjandra 2016, 184).[44] The strategy was mostly used in times of direct regional elections. In contests for the positions of governors, mayors and regents (bupati), the votes of local mass with various identities are a valuable resource that is contested by candidates. Workers organised by unions are a source of votes for the candidates in industrial areas. This provides opportunities for the exchange of interests between workers and the political elites. A political support was exchanged for the promise of a wage increase.[45]

However, the beneficial exchange of interests from both parties actually came late. Until a few years after the direct elections were first held in 2004, the

44 The term of politicisation of wage seemed to be slightly confounding since it implies that other forms of contestation in wages might be less political, but the common use of this term actually refers specifically to the *win-win* strategy used by unions in coalitions by making cooperation with political elites for winning a minimum wage determination.

45 In most cases in industrial regions, the exchange of such interests between political elites and the unions occurred only during the regional-head elections. After that, the workers would find difficulties to find similar support from the elites they have endorsed despite the victories of the elites in the elections. Most of the regional-heads who had won the elections are no longer in needs of popular supports, but rather the business supports. Business groups would also put more pressures on the regional-heads to provide a supporting climate for market and production growth. Such politicization of wage did not only take place in regards to the regional elections, but also the presidential elections at the national level.
(Interview with Ari Munanto, SPN/KSPN branch official, 28 May 2015; for some examples, see also https://regional.kompas.com/read/2011/12/30/00130421/regionaljawa; https://www.beritasatu.com/nasional/120524/gubernur-atut-kembali-digugat-serikat-buruhwww; https://cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20141210183901-20-17307/jokowi-telepon-buruh-yang-sedang-demonstrasi/)

demands of wage increases organised by unions were still separated from the electoral interests (Caraway, Ford and Nguyen 2019, 256-257). Both sides did not perceive that as an opportunity for their respective goals. Tarrow also argues that objective opportunity would never exist until the challengers perceive its subjective existence that allows collective actions (Tarrow 2011, 163-164). Besides the impediment of union fragmentation, the workers were also slow in realising adequately the significant gap between the normative standard living cost (KHL – Kebutuhan Hidup Layak; Decent Living Needs) and the actual impact of inflation growth on workers daily social economic lives.[46]

The politicisation of wages began to emerge in 2010 when workers in Sukabumi, West Java, under the alliance of *Koalisi Buruh Sukabumi,* organised workers to force the local wage council and the Regent of Sukabumi to recommend a higher minimum wage. Such actions were conducted close to the regional electoral period in which the incumbent ran for re-elections (Tjandra 2016, 187-188). Similar practices then also spread in other major industrial regions like Jakarta, Bogor, Bekasi, Banten, and Batam, including Semarang and Pekalongan (Caraway, Ford and Nguyen 2019) (Cahyono 2010).[47]

Wage politicisation challenges often spark responses from central government officials and employers since, who express concerns that rising wages may adversely impact the investment climate in regions with rapid wage growth. Business people struggled against the alliance of local politicians and unions, highlighting regional wage disparity. As a response, in 2015, President Jokowi signed Government Regulation No. 78 (PP78), changing the minimum-wage setting mechanism based on regional inflation. The decision, met with mass protests, used a mathematical formula, undermining traditional negotiations between workers and employers. The protests, leading to a National Strike (Mogok Nasional), demonstrated unions using coalitions strategically against government decisions.

Similar attempts were evident in the way unionists tried to find an alternative way to deal with the loopholes in the Manpower Act on the use of temporary labour. Faced with political constraints at the national level, they shifted

46 Tjandraningsih and Herawati (2009) presents a detailed survey that promotes a higher value of KHL (Decent Living Needs Index) which became the foundation of decent wage; a novel concept which was then adopted by many trade unions both at the national and local in the negotiations at the wage councils.

47 The cases of workers' actions in wage politics in Semarang and Pekalongan are illustrated further in chapter 5 and 7 of this thesis.

focus to regional struggles. City and regency branch unions experimented by proposing draft regional regulations (*Raperda*) to overcome loopholes, leveraging decentralisation and regional autonomy. This approach was widespread in industrial regions. For example, unions in Serang, FSBS (Serang Workers' Solidarity Forum) and ASPSB-Serang (Alliance for Serang Workers Unions), proposed stronger sanctions for corporate violations related to short-term contracted and outsourced labour (Cahyono 2010, 89-100). Similar initiatives occurred in Pekalongan, where activists collaborated with local politicians to negotiate with the DPRD, submitting a draft regulation establishing a special tripartite mechanism overseeing local labour practices, especially in the use of contract and outsourced labour (see chapter 6).

Despite widespread attempts through state political institutions, the success stories of regional actions on employment issues remain largely unheard. Even if regional regulations favouring workers were ratified by the DPRD, effective implementation faced obstacles, including failures in the labour inspection system and local political pressures (Mufakhir 2014, 105). In some regions, workers and unionists reached an impasse, leading to widespread discontent and, at times, fierce resistance, notably between 2010 and 2011. A notable example is the "Grebek Pabrik" (Factory Raid) in the Bekasi industrial region, where Metal-workers Union (FSPMI) and KSPSI unionists conducted large-scale factory raids, compelling companies to comply with the Employment Act on outsourced and contract workers (Mufakhir 2014). Despite claims of success in converting temporary workers to permanent status, challenges persisted in reducing corporate violations across regions. However, these experiences shaped a new understanding among workers, leading to broader initiatives such as pursuing political positions in parliament through electoral politics and organising social movements involving civil society and grassroots communities.

2.3.3. Workers' Community-based Activism for Social Welfare

Challenges faced by workers at regional and national levels in advocating for workplace-related interests prompted a shift in perspective among unionists. This shift arose from the realization that workers' daily lives encompass needs extending beyond the workplace, viewing themselves as members of a broader community. A survey by a union revealed that the most pressing socio-economic burdens for workers' households involved extra expenses, particularly for health problems and children's education. Despite annual wage increases, income proved insufficient for such emergencies, exacerbated by job insecurity due to widespread temporary labour use. Married workers, especially women managing household finances, felt these grievances keenly. Some unionists and NGO

activists sought to reframe this life-affected employment situation, questioning the state's responsibility to workers' lives as citizens beyond the workplace.[48] This question led to a newfound awareness of workers not solely as labour but also as citizens.

This meaning didn't emerge mechanically. It was constructed through shared experiences and interactions within coalitions, alliances, and networks. NGO activists played a crucial role in framing the workers' role and interpreting opportunities for that role. The conception evolved through labour networks in industrial areas of Java, including Semarang and Pekalongan (see chapter 4 and 6). Initially, this discourse was limited to a few local union leaders, with varying understanding even among central and regional leaderships. Changes in perspective began to spread among union members when local unionists extensively introduced workers' rights to regional healthcare insurance (Jamkesda), the national social security system, educational rights for workers' children, regional budgets for the poor, and the significance of union engagement in electoral politics.

The structure of political opportunities plays a crucial role in shaping awareness and translating it into concrete actions. At the regional level, the decentralisation process offers a fundamental political opportunity for interest groups to engage in local political decision-making. Regional legislative elections and direct elections for regional heads provide avenues for locals to demand accountability, despite the continued dominance of regional elite forces in local politics. The decentralisation process and regional electoral politics create a contested space that enables grassroots interest groups to demand, negotiate, and influence decisions at the regional level. Workers and labour activists' experiences with wage politics exemplify this space, which local unionists view as an alternative arena for promoting workers' rights as citizens and integral parts of a wider community.

In this context, an additional opportunity arose through the flow of financial, technical, and knowledge supports to local activists and unionists, which came from international institutions. Along with the struggles surrounding the impact of the Employment Act, a number of international organisations came with different issues and programs. One of them came from ACILS (American Centre for International Labor Solidarity), an international labour NGO which

48 This tone of question has been raised among unionists and labour activists on different occasions, such as a seminar in 2008 organised by TURC and ACILS which I attended as a facilitator of discussion. It was also mentioned by several union leaders in Pekalongan when I first met them in 2010.

initiated a program for the political engagement of regional trade unions. In 2004 ACILS invited and facilitated unionists from ten industrial regions in Java and one from Batam-Sumatera to engage in a vote educator program (Caraway and Ford 2020, 137). The program provided trainings on the local governments' decision-making process in regional budgeting as well as strategies for political engagement and lobbying (Yulianto 2008), including participation in competing regional legislative seats. Several unions filiated to SPN, FSPMI (metal union), KSBSI, FSP-KEP benefited from this program.[49]

The implementation of the program varied greatly (see chapters 4 and 6). In some regions, unions still retained the negotiation of employment issues. For instance, SPN in Sukoharjo, Central Java, lobbied the local government and regional parliament (DPRD) for a budget increase for improving the regional labour inspection system in order to reduce the violations of labour practices in workplaces.[50] The Metal Union in Batam industrial area succeeded in establishing a more constructive dialogue for general local employment policy. In Pekalongan however, the unionists managed to make a breakthrough in political communication with local governments and encouraged them to increase a social program budget aimed at reducing workers' household economic burdens. Unionists in Semarang have successfully promoted a special regional budget subsidy that allowed local children of workers to be exempt from the school building fee.

Besides ACILS, some other development agencies and international donors such as the Asia Foundation, USAID, UNDP, have also supported the strengthening of democracy at the local level through different programs, including programs targeted at union development. They provide financial and technical assistance to grassroots groups involved in monitoring the planning and implementation of local policies and budgets. In Pekalongan, although the program did not specifically targeted workers' organisations, local unionists took advantage of this to build wider access to health care services for reducing household economic burden of local workers' families and urban poor. This also provided an opportunity for the local unionists to organise a wider movement that involve various local NGOs and grass root associations (see Chapter Six).

49 The four unions came from different industrial regions such as Jakarta, Bogor, Tangerang (city and regency), Bandung, Sukoharjo, Temanggung, Bekasi, Gresik, Semarang (regency), and Malang (Yulianto 2008).

50 The union's experience was presented at the workshop organised by TURC and ACILS in 2008. The meeting was held to promote the active participation of unions and workers in local government's decision making process, local budgeting, and local electoral politics.

Similar steps at the national level took place a bit later, but had a significant impact across regions. Unions along with other elements of civil society found the moment to build a broader movement when they were fighting for the National Social Security System (SJSN, Sistem Jaminan Sosial Nasional). A large coalition named KAJS (Komite Aksi Jaminan Sosial, Action Committee for Social Security Reform) played a pivotal role in this movement. KAJS is an alliance formed by union leaders at the national level together with heterogeneous elements of civil society to push for a universal social security reform**.** Academics, domestic and international NGOs, politicians, farmers, fishers, students' organisations joined the coalition (Tjandra 2016, 138). The goal was to demand the immediate implementation of the Social Security Act (No. 20 of 2004 on the National Social Security System). The act consists of transformation of state-owned companies of social security into public institutions; universal healthcare for all Indonesians; pension scheme for formal workers (Tjandra 2016, 139). For the implementation, a special authority body called BPJS (Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial, the Social Security Agency) was needed, which merged the existing state-owned agencies that manage social security for formal workers (Jamsostek). The formation of the KAJS alliance marked the shift of the labour movement: from labour issues to citizenship issues at national level (Tjandra 2016, 135-138).

The discourse of this universal social security gradually developed through networks after it had initially emerged among a limited group of activists in Jakarta a few years after the peak of the polemics on the Manpower Act. Discussions and insights from other countries significantly contributed to the acceptance of the idea. In 2009, for instance, FES (Friedricht Ebert Stiftung), a German NGO, organised a group dialogue discussing the necessity of social security as a safety valve to alleviate the burden caused by declining income and job loss, especially in the aftermath of the wave of precarious work spurred by the labour law.[51] They explored the relations between employment and poverty and the potential establishment of an inclusive social movement (Jurnal Demokrasi 2011).

As universal social security emerged as a new concern for most unionists, leaders from SPN and KSBSI initially focused their campaign on insurance issues solely for formal workers (Jamsostek), rather than advocating for universal social security that would benefit all Indonesian citizens (Caraway and Ford, 2020, 72). Due to the efforts of other unionists, however, NGOs, academics, and civil society organisations in emphasising the importance of universal social security

51 It was reported on the Jurnal Sosial Demokrasi 2009 vol 7 published by FES (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung).

and mobilising a broader social movement, the KAJS coalition gained significant momentum.

The KAJS coalition itself was formed in a meeting initiated by Metal union leaders in March 2010 in Jakarta, sponsored by FES.[52] This gathering included leaders from major unions and activists from TURC, a labour NGO (Tjandra 2016, 141).[53] In subsequent developments, politicians from PDIP, such as Rieke Dyah Pitaloka, and academic Hasbullah Thabrany, along with NGOs like Prakarsa, urban poor groups, and the Indonesian Corruption Watch, joined the coalition, strengthening KAJS's bargaining position and expanding the network of alliances (Tjandra 2016, 139-140). While the last two non-union actors played a less dominant role in facilitating this idea, the overall network and alliance positioned KAJS as a symbolic representation of a broad social movement beyond the working-class constituency (Caraway & Ford 2020, 73).

KAJS put pressure on the SBY's administration and encouraged politicians in the DPR to implement immediately the social security system. The main tactics comprised of campaigns, mobilisation, and lobbying. The target was the establishment of a special executive agency (BPJS) which as an authority to execute mandate of the law. In fact, the political process within the government itself had been underway since the Law on National Social Security System enacted in 2004, but the Yudhoyono (also known as SBY) administration was still reluctant to follow up due to budgetary reasons. The political lobbying of KAJS activists with political factions in the DPR had been a breakthrough for this barrier. Campaigns through the mass media and social media platforms such as Facebook, including tens of thousands of signature petitions, were carried out to frame the public opinion including the government. Hundreds of thousands of masses were mobilised on the streets to show the magnitude of the social movement forces. The obstacles launched by the SBY administration also encouraged KAJS activists to pursue legal proceedings, by filing a citizen's lawsuit against the president and his ministers (Caraway & Ford 2020, 73).

52 Before KAJS was formed, the three largest confederations (KSPSI, KSPI and KSBSI) had plans to reconsolidate. A meeting called TUMPOC (Trade Union Meeting for Political Consensus) was initiated by KSBSI in 2009 and received support from FES and ACILS. The meeting discussed many agendas of the Indonesian labour movement including the issue of Social Security reform. The meeting which agreed on the formation of the FreN (National Discussion Forum) as a follow-up step, ended in stagnation after KSPI with the support of FES built KAJS. As a donor, ACILS chose not to be involved in KAJS steps. Likewise, KSPI and KSBSI decided not to get involved in KAJS - although in the end one of the KSBSI factions returned to support KAJS after receiving instructions from KSBSI's founding father - Muchtar Pakpahan. (Tjandra 2016, 147-148)

53 The unions which attended consist of FSPN, KSPSI, PPMI, KEP-SPSI, OPSI, KSBSI, KOBAR, and FSPMI as the initiator.

Their struggle was victorious, but also resulted in fragmentation. On the one hand, KAJS succeeded in winning this struggle when SBY finally agreed to sign the law in November 2011. This has become an important milestone in the implementation of a national social security system. BPJS has been officially running since 2014. All Indonesian citizens have access to health care services, including the right to pensions for formal workers, through a low-cost social security system. Workers in the formal and informal sectors have relatively equal opportunities for the rights. KAJS' action has actually become a milestone for the formation of a popular social movement in which the working class played a substantial role (Törnquist 2022, 250).

Fragmentation, however, within the movement remains inevitable. There have been generally two main groups with different views and sometimes opposing interests (Tjandra 2016, 142-150). The first one was the unions which refused to join KAJS due to different interest and perspective on the institutional scheme of the social security system. Included in this group was a faction of K-SPSI led by Syukur Sarto and a faction of K-SBSI led by Rekson Silaban.[54] SPN, which was initially involved in KAJS, eventually also resigned from the coalition. These organisational leaders who decided not to join KAJS argued that the revision of the existing Jamsostek Law that served the interest of formal workers should be given first priority rather than establishing a new universal social security system. However, another perspective suspected that their attachment to Jamsostek was the major rationale for the refusal as these leaders sat as the board members of Jamsostek. The second group was slightly ideological in their rationale (Tjandra 2016, 150). They mostly came from leftist unions such as KASBI, FNPBI, GSBI which considered the model of insurance agency (BPJS) that characterises the SJSN showed how the state relinquish its responsibility in providing a full social welfare for all citizens. According to these unions, universal social security should be supported by a full funding of the National Budget (APBN).[55]

2.3.4. Workers in Electoral Politics

Electoral politics is another arena outside the workplace where workers sought alternative spaces to increase their political bargaining power. Trade union involvement in electoral politics has been relatively recent, although individual

54 Union organisations in Indonesia are sometimes marked by divisions in which each union continues to use the same name. For example, KSPSI and KSBSI.

55 an NGO, DKR (People's Healthcare Agency Council) which was founded by the former minister of Health, rejected the SJSN and BPJS because the scheme slashed funds that had been managed so far by the Ministry of Health in the form of the Jamkesmas Program (a free healthcare program for the poor).) operated in regions (Tjandra 2016, 150).

workers have actually been experimenting with elections since the beginning of Indonesia's political transition, showing mostly insignificant strength and results. The workers' Go-Politics is arguably the greatest trade union experiment in electoral politics in the last fifty years. Preceded by initial experiment in 2009, trade unions in several regions took a political step by sending their candidates to compete in legislative elections in 2014. The main strategy of this political experiment is to make the trade union organisation the main political engine and mobilise constituents militantly to win seats for their own candidates in the DPRD.

The workers' involvement in electoral politics, generally, has occurred through both direct and indirect representation. In indirect representation, workers and unionists were not the primary political subjects. They entrusted their voices or interest to the others – normally were non-working-class party cadres – who were directly running to compete in the legislative elections or *pilkada* (regional head elections). Therefore, the unions must mobilise their members to vote for these candidates, aiming for victory, in order to get political support in return. Having the political access from the elected parliamentarians or/and the elected governor or mayor or regent will provide the chance for unionists to lobby pro-workers policies. This is how the wage politicisation took place, including their attempts in proposing the draft of regional regulation on employment that I explained above.

However, due to the absence of a strong symbolic representation bond between the workers and the elected individuals, the exchange of interests remains subject to failure. This is an aspect where Pitkin and Laclau might find common ground on the significance of symbolic representation, as I discussed in the Introduction. The experiences of workers in promoting regional regulations illustrate this point. For example, the unionists of SPN in Serang faced challenges relying entirely on the support of the local DPRD, mainly composed of representatives from Islamic parties and middle-class nationalist parties, despite their initial alignment with workers' interests.[56] Similarly, workers and unionists in Pekalongan could not consistently depend on the defense of the local mayor, as he did not belong to the same social class (see Chapter Six). The most notable success in the union's political experience may be the actions of KAJS, where several politicians from the National DPR were actively involved in the activism. A female PDIP politician, Rieke Dyah Pitaloka, along with many

56 SPN branch of Serang relied mostly on the support of Hafadzoh, the DPRD, and Andi Sujadi, the vice governor of Banten who was promoted by PKS and Democrat Party in the Regional Head elections.
https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/104236/taufik-nuriman-bupati-serang-terpilih

others from the middle class with strong connections to grassroots workers, played a pivotal role in the KAJS movement (Törnquist 2022, 250). Nonetheless, workers realised the need for continuous engagement in electoral politics to have a direct impact on their interests, as perceived by some unionists at both national and regional levels.

In regard to the strategy of direct representation**,** the experience had actually begun in the early democratic elections in 1999. However, none of workers' political forces had significant political power, despite the rise of new labour parties. There had been three labour parties who participated in the elections: PBN (Partai Buruh Nasional, National Labour Party), PPI (Partai Pekerja Indonesia, Indonesian Workers Party), dan PRD (Partai Rakyat Demokratik, Democratic People's Party) (Caraway and Ford 2020, 36).[57] In the 2004 and 2009 elections, the situation was relatively the same. There were no significant working-class political parties. The National Labour party which changed PBSD (Partai Buruh Sosial Demokrat; Democrat Social Labour Party) had successfully collected more votes without any contribution to acquire parliamentary seats.[58]

The insignificant working-class political participation in the two elections was caused by the destruction of the political base of the working class in the preceding New Order era (Törnquist 2004) (Aspinall 2013, 112). A survey in 2019 found that half of the respondents at the grassroots of industrial working-class did not agree with the direct involvement of unions in elections.[59] The majority were of the opinion that union leaders should continue to fight solely for welfare issues rather than getting involved in electoral politics. Only a very few unionists in the regions have succeeded in electoral politics, as happened in Pekalongan, where SPN branch leader won a seat in the local DPRD (see Chapter Six). This victory, however, was not a real result of trade union political mobilisation. It is rather a product of the local Golkar Party.

57 The National Labour Party (140,980 votes/0,13%) was established by Mochtar Pakpahan, the founder of SBSI, and independent union in the New Order Era. The Indonesian Workers Party (63,934 votes, 0,06%) was established by Wilhemus Bokha, a unionist from the corporatist SPSI, and Democratic People's Party (PRD) was a leftist party. The Election Commission's also listed some parties such as Solidarity Party for All Indonesian Workers (61,105 votes/ 0,06%) dan Workers Solidarity Party (49.807 votes/ 0,05%). However, none of them gained parliamentary seats in 1999 Elections.

58 The National Labour Party changed into Social Democrat Labour Party in 2004 Elections. It obtained four times higher votes (636,397 votes) than its' own gain in 1999. However, it did not give any significant chance to get a parliamentary seat. The gain even declined in 2009 Elections (265,203).

59 The survey was part of a longitudinal research project that was conducted by Caraway and team in 2009, 2014 and 2019, but it was not presented in our co-authored article (Caraway, Ford and Nugroho 2015)

A significant organised political experiment of the working class emerged in the 2009 elections, even though it was not the work of independent labour parties. This was arguably the unions' first political experiment in which labour organisation were taken as a means of mobilization and carrying legislative candidates from the working class. The idea initially came from the agreement between the SPN national leaders and the politicians of PKS. The party was the most active political organisation in initiating the political coalition, although others such as Gerindra, PDIP, PAN also had similar intention. PKS was an emergent Islamic political party and it was often characterised as a party of the urban Muslim middle-class constituents (Bubalo, Fealy and Mason 2012, 52-62), but it also organised a special wing – JABURTANI – that mobilised the working class, farmers and fishers (Caraway, Ford and Nugroho 2015, 1301). It was through this network the communication of unionists and political party leaders generated the ideas to establish a coalition for legislative elections.

While the political agreement was made in the central level of organisations, the most substantial mobilisation was in the regions. The instructions of central leadership went down to the regions where the branch union established cooperation with PKS branch leaders. The SPN branch in Semarang was one of those which received the instruction and decided to send two labour candidates to compete in the legislative elections (see Chapter Four). The largest mobilisation, however, was actually carried out by the SPN branch of Tangerang City in Banten Province where the only SPN female unionist was chosen to move forward in the elections. Meanwhile, the collaboration between PKS and metal union mainly took place in Batam industrial region, Sumatera.

None of the union candidates in each electoral district ultimately won DPRD seats. Although the female SPN candidate in Tangerang received the fourth largest vote in her electoral district (726 votes), she was eliminated by the PKS cadre candidate who received more votes (Caraway Ford 2020, 138-139). Similarly, none of the candidates in Batam won a seat. Nevertheless, the result in Batam gave another meaning to the unionists from Metalworkers Union. Iqbal, the central leader of the union, who ran for the national DPR legislative by using PKS as the political vehicle, gained 22,865 votes. This was the second highest number of votes and was close enough to the PKS's own candidate who successfully won the national seat (Caraway and Ford 2020, 140). When, SPN ended this failure by deciding not to continue with the union-organised electoral politics experiment following widespread member discontent of the result, their fellows from Metalworkers Union decided otherwise. The way the Metalworkers Union gained large votes for national DPR created a conviction to continue the experiment in the 2014 elections with an improved strategy.

The experience of workers in the 2009 elections revealed some compelling situations. First, the involvement of unions and their constituents in the 2009 legislative elections provided a foundation from which they might be able to gauge the political capacity of the local industrial workers. Second, despite the failures, all unionists realised that local constituents and branch unions in the regions had proven to be a potentially strategic political force that can be beneficial both for the local movements as well as the national organisation. Third, since branch unionists in the regions were closer to the available local resources and they understood better the local power structure, they had a stronger bargaining position against the central leadership in making the decision for their own political measures. For an example, the unionists in Batam made their own decision about whom political parties could cooperate with in the competitions of the local DPRD seats.[60] Likewise, the SPN branch unionists in Pekalongan chose to work with the local Golkar Party in 2009 while the central leadership actually expected them to make cooperation with PKS (See further chapter six).

The workers' participation in the 2014 election marked the next and most significant political development. Several branch unions in the regions used this opportunity to explore their political capacity through independent political mobilisation. In this election, a group of unionists, NGO activists, and academics formed an open political alliance called "Go Politics." It was a political project in which labour activists and union constituents established an independent political force, using the union as a fully political machine. The objectives were to win legislative seats by: firstly, reducing dependence on and the control of political parties; secondly, avoiding the vote-buying practices that characterised almost all political parties in the elections; thirdly, controlling the influence of the politics of religious identity that dominates Indonesian politics; and therefore, fourthly, building political awareness of workers' own class identity (Caraway and Ford 2020, 154). Amidst the tendency of individual workers' engagement in legislative elections, with or without relying fully on political parties, this "Go Politics" independent activism became an important parameter to measure the extent to which the real political character of the industrial working class could be achieved.

The emergence of this movement was parallel with a shift in grassroots' orientation. In regions like Bekasi, where unions could organise themselves

60 In 2009 legislative elections, despite the local unionists of FSPMI (Metal Union) mobilised votes for their central leader who were working with PKS, they established collaboration with different local political parties: PPP, Golkar, and PAN (Caraway and Ford 2020, 140).

in a militant way, workers gained exposure to knowledge and information about how unions engaged in political arena. The workers learnt about how unionists participated in the KAJS's actions through their participation in the demonstrations, as well as through formal and informal dialogues. They learnt about the relations between factory raid and unions' political activism. These experiences helped them to recognise the interconnectedness between workplace-related interests and the necessity of political struggles (Caraway and Ford 2020, 154-155). This was similar to the situation in Pekalongan where the unionists became actively involved in community-based actions such as health service advocacy or pro-poor policies.

Therefore, when the idea of Go Politics circulated, workers and unionists in both places were relatively responsive. The Metal Union (FSPMI) – particularly the Bekasi branch that was supported strongly by the central leadership – played a key role in the Go-Politics movement. As a result of their strong organisation, this idea quickly spread to the grassroots level. Several other unions were inspired to take similar steps, but the SPN Pekalongan was the one which responded immediately to join the network of of the Go-politics. The involvement of Omah Tani, led by Handoko Wibowo (see Chapter 6), who became the 'node' of the network through political training on elections made significant contribution to the integration of the unions across regions in this political experiment.[61]

Go-Politics has become one of the most successful political exercises to build an independent political experiment. Unionists in Bekasi have become able to encourage political militancy of their constituents. Through political training carried out in factories and workers neighbourhood they created political bonds between workers, their families, the unionists, and their own legislative candidates. In the 2014 elections, two unionists in Bekasi managed to win the seats out of union's nine candidates who competed independently. A different experience was obtained by workers and unionists in Pekalongan. They were not as fortunate as their colleagues in Bekasi owing to their failure to mobilise on a large scale. They learnt, however, through this political experiment to strengthen the political capacity and broaden the political awareness of their constituents. This is different from most workers in many other regions, who separate the roles of unions in workplace-based economic interests and the needs of political struggle through wider community-based activism (Caraway, Ford and Nugroho 2015, 1305). Even if they were interested in political and broader community

61 Omah Tani is an NGO organised by Handoko Wibowo, a pro-bono lawyer who lived in Batang, Central Java. He organised the local peasants for defending the rights for land. I describe further the roles of this group in Chapter 6.

issues, activists or workers from such unions – like the ones in Semarang – were often caught up in the strategies of the political parties. Consequently, the political agenda of the union became simply represented pragmatical interest of a few union leaders.

Summary

Workplace-oriented and community-oriented labour movements have long developed in Indonesia through different state regimes. Each political regime contributes to the process of shaping these two types of approaches. Although each of these types in different regimes is categorically the same, they are never completely similar throughout the history of regime change because the stage of development of global capitalism, the economic and political character of nation-states, and the dominant social structure differed greatly from one period to another.

Most types of workers' movements that existed in the colonial East Indies in early 20th century were characterised by anti-colonialism and anti-capitalist. Even though some scholars argued that the revolutionary character of the leftist movement in the colonial period was sometimes lacking, the movements had built these sentiments through narratives of radical class political struggles and, therefore, always established relations between the interest in the workers' welfare and wider socio-political problems induced by colonialism. While unions with religious-nationalism were also equally keen on anti-colonialism, they confined the main struggle within the workplace issues and refused to rise class antagonism.

These union models of activism influenced the emergence of unionism in early post-colonial Indonesia. While industrial capitalism was still in its infancy, the nation-building that dominated national political struggles had increasingly blurred the distinction between unions that focused on workplace-based economic orientation and those with community's orientation. Most of major unions had affiliation to political parties, and had links with grassroots communities. However, the leftist unions had arguably much larger militant constituents, and had a strong political orientation, supported by broad social and political network.

The New Order's transformation which emphasised economic growth through developmentalism supported by repressive political control, had a major influence in restructuring the labour movements in Indonesia. All political orientations of unionism were crushed. Unionism became an integral part of

the overall organisations of state economic development. Although workplace-based economic unionism was the only model permitted by the state, its representational functions were severely limited. Labour control, for political reasons, restricted the spaces for any economic struggle of the working class. The weakening and deprivation of union representational functions undermined the union's leadership and services to its constituents. Union leadership was only a proxy for the interests and control of companies (at the workplace level) and the apparatus of state control (at the national and regional levels). The emergence of NGO activists and other civil society actors in the last decade of the New Order era was a counter-movement to rebuild union representative leadership. This effort revived community-based movements. However, it was only used as an organising space, while the main issue was basic labour rights. Nevertheless, the destruction of leadership and the representation roles, as well as the diversity of working-class struggle models and their organisational culture remains the greatest legacy of the New Order labour regime.

When in 1999 the market economy began to replace the authoritarian state that collapsed due to the regional crisis and global market forces, the character of the labour regime was shaped by the principles of marketization. Under this new labour regime, the labour policies lean towards strengthening a workplace-based orientation. The opportunity to build a broader movement orientation was actually available due to the democratic drives, but the legacies of the New Order's labour corporatism have amputated the political foundations of the existing workers' organisations. This is evident from the failures of political experiments by union activists at the national and regional levels, especially in the first decade of the Reformation period. It is the precariousness, which is the paradox resulting from the labour policy design, which drives the need for unions to expand the space for activism beyond the boundaries of the workplace. The political economic structure formed by decentralisation helps how the movement is organised at the national and regional levels in building these experiments. The experiences of workers and activists in Semarang and Pekalongan, which I describe in the following chapters, show how both of them were involved in community-based experiments, but ultimately shaped how they actually differently positioned the workplace struggle within their movement.

PART II SEMARANG: WORKERS AND WORKPLACE UNIONISM

Chapter 3
Rural Workers in a Globalised Industrial Region

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the challenges encountered by Indonesian workers amid the shift to a new labour regime dominated by market-based principles. This transition has led to the rise of flexible employment patterns aligned with market fluctuations. In Semarang, these transformations have occurred as local industries became more integrated into global markets and production chains, accompanied by the widespread adoption of non-standard and flexible workforces. The proximity of industrial sites to the local labour supply sources in rural areas creates a significant interplay between these environments, shaping specific labour types and influencing the character of organised labour. This local-global dynamic distinguishes Semarang from other studies that have often focused on industrial regions around Jabodetabek (Greater Jakarta) characterized by migrant workers (Hadiz 2001; Saptari 2008; Elmhirst 2004; Dahana and Arifin 2017).

This chapter aims to provide a contextual understanding of the activism of workplace-oriented unions and their interactions with their members and the local non-unionised workers. Through the analyse on the interaction between regional economic structures and the rural social environment, I raise a question: how does this interplay shape the fundamental characteristics of the local workforce? This exploration becomes a significant foundational aspect for the ensuing discourse in Chapter four. This chapter also briefly outlines how the overall landscape of labour unrest in the region developed, and examines to what extent the political context has acted as a constraint or an enabler in this regard.

The first section of this chapter provides a concise overview of the historical development of the industrial sectors in Semarang. I emphasise labour absorption and its impact on creating socio-economic categorisations within the workforce. The second section explores the reciprocal relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of the workforce and the interplay between the industrial economy and the social and cultural environment supplying the labour. Job opportunities are shaped by the dynamic interaction of capital's

control mechanisms and the economic, cultural, and social structures of the rural areas that provide the labour. Gender, age and employment skills all influence who is able to access different kinds of work. Localities, community traditions, and family dynamics are utilised by the industrial regime to shape a specific workforce aligned with market dynamics. The third section outlines the diverse interests advocated by workers and their organisations in response to recent industrial and employment transformations. These interests often represent traditional concerns of the working class inherited from responses to previous political regimes. In the fourth section, I explore how workers express their interests through organisational structures in Semarang. Despite some attempts at organisational reform, the legacy of the New Order continues to influence much of the organisational landscape in the region. Furthermore, the chapter discusses how the militant tradition of organised labour is constrained by the local political context, social structure, and cultural traditions in Semarang.

3.1. Industrial transformation and the making of industrial labour force

3.1.1. Industrial growth and labour supply

The early growth of industrialisation in Semarang dates back to 1970s (Wolf 1992, 111). This was a period in which the New Order regime attempted to boost the national economic development by spurring industrialisation, competing with other developing Asian countries (Wie 1989, 135). Although industrialisation in Semarang in the postcolonial era was not as extensive as that in other major industrial regions in Java, it had significance as a growth pole of Central Java's industrial economy since the colonial era (Cobban 1988, 266). Until the 1980s, the industrial development in Semarang remained localised in the regency's capital situated in the lowland area extending to the north coast.[62] The infrastructure left by the Dutch colonial, including ports and roads connecting the western and eastern parts of Java, played a crucial role in facilitating the growth of this region (Supriyono 2013, 57-58).

62 Until 1906, the regency of Semarang covered all areas ranged from coast in the north to mountainous areas in the south. When the Dutch colonial government adopted the decentralisation policy in order to reduce the burden of the central government, they separated the administration of the central region of Semarang from the entire area of regency. The centre that was close to the coast became a township but was still under the control of the regency. A completely administrative separation just began in 1983 under the Suharto government, and the industrial economic growth began to grow in the south. (Dinas Pariwisata dan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Semarang, 2007).

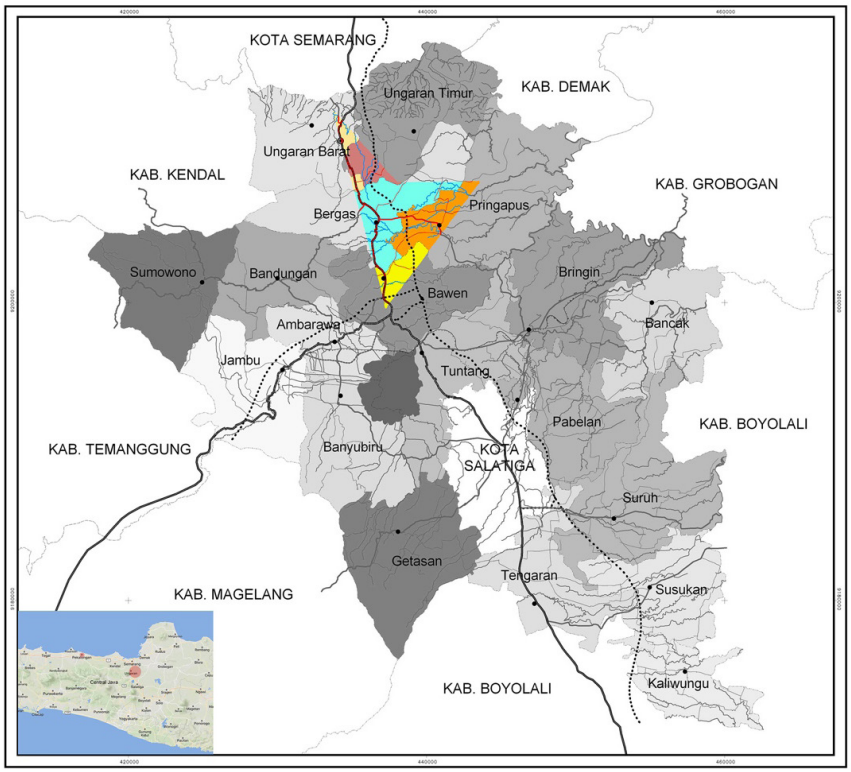
Until 1970s, the highland area in the southern region was predominantly characterised by a rural agricultural economy. However, this region began to turn into an industrial area when it transformed into a distinct administrative region separated from the lowland region in 1983. The central administration of the regency (hereinafter referred to as Semarang) relocated to the District of Ungaran in the South. This strategic move aimed to counterbalance the rapid population growth of the lowland area in the north. A new industrial zone was established in the south, becoming a new axis of the Central Java economy. This axis connects the industrial areas in the north (*Pantura* Jawa) with other economic regions. These regions include Yogyakarta, Magelang, Solo and the surrounding region of Solo Raya.[63] The core industrial zone of Semarang, comprising East Ungaran, Bergas, Bawen, and Pringapus, have become integral to this triangle zonation (see figure 3.1).[64] Semarang is currently divided into two distinct areas: the industrial zone with its semi-urbanised districts along the provincial roads and the "rural backyard", which still maintains an agricultural economy and serves a major source of the industrial labour supply.

The most intense period of Industrialisation in Semarang took place during the 1980s. Local statistics show a fourfold growth of new enterprises by the end of 90s (BPS 2001, 189). Within a decade, manufacturing industry became the largest contributor to Semarang's GRDP (37.4%) and has still increased steadily to 40% in 2014, replacing the agricultural sector that fell to the second place (12%) (BPS 2016, 361). The growth of the industrial sector created the second largest source of local employment (11.9%) in 2015 - 66% of whom are female workers (BPS 2016). The massive influx of investments, particularly in garment and textile industries, between the 1980s and early 2000s, had made Semarang and the neighbouring regions in Central Java the second largest garment and textile producers in Java (Sari 2018, 156). Up until 2014, forty-one garment and textiles companies had been established in Semarang. Together they constituted 31% of the local industries, employing 69.7% of its industrial workforce (BPS 2016). Within two years that had increased to 50 companies, contributing 71% of the industrial workforce (BPS 2019). In the last half-decade this growth has become more striking following the expansions of industrial networks originating from the western part of Java.

63 Semarang has been one of the increasingly crowded regions in the north coast of Java in the last few decades. Sub-urban development has been inevitable, accelerating the urbanisation of the corridor between Semarang (City) and the districts of Semarang Regency.

64 Another industrial area was the district (*kecamatan*) Tengaran. The location was far from the triangle economic zone in the centre of Semarang. The industrial economy of Tengaran had more intensive interaction with the nearby city: Salatiga.

Figure 3.1. Industrial 'Triangle' Region in Semarang[65]



Despite both national and local government's intervention in boosting local industrial development, two additional factors accelerated further industry growth and high employment in Semarang. The first was the integration of industries into the global economy. The industrialisation in Semarang became interconnected with the global market and production networks. Foreign companies, including those from South Korea, Japan, the US, and European countries, invested in Semarang-based companies. While domestic investors also played a significant role, producing commodities for global buyers and international markets. The factories spread across the districts (*kecamatan*), recruiting local young individuals for the workforce. Textile and garment producers manufactured products for major brands like Nike, Esprit, Arrow and Calvin Klein, employing thousands of locals as workers. Among these, Ungaran Sari Garment (USG) stands out as the largest garment companies, owning three large manufacturing plants that

65 Source: Peta Batas Administrasi Kabupaten Semarang (Map of Administrative Borders of Semarang Regency), Pemerintah Kabupaten Semarang and Bakosurtanal, 2001.

employs more than eleven thousand workers from Semarang and the surrounds. With the production of over 25 million pieces of exported garments annually, this company, as part of the Texmaco group conglomerate, claims to be the largest apparel producer in Southeast Asia and has an extensive international market network involving major global brands like GAP, DKNY and Tommy Hilfiger. Other global producers have also established their own factories in the region. These include a European shoe-manufacturer and global giants of food and beverage producers such as Coca-Cola and Nissin. In total, there are 160 large and medium-scale manufacturing companies in Semarang (BPS 2018), with many located along the ten-kilometre industrial economic corridor of this region. This economic production corridor reflects the density of the industrial workforce in the area.

The second factor that has enabled industrialisation in the region is the labour supply that has been driven by the transformation of the rural economy. Young men and women from rural families have become less likely to work in farming. Much of the low-skilled rural labour force from Semarang and the surrounds, look for industrial jobs rather than relying continuously on agricultural economy. Many of the young workers I interviewed staid that better wages were the main reason the preference for industrial jobs. Wolf, in her study (1992, 254), also argues that the industrial sector has been a steadier source of income. Local statistical figures also affirm a constant increase of industrial labour demand in the region. Workers in manufacturing industry grew by 49.9% from 2008 to 2017.[66] The growth is significantly greater than that in agricultural sector which was only 4.05%. The agriculture sector continues to have the second largest labour force.

3.1.2. The formation of labour categories

With an abundant supply of labour from rural regions, industrialisation in Semarang created a distinctive structure of industrial labour force. Local statistics reveal a notable feature: a significant portion of the industrial labour force in Semarang consists of women. The participation of female workers in industrial sector of Semarang increased by 57.68% between 2008-2017, surpassing the growth of male workers, which was 37.11% (BPS, 2009; 2018).

66 It is calculated from the statistical records published by Central Burau of Statistics (BPS 2009; 2017). The criteria of workforce defined in the statistical books of Kabupaten *Semarang in figures* 2009 is slightly different from that of 2018. The definition of workforce in the book of 2009 includes those at age of 10 years old above, while the 2017 begin from age 15. However, I assume this gap does not make any significant differences in the proportion of workforce in each year.

This feminisation not only reflects the numerical dominance of women in the industrial workforce, but also underscores the nature of labour designed to serve capital accumulation. Feminisation, in this context, denotes a corporate strategy involving the recruitment, training, and control of a substantial female labour force based on socially and culturally constructed gender assumptions, aimed at maximising the extraction of value from this workforce (Caraway 2007). This strategy is rooted in the managerial belief that hiring women is an efficient production strategy, supported by stereotypes about their nimbleness, often attributed to training received within the family for gender-related reasons (Warouw 2008, 110). This stereotype, which imagines women as 'docile' is constructed within family, community, and endorsed by the state, is deemed beneficial for the manufacturing industry (Elson and Pearson 1981, 92-93).

The feminisation is evident in the trend of mass recruitment of women, especially in competitive labour-intensive companies related to foreign capital or global production chains (Caraway 2007, 159-160). This is a phenomenon that has been observed in manufacturing companies in Semarang and which I discuss further in Chapter Four. Labour-intensive industries which produce commodities like garments, textiles, and footwear for international export have been characterised by feminisation. This pattern underscores the relationship between the recruitment of female labour, the imperative of labour control and the pursuit of low labour costs. Along the main road of Semarang and rural streets, job vacancy posters are commonly seen on the outside walls of factories and rented houses for workers, explicitly targeting young women or mentioning tasks traditionally associated with female roles, such as sewing or ironing (see Photo 1).



Photo 1: A Billboard for female job vacancies at the roadside of an industrial area of Semarang

In Semarang, the growth of flexible labour, characterised by the widespread use of short-term contract labour, outsourced labour, casual (daily) labour and home-based labour, is evident, with women dominating this flexible labour force. There is no detailed data that refers to each category of labour, but the unionists of Semarang branch, the local workers and shop stewards have frequently admitted the increased preference of companies to recruit women. Statistics from Semarang show that the number of people who worked less than 35 hours per week have increased significantly from 99,930 in 2007 to 276,126 in 2013.[67] This figure in part shows the increase of part-time workers in casual labour and home-based workers. The statistics, however, only show the tip of the iceberg. The real figures of part-time or flexible labour could be greater than that since part-time labour is not necessarily represented by lower working hours. Some part-time jobs, especially home-based labour, entail long working hours. Moreover, some types of the flexible labour are often interchangeable. Some home-based workers were frequently employed for additional jobs within the factory and were treated informally as casual labour (see Chapter Four). It is this type labour that has increased significantly in Semarang in the last few years (Pieper and Putri 2017). The home-based labour even involved family members on an informal basis, creating a large hidden figure of the actual workforce.

The widespread use of home-based labour is not simply enabled by the existing new labour law, but is also driven by the corporate strategy to survive in a competitive market. By decentralising the production process into homes in rural areas, the companies benefitted from abundant cheap labour, especially that produced by female workers. Thus, this production method enabled companies to lower their labour costs. The companies turned households into extended units of production, resembling *a putting-out system*, drawing blurred line between formal and informal jobs. Thousands of home-base female workers were employed for factory piece-rate jobs without any standard employment contracts for producing export commodities such as shoes, leather sport products, and garments. A European-owned shoes factory located in one of the districts in Semarang was the largest user of this type of labour, employing approximately more than three thousand registered and unregistered workers – represented by thousands of family members – for manual assembling of shoes (Pieper and Putri 2017, 23).

The spatial separation of workplace that intersects with gender-based politics of production has been also a corporate instrument for controlling workers docility

67 The statistics shows a consistent trend of growth and decline of those . See Statistical book series: Provinsi Jawa Tengah dalam Angka (BPS 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014).

and reducing collectively potential resistance. The company segregated the daily activities of the home workers from the factory-life where other types of labour were employed. This hindered interaction among the different categories of workers, and restricted them from sharing factory working experiences directly. On the contrary, the home-based workers conflated the economic production and the everyday social affairs of the family. Thus, the work-related narrative subjects and concerns competes with the everyday family issues. The use of home-based labour has been a critical matter of the rural labour supply, complicating the existing common issues of employment which has taken place within the factories This creates a complex intertwined relationship between the factory-based workplace and the community where household activities are socially and culturally entrenched.

3.2. Community of Workers and Labour Control

The links between categorisation of labour and the nature of flexible employment that I have explained above show how the market-based labour regime maximises the advantages by extending the range of control beyond factories and reach deep into communities. The interaction between the industrial economy and rural environment is facilitated by their proximity. This means that locality matters. As such, the labour regime has benefitted from the local social structures and values in shaping a typical industrial workforce as a whole that serves the needs for the accumulation of capital. This is not limited to the way the industrial companies mobilise the home-based workers, but also the masses – most of whom are women –supply labour from the countryside.

The significance of locality lies in how local communities and their social units, including families, neighbourhoods, local institutions, and actors, had been utilised by companies to shape the existing labour dynamics. Notably, the population in Semarang's industrial areas primarily consists of local inhabitants rather than migrants. This differs from the typical characterisation of other industrial regions which are dominated by migrant workers. This is evidenced by the low percentage (less than 1.2%) of in-migration to the region between 2011 to 2014. A considerable portion of the locals (11.9%) earned their livelihood from manufacturing industries.[68] Given this context, it's unsurprising that despite the influx of the younger generation into the industrial sector in Semarang, the industrial working class remained closely connected to families,

68 The largest portion of the local population still relied on these agricultural sectors (19,2%) and those who earned their living from the industrial economy was the second largest (Semarang Regency in Figures 2012 and 2014).

neighbours, friends and local community figures. Many workers residing in this area, have deep-rooted ties to the locality, while others have migrated from nearby regencies and cities around Semarang, such as Magelang, Pekalongan, Kendal, and Klaten.[69] They typically reside in collectively rented houses or boarding houses with dozens of rooms, situated in close proximity to the factories.

3.2.1. Labour control by space

These social bonds and the spatially residential pattern often served, either directly or indirectly, as a company's medium of labour control. The location of the workers' settlements was one of the channels through which the control was exercised (Warouw 2006). The workers who lived around the factory were sometimes faced with community figures who were used by companies to control workers indirectly through informal power. These workers, particularly the migrants, had been informally targeted of supervision by local figures like village or neighbourhood leaders[70], local religious leaders (mostly Islamic ulama) (Juliawan 2010, 124-125). The migrants were expected to behave properly according the local traditions which gave the company indirect opportunity to discipline them. In order to quell the potential resistance to the company, the managements established a good relationship with the local figures to maintain the tradition of docility especially among female workers. Religious sermons and Javanese proverbs of politeness were often used by the figures to maintain workers' docility. Combining between Javanese and religious values, the advices emphasise the submissiveness of being a woman both in community life as well as in the workplace.

Although these methods were easier to practice in the community of workers living around factories, corporate control over workers who lived in more distant districts (kecamatan)[71] assumed various forms. The decentralisation of production, described above, was arguably, the most vivid example of how

69 This is different from the categorisation of workers in industrial areas in West Java and Banten. The appellation of migrant is used to refer to those who are from distant cities or regencies, having different ethnic identity from the locals.

70 In rural areas in Indonesia, community leaders take on various roles within the regional government structure. Some serve as village heads (*kepala desa*) or *lurah*, holding official positions in the formal governance system. Others, like neighbourhood leaders, are elected by smaller communities through acclamation or democratic elections. Examples of such roles include heading the RT (*Rukun Tetangga*) neighbourhood association or the RW (*Rukun Warga*) community association.

71 District or Kecamatan is an administrative area that is managed under the regency. Semarang has 19 districts, many of which spread out in the rural areas, relatively far from the factories. Some of the districts have grown into small towns, such as Ambarawa, Bandungan, and West Ungaran, thanks to provincial accesses that connect to other big cities outside Semarang Regency.

spatial politics was exerted by manufacturing companies to control the labour. By transferring one or several units of the production process to households in rural areas, the company not only gained cheap labour, but also reduced the potential strength of organised labour. Through spatial division, workers were separated from other workers in the factory. Thousands of workers, almost all of whom were women, were scattered in dozens of villages within a radius of seven to twenty kilometres from the factories. With this decentralisation of production, companies localised the workers activities at home, involving family members, and separating them from all the dynamics of production within the factories. This has been a spatial and gender-based Intersectional strategy that had reduced the potential for collective resistance (see further Chapter 4).

3.2.2. Family relations and labour control

In addition to the spatial dimension of labour control, the politics of production also relies on family relations as a means to create controllable types of labour. Workers' family members have been the "significant others" through whom the workers attached themselves to the rural life. On the one hand, families have served as a private helping institution for workers' life, and they have also functioned as an instrument that have kept the workers' behaviour within the boundary of local values and their relationship with the local community. In Semarang, many local workers – particularly single women, but also some young married couples – still live together with their parents. A few others live with their siblings who were mostly working in the local factories. The migrants who originated from different districts in Semarang and lived around the factory maintained their relationship with families by visiting them regularly.

The workers' decision to live and make close contacts with their families is a strategic way for socio-economic purposes. It provides a supporting base for dealing with critical economic conditions. Receiving the minimum wage of 1.4 million Rupiah (equal to around 90 Euros) per month was only sufficient for fulfilling the daily basic needs. Families, thus, are a significant safety valve for mitigating economic hardship, especially among the single workers. The parents of workers, – sometimes who are also supported by other siblings – were the main source from whom they borrowed some money for medicine, impromptu educational needs of workers' children, or any other urgent needs. Parents and siblings came to the aid of family members who encountered economic problems. Since many parents earned a living from agriculture and other forms of local non-industrial based economy (traditional markets, stalls, local transportations, including local government offices), they had resources on which the workers could rely temporarily. In a severe economic crisis, like job

termination, workers turned to be the temporary dependants until they found a new job. Some permanent workers had more special privilege by taking loans from corporate cooperatives, but for most workers, family and other personal were the primary source for saving their economic life. Only when family was unreliable to do so, they eventually went to fellow workers or relied on travelling banks (*bank keliling*), *rentenir* or loan sharks (Juliawan 2010, 114-116).[72]

For some married workers, the proximity of families also functions as an immediate support for childcare. The availability of parents – or parents-in-law – or siblings at home during the working hours is beneficial for female workers who are frequently burdened by Javanese patriarchal values that expect women to take responsibility for childcare (Wolf 1992, 66; Geertz 1989). Therefore, when female workers and their husbands spend their working hours at factories, sharing childcare with parents or other family members is a necessary strategy. This aspect of family help reduced burdens of care for those who were working in the companies without any childcare facilities. Only a handful of factories provided a day-care and "lactation corner" for female workers who could not rely on the family support.

This family support played a crucial role in maintaining the cultural ties and social relations of workers with the traditions of the local community. A number of traditions were rooted in a mixture of traditional Javanese and Islamic values which were reflected both in daily social behaviour and rituals – which were not mostly found in urban industrial communities in Jakarta and its surrounding satellite cities; a region known as Jabodetabek. Workers who still had close interactions with families in Semarang usually attended traditional events such as *Nyadran* which is held before Ramadan, life cycle ceremonies (related to pregnancy, child birth to death), and other typical rituals of agrarian communities such as *Sedekah Bumi* (a kind of thanksgiving).[73] Traditional events were carried

72 Some workers complains that the heaviest daily economic burden was the transportation cost, especially for those who lived far from the factories. Only very large and rich companies provided options for their employees: either receiving transportation allowance or using company's bus facilitation for fetching. However, this is not the case for the companies in a moderate scale of production. They only provided a limited amount of transportation allowance which was unable to cover the whole trips. Some other companies provided bus for fetching, but only for limited distances. Some other smaller companies even provided nothing. Many relied on their family members like husbands, parents, children to fetch by motorbikes, or riding public transportation with their own expenses.

73 *Nyadran* is a cultural ceremony that is typically held in Central Java. This ritual mixes Javanese pre-Islamic culture (especially Hinduism) with Islamic traditions. The word *Nyadran* itself was adopted from Sanskrit. *Nyadran* is usually held before the month of Ramadhan – Muslims fasting month. The Javanese in this tradition usually make pilgrimages to family graves, praying for their deceased parents and ancestors. In rural communities, this ritual is usually followed by gathering with family

out, especially in the outskirt areas, but the local residents in workers' settlements in Pringapus, Bergas and Ungaran also maintained these rituals. These traditions, including some other communal traditions, such as *gerebeg* festival dan *bersih desa*, are significant in symbolically reducing the daily problems that workers have to deal with (Juliawan 2010, 117).

The cultural rituals also gave feelings of Javaneseness with cultural ties to the communities in which they belonged. It also created a horizontal solidarity among the community members (Juliawan 2010, 118). Family has been a central social unit that connects the workers with their communities as the workers participated in rituals together with family members (Wolf 1992). Although migrants in urbanised industrial regions sometimes joined community religious activities such as Qur'anic recitation and study groups (*pengajian*), it did not necessarily embed them in the local culture. This is different from the local workers in Semarang who social and cultural ties to a certain extent represent feelings of community harmony where the roles of parents – including the elders – had been regarded essential in the local culture.

The family roles and the culture of harmony in the industrial areas were often points of contention for labour activists. Union activists, primarily men, faced challenges in mobilising female workers, who made up the majority of workers. Many parents and husbands discouraged women from participating in collective protests, strikes, and demonstrations, often advising them with statements like, "Kamu tidak usah macam-macam" (Don't put yourself in troubles). The prevailing sentiment was that these workers should be grateful for having employment. Family members emphasised the importance of maintaining a peaceful life and discouraged actions that could jeopardise job security.[74] Challenging employers was deemed unacceptable, and stories of negative consequences resulting from bold protests circulated in the community, reinforcing the idea of the risks associated with collective actions.

For married female workers, avoiding financial dependence on their husbands sometimes led to submission to management rather than risking job loss. Workers

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or neighbours. *Sedekah Bumi* is a ceremony that is typical of an agrarian society, especially in Java. This ceremony is carried out as a way of thanking the farmers for their successful harvest. In this ceremony they symbolically surrender some of their agricultural products to the nature. (from the interviews with the local NGO activists, 23 May 2015; see also https://petabudaya.belajar.kemdikbud.go.id/Repositorys/sedekah_bumi/; https://www.kompas.com/stori/read/2022/06/06/120000679/tradisi-nyadran--sejarah-dan-pengaruh-islam?page=all)

74 Interviews with Catur, 27 March 2015; Sumanta, 5 May 2015, and similar expression was often implied by some female workers.

with permanent status in large, established companies often avoided collective actions to secure job stability. Many workers set aside discussions of workplace discontent during neighbourhood and family talks, focusing instead on topics like agricultural activities and traditional rituals. While a few active workers or unionists attempted to raise workplace-related issues. Transforming such discussions into collective discontents required considerable effort. Domestic responsibilities, including childcare and household tasks, were often seen as separate from the unfair treatment experienced in factories, such as supervisors' pressures to meet production targets. The perceptions of family and community members regarding livelihood significantly influenced how workers viewed class relations in the industrial economy.

3.2.3. Rural Living Conditions and workers' consciousness

While such competing narratives of the industrial working conditions and the community life – maintained by families and community leaders – reduce the potential development of a strong class consciousness among the local industrial workers and moderated the sense of class antagonism, the structure of the local living conditions reinforces this effect. This is not a direct intervention of the industrial regime, but rather a result of social dynamics of the rural life that create a social setting less prone to conflicts. Some studies show that the way workers lived in poor residential conditions – such as cramped houses in densely populated villages in the main industrial areas of Java, squeezed between factories, with poor water, sanitation, and access to good transportation, coupled with the daily economic difficulties – have been important factors that assert the meaning of being marginalized and exploited workers (Hadiz 2001; White 1993), and therefore intensified the sense of class antagonism. This shapes a shared identity that distinguishes them from other communities with different social classes such as the corporate managers or others who have better socio-economic status.

This is different from the situation in Semarang. Despite the population growth and the urbanisation induced by the local industrialisation, there were no striking contrasts of the living environments between the industrial areas and the rural parts in Semarang. There was no sense of density when I travelled along the villages and industrial zones. Population density in Semarang was much lower than that of other major industrial areas in Java like Tangerang as being shown by Table 3.1.[75] Workers' houses looked larger and more spacious than those

75 As Comparison, in 2013, Tangerang (regency) has 128 medium-large enterprises that produce textiles, garments, and footwears. Semarang (regency) has 47 enterprises in the same sectors (BPS 2014) (BPS 2015)

in Tangerang, Bekasi or even Pekalongan City - which all have fewer factories. Gardens and plantations – both private and state owned – were spread out between settlements behind the factory areas. Houses with rows of rented rooms available for workers were not as large as the ones in other dense industrial regions like Tangerang and Bekasi that were sometimes notoriously named "*kontrakan seribu pintu* (a thousand doors rental house)," representing a high level of density of workers who lived in the area.[76] The development of worker flats in Ungaran that was inaugurated by the President Joko Widodo (commonly known as Jokowi) in 2015 under his *One Million Houses Program* (*Program Sejuta Rumah*) did not represent any workers' housing crisis in Semarang since the demand of the housing was not as high as that in Tangerang, Bekasi, and Jakarta. The housing condition in Semarang industrial area and the everyday life in the family and the community did not articulate the workers' exploitative experiences in the workplace. The feeling of dissatisfaction experienced by workers, instead of being amplified, was actually diminished by their living conditions within the communities and families.

Table 3.1. Density and Number of Population of the Industrial Areas in Semarang and Tangerang

Semarang			Tangerang		
District	Population	Density	District	Population	Density
Ungaran Timur	69,895	1,840	Pasar Kemis	328,455	12,672
Bergas	71,411	1,509	Kelapa dua	227,782	9,343
Tengaran	65,246	1,379	Curug	207,906	7,585
Bawen	57,900	1,243	Cikupa	279,785	6,555
Pringapus	51,772	661	Kosambi	162,241	5,452

Sources: BPS, 2016a; BPS, 2016b

At first glance, workers in Semarang seemed to be in a transitional process, from a rural to an industrial economy. This was evident through the shift of labour from agricultural to industrial sector. Regardless of the three decades of this change, however, the traditional ties between industrial workers and the traditions of rural socio-economic life around the factory have persisted. Rural life has remained significant for the industrial worker as it has helped alleviate their socio-economic burden. Despite the social construction on the industrial workers identities (Warouw 2008, 104-106), their identities as part of the rural

76 The high density of workers residential area is often indicated by hundreds of rooms rented by workers who worked in the factories around the area. In Cikarang Industrial area, Bekasi, for instance, such place is popularly called the residential areas with a thousand doors (*kontrakan seribu pintu*) (see, Kompas.com, 7 July 2014)

life have remained intact. This differs from the lives of workers residing in densely populated urban industrial regions, where their harsh living conditions sharply contrasted with the 24 hours operation of factories and the bustling traffic facilitating the global market trade. The workers' hard life was in contrast to the representation of the prosperity of the companies. Such contrasting conditions were not present in Semarang. While the large factories operated continuously and thousands of workers could be seen around the factory during shifts, they returned to a social environment where traditional customs and rural everyday life suppressed potential industrial class antagonisms.

For many local workers, although having an industrial job is an attractive goal, working in factories is sometimes a transitional or alternative phase of personal economic life. For example, a married union leader who was fired from a shoe company chose not to return to the factory after more than five years of employment. Instead, he preferred to make a living by breeding fish instead. A younger woman, who decided to leave her job in the same company finally chose to do another job by selling food in front of a garment factory that employed thousand workers. Other workers combined their factory jobs intermittently with different kinds of jobs separate from the factory. An older home-based worker who sewed shoes in a factory helped her husband selling vegetables harvested from his land to the cities when there was less work available at the factories. Another female home-based labourer in the same generation who worked for an American factory of baseball gloves also had similar pattern of activity. A younger woman took the advantage from the layoffs that she had previously, for caring for her own baby before returning to factory after the next several years.[77] However, many younger men and women, especially those who were single workers aged below twenty-five, chose to maintain their occupation in the factory and move to work from one garment factory to another. When their contracts expired, they spent the pause of unemployment by relying on the support of their parents who lived with them, before returning immediately to factories.

77 Interview with a former woman worker who worked at USG, large garment producer for global brands, on 17 May 2015.



Photo 2: Farmers at work in a rice field during harvest time in Semarang

In other words, although the labour force in the agricultural economy continues to shift to the industrial economy, this agricultural sector and the rural life remained important as a social and economic buffer for the local workers (see Photo 2). Local workers and residents took industrial occupations and rural life as two mutual-support socio-economic fields. The industrial economy created employment when the agricultural sector had increased limitation in creating economic surplus; while, the latter, along with other non-industrial sectors in rural areas, served to be the socio-economic buffer when the economic turbulence hit the industrial occupation. For those, aged in their thirties and above, industrial work and other typical rural occupations became a socio-economic cycle.

Nevertheless, the mutual-support relations and the rural community traditions were both the essential factors in moderating potential labour conflicts ignited by bad working conditions. Young female workers who were brought up in a conservative Javanese setting, in which husband and parents had a more powerful position, were forced to avoid resistance against corporations. Resistance exploded inevitably only when the working conditions were heavily burdening the socio-economic life of the entire workforce of a particular company. Protracted delays of wage payment, the employer's failure to provide severance payment for laid-off workers, and continued violation in complying minimum wage were some sources of serious grievances that triggered workers' mass protests. Thus, as long as there were no significant corporate threats to the workers' socio-economic threshold that disrupted their life, the community

controls - along with corporate controls – were able to condition the workers to accommodate continuously to the existing working conditions.

3.3. Workplace and workers discontents

Despite complex labour relations that potentially lead to various labour issues, wage is the source of most workers' anxiety. Although workers certainly admitted to troubles with a range of matters, unionists and some segments of labour were likely to emphasise more on wages rather than the other issues. On the one hand, this strong view of wage issues reflects how they assumed wages as the most fundamental element of exchange in employment relations that significantly affected their socio-economic life. On the other hand, this also illustrates the gap between workers leadership and the complexity of the daily problems of the grassroots both at work and in the community.

For the trade unionists, the wage struggle was a struggle to win the increase in the regional minimum wage. The priority on minimum wage even frequently reduced their persistence in fighting for no less crucial issues such as precarious forms of labour, the social security (BPJS), including the unions' experiments in electoral politics. They continuously compared the local minimum wage to that of other major industrial regions outside the Province of Central Java, which were mostly much higher. In 2015, the local minimum wage was 1,419,000 Rupiah (approximately equals to 92 euros) per month. It was the second highest wage in Central Java, but it was indeed much lower than that of Jabodetabek regions and major regions in East Java.[78]

Besides the local minimum wage was the lowest among major industrial regions in Java, the demand of the rise of local minimum wage had been also the union's politics of claim.[79] The battle of minimum wage had been a strategic indicator of the local unionists to claim the success in carrying out the organisational mandates.[80] Every end of the year was the most critical period of the unionists'

78 The minimum wage of industrial region in Bekasi (regency), West Java was Rp 2,840,000 (equals to 183 Euro). It was two hundred percent higher than that of Semarang. Meanwhile the minimum wages of industrial regions in Surabaya, Gresik, and Sidoarjo, in East Java were about Rp. 2,700,000 (equals to 184 Euro).

79 One of the reasons why the local unionists pushed the increase minimum wage was their believe in the employers' capacity to provide higher wages. In 2014, the local union, the SPN branch of Semarang, surveyed a number of companies where their members were employed. The survey found that 85% out of 54 companies complied with the minimum wage regulation. Only small companies with less than 150 companies which failed to comply with the regulation.

80 Interview with Andi, the chair of SPN/KSPN Branch of Semarang on 15 April 2014; Interview with

leadership as they struggled to win the minimum wage increase in the negotiation with the employer association and the local government (see also Chapters Two and Four).[81] The mobilisation of workers mass at every end of the year had been a strategic tactic for winning the unions' pressures over the local government and employer association on minimum wage.

Another wage issue was more localised and observed at enterprise level. This issue was raised by workers and union representatives of particular companies and concerned local working conditions. The raised issues were mostly about delayed payments of salaries, lower wages compared to regulated minimum wage and poor wage components such as poor overtime payment, lack of meals and transportation allowances.[82] These mostly occurred in the companies where unions were powerless against the employers. Most of these discontents turned into small-scale localised disputes within each factory. Only a few developed into mass collective actions, involving hundreds of workers as shown in table 3.2. Workers who were organised by strong union at enterprise level raised an issue that was close to the union's typical voice: demanding higher wages than minimum wage. But this is a rare case among the workers of dozens of companies in Semarang. The only largest protest was the one that hit a European producer of shoes in 2013. It was considered as the first and the last largest factory strike in Semarang since the Reformation Era (see Chapter 4).

a shop steward, union leader at the company produced sport leather gloves, 25 March 2015.

81 The decision of the new minimum wage for the following year is normally made during October to November annually. The representative of unions negotiates the new minimum wage through the local wage council with the representatives of employer association (APINDO), the local governments, and the university academicians.

82 Interviews with a migrant worker employed by a local garment producer for Nike brand on 2 April 2015, and with a former female garment worker who currently sells foods for factory employees during lunch breaks, on 11 April 2014.

Table 3.2. Major Labour Protests between 2013-2017 Occurred within the Factory in Semarang (Regency)[83]

Year	Product manufactured	Issues of labour conflict	Form of protest	Workers involved[1]
2013	Shoes	Demanding higher wages (than minimum wage) for workers with more than one-year employment	Strike	2.500
2015	Garment	Low overtime payment	Strike	600
2015	Agrochemical	Violated minimum wage regulation; including the elimination of short-term contract labour, and the prohibition of establishing union	Strike	400
2017	Garment	Unpaid overtime payment and severance payment for the laid-off workers	Strike	1.200

Local home-based workers raised other demands regarding wages. This was a complex wage issue as it was related to the nature of employment of this labour. Wages were paid by a piece-rate system so that they varied among workers depending on the level of productivity. However, the highest wage rate for a highly productive worker was only close to that of regular workers who worked in the factory with a standard workload, whereas the home-based workers spent longer working hours for the production. They were also burdened by domestic tasks since the majority of them were female labourers. The consciousness of the exploitative dimension of this work came to surface thanks to the activism of local NGOs that introduced them to labour rights. Since then, wage grievance among these workers was explicitly expressed in front of the employers.

Another common issue stemmed from the everyday practices of the labour process. This issue received less attention from many unionists. These grievances revolved around the pressure of production targets, particularly in garment productions aimed for international markets. Workers, especially those in garment production, were highly vulnerable to unforeseen changes in production targets due to fluctuating pressures in market competition. These changes often led to extended working hours. While many workers were pleased with the higher income from working overtime, those working for more despotic companies received lower pay. While workers from a few companies boldly fought against such practices (as presented in Table 3.2), many others

83 Sources: KoranTempo.com 31 January 2013; Tribun.com 16 February 2015; Elshinta.com 16 April 2015; KrJogja.com 30 January 2017;

remained silent.84 This issue also extends to home-based workers. The increase in workload in the piece-rate system due to increased production demand did not result in a significant increase in wages, even though this pressure reduced the time available for domestic affairs within the family (see Chapter 4). The structure of employment relations and their dependence on their work places them in a vulnerable position to resist the pressure of production targets.

Advocacy on community issues and experiments in electoral politics are two other important factors that are unsustainable and which are no longer discussed in the long term. Although they have the potential to integrate workers divided by production strategies, they did not have a real effect on constituents or labour organisations themselves. This mainly refers to the case of homeworkers who are marginalised due to the spatial-based production strategy. This also emphasises the exclusionary impact of union members' excessive concern with wage issues in isolation from other equally important issues.

3.4. The landscape of local organised labour

3.4.1. The emergence of new unions and the legacy of authoritarianism

The post-reformation Semarang period witnessed the growth of new labour organisations. While most of these unions were connected to the organisation established by the New Order regime with the goal of depoliticising unionism, they were currently undergoing a transformation into new entity. Some of them were still strongly influenced by past organisational culture, but some others were dismantling it by various ways.

Among the existing organisations in Semarang, eight were sectoral federations that still operated under the confederation of SPSI (KSPSI) (see table 3.3), referred to Caraway (2008, 1372) as legacy unions—state-backed unions inherited from the previous nondemocratic regime.85 The other six unions (including SPN and KSPN) were newly established during the Reformation Era, but had *historical link* to the older SPSI. The establishment of these unions was initiated by members who had seceded from SPSI for independent unionism in

84 It was also mentioned by a worker who is working for another company which produced garments for global brands (interview with Ana, 24 March 2015).

85 These are SP-RTMM (the union in the industries of cigarettes, tobacco, food and beverages), SP-PAR (union of tourism), SPTI (union of transportation), SP-KAHUTINDO (Forestry Union), TSK (Union of Textile, Garments, Leather), SP-KEP (Union of Chemical, energy, and mining), SP-PP (Union of Plantation), SP-NIBA (Union of trading, bank, insurance and services).

the early period of Reformation. The remaining two unions are the only fully new unions with very small number of memberships (FSBI and independent enterprise unions without any affiliation at national level).

The composition of labour organisations, dominated by the unions under KSPSI (The Confederation of SPSI), reflects the enduring influence of corporatist values on the organisational culture of unionism in this region. The chair of the KSPSI branch in Semarang, overseeing eight union federations, acknowledged that these organisations maintained the principle of *industrial harmony*. This conception was the core value of the Pancasila Industrial Relations System, the past political cornerstone of the New Order regime for controlling unionism (as outlined in Chapter 2). Antagonistic actions in employment relations were explicitly discouraged. Consequently, the local KSPSI rarely participated in joint demonstrations with other unions as it contradicted organisational traditions. Moreover, there was no record about the strikes organised by any union under this confederation. He cited the doctrine inherited by his senior predecessor: "KSPSI emphasises the principle: *ngluruk tanpo bolo, digdoyo tampo aji* [the traditional Javanese value meaning: attacking opponents without mobilising the mass force, winning without embarrassing opponents]".86 Therefore, companies with KSPSI members appeared calm, although he admited that KSPSI members in some companies faced problems such as manipulation of wage components and severance payments. Since the organisational resistance capacity was never cultivated, members were unable to challenge unfair corporate's decisions. Instead of establishing the traditions of bottom-up expression, KSPSI maintain the old principle "*bina, lindung, sejahtera*" [foster, protect, welfare] which implied a top down leadership rather than the other way around. The term *bina* was typically used by the state apparatus during the New Order regime for fostering people to behave according the state's acceptable values. In the KSPSI culture, the word *bina* was employed to shape a set of particular behaviour of the members to conform the union major value.

86 Interview with the chair of SPSI confederation (KSPSI) branch of Semarang, 6 May 2015.

Table 3.3. Trade unions in Semarang Regency (2015): sectors and relationship with (K)SPSI

Trade Union	Sector	Relationship with the SPSI[2]
KSPSI (confederation)[3]:		
FSP RTMM SPSI	Cigarette, tobacco, food and beverage	legacy
FSP PAR SPSI	Tourism	legacy
FSP SPTI SPSI	Transportation	legacy
FSP KAHUT SPSI	Forestry and wood	legacy
FSP TSK SPSI	Textile, Garment, Leather	legacy
FSP KEP SPSI	Chemical, Energy, Mining	legacy
FSP PP SPSI	Agriculture and Plantation	legacy
FSP NIBA SPSI	Commerce, banks, services, insurance	legacy
SP BUN	Plantation	linked
SP FARKES Reformasi	Pharmacy and healthcare services	linked
SP KAHUTINDO	Forestry and wood	linked
FSP KEP	Chemical, Energy, Mining	linked
SPN	Textile, garment, leather, and others	linked
KSPN	Textile, garment, leather, and others	linked
FSBI/SPI	Multi-sectors	independent
Enterprise unions	Various sectors	local unions

Source: *Disnaker Kabupaten Semarang*, 2015, with author's own categorisation

The presence of local KSPSI, although not entirely decisive, had influenced the dynamics of local labour movements. Despite its large membership (11,043), covering one-third of the total regional union membership, it did not necessarily translate to strength. Other unionists even perceived them as disruptive to the local workers solidarity. This was evident in the negotiation process at the local tripartite body, especially in determining the minimum wage increase. The unionists of SPN branch in Semarang criticised the KSPSI's accommodative attitudes, avoiding prolonged resistance to the local government and employers' association, creating difficulties for other unions to establish the solidarity to achieve their collective demand. As a result, the unions almost never achieved the targeted increase of minimum wage.

The Semarang branch of SPN, the largest organisation in Semarang with 28,469 members, was slightly more active than the other local organisations. Local SPN unionists played a leading role in collective actions during the annual minimum wage negotiations. The different orientation SPN – compared to the SPSI – is rooted in the history of the union itself. The formation of SPN in 2003 was stimulated by the dissatisfaction of SPSI members from the organisation for textiles, garments and leather (SPSI-TSK) with the failure of the local SPSI to

establish a democratic unionism. The unionists then tried to establish a new form of organisation by the foundation of SPN. However, despite some different new values, they still faced challenges in building a new form of militant unionism. The cultural legacy of the authoritarian regime, firmly attached, remained a major obstacle. This local force of SPN did not even last long, following the split of this organisation in 2014 due to power struggle among its national leaders.

The collective strength of the labour movement in Semarang does not solely rely on the collaboration of SPN and KSPSI as the two largest organisations in the region. SPN in Semarang also collaborated with unions from other sectors, such as the Healthcare Union (Serikat Pekerja Farmasi Kesehatan Reformasi/ SP Farkes Reformasi) and the Forestry Union (Indonesian Forestry and Allied Workers Union/SP Kahutindo), driven by their common history of breaking away from SPSI and the resulting shared interests. Some labour coalitions were also established between them which were mostly dedicated for mobilising the local forces against local government in minimum wage negotiations. While the local organisations of KSPSI mostly avoid to join actively the coalitions, the local SPN engaged several alliances such as ABKS (Aliansi Buruh Kabupaten Semarang; Semarang Regency Labour Alliance), and GERBANG. The unionists of SPN also participated in the network with local NGOs such as Yasanti (NGO for women advocacies) and LBH (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum/NGO for legal advocacies). Nevertheless, most of the collaborations unstable and not well-institutionalised, unlike the wider networks of organised labour in Jabodetabek regions, which actively responded to various labour issues (see Chapter Two). The tendency of the local unions in Semarang to focus narrowly on workplace matters had been the constraints for establishing a stable wider movement as I describe further in chapter 4.

3.4.2. The local political context

The development of labour organisations is inseparable from local political contexts which encompasses both historical and contemporary dimensions. Militant labour movements, particularly those organised by leftists, thrived in northern part of Semarang during the colonial an early-post colonial era (see Chapter Two). The destruction of these leftist movements, however, by the New Order regime weakened this militant labour movement, and since then, any labour-related activism has been closely monitored. The state apparatus – especially the Diponegoro Regional Military Command which – played a major role in controlling such activities (Juliawan 2010, 87).87 In 1993, for example, the

87 The Military Command itself had been a reputable institution which spawned some nationally

New Order security apparatus banned student activities commemorating May Day, deeming it a representation of the suspicious leftist movement (Juliawan 2010, 87). The strategic geographical location of this military command, situated between the northern and southern parts of Semarang, further ensured political silence.

The military leadership of civil society has been dismantled in Indonesia's democratic era, opening political opportunities for people's participation in local politics. Local politics, however, have not been entirely conducive for the development of unions' agendas due to the dominance of local elite power. Since the beginning of the Reformation era, the New Order's major rival party, PDIP, has continuously won seats in the local parliament (DPRD Semarang), replacing the dominance of Golkar, the ruling party during the New Order era. PDIP has a strong historical root in Central Java, especially in Semarang (Lay 2019).88 However, despite to be the party *of* 'ordinary people' (*wong cilik*), the emergence of this new political power has not provided a wider channel for local workers to establish a strategic political alliance.

The attempts of unions to garner political support from the local working-class even remained difficult due to the effect of past regime's policy of de-politicisation. In the second democratic legislative election in 2004, workers established a political party named PBSD (Partai Buruh Sosial Demokrat; Social Democrat Labour Party). This was a regional branch of the national level political party established by Mukhtar Pakpahan, a prominent rival labour leader during the New Order era. When the party of the Semarang branch participated in pursuing a regional parliamentary seat (DPRD of Semarang Regency), it only managed to collect 761 votes, representing 0.15% of the total votes contested in the region, and failed to secure local parliamentary seats. Subsequently, there

prominent political and military leaders in the New Order era, including Suharto, the leader of the New Order regime (Abdulgani-Knapp 2007).

88 PDIP (Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle) was a transformation from the old PDI (Indonesia Democratic Party) that was established by the Suharto's New Order. The foundation of the party dates back to the fusion of several parties which had been established since the early postcolonial Indonesia. The goal was to give a greater power to the New Order regime to control the political climate and reduce the fierce political contestations. Some nationalist parties such as PNI (Indonesia National Party) which was established by the first Indonesia's president, Soekarno, IPKI, Parkindo, Partai Katolik, and Murba, were fused by the regime into a single party, that is PDI. The pro-democratic faction, which was mostly made up by the Soekarno faction, within the party continuously struggled to establish an independent political party. They eventually established an alternative political party, PDI-P, three years after the failed bloody ambush launched by the PDI pro-New Order faction supported by state security apparatus in 1996, which was aimed for dismantling the alternative democratic forces (Eklöf 2003) (Lay 2019)

were no more organised political attempts by unions in regional elections until local SPN leaders made initial experiments in 2009 elections with almost the same failure.

The young leadership of local SPN attempted to establish personal communications with local politicians, particularly from PDIP, but it never developed into an institutionalised political alliance. This contrasts with the situation in Pekalongan, where unionists informally succeeded in establishing a political alliance with local Golkar Party. This is discussed further in Chapter Six. This paved the way for the unionists to connect with local elites and provided leverage in dealing with local government bureaucracy. Since the unionists in Semarang lacked such institutionalised social and political capital, they were unable to establish strong position against the local government.

Almost all local unionists' political experiments beyond the workplace activism were not deeply rooted in the constituents of the union. The only non-workplace experiment that created an impact, albeit to a very limited extent, was the community-based activism sponsored by an international donor. It was five years of union's advocacy on the educational access for local workers' family. However, it was also unsustainable due to the failure to organise independent resources. These non-workplace experiments have disclosed the complexities of the conception of community within the union activism, and demonstrated how the perspectives and the actions of the local unionists were also influenced by capital strategies in production relations, local state policies, and the legacy of corporatism within the local labour movement.

Summary

The core question of this chapter has revolved around how the link between the rural and the industrial economy creates a social context that shapes the emergence and the dynamics of the local labour movement in Semarang. Workplace-based interests have become a central focus of workers' economic goals, organisational struggles, everyday discourses and a major source of disputes in this region. These interests grew and were sustained by traditions and structures within the labour movement itself, influenced by the complex interplay between the industrial economy and rural life which is reflected in the dynamics of workers' life.

The industrial economy in Semarang has grown due to the presence of an abundant rural labour force. The integration of local circumstances with the industrial companies under global production chains and international

markets has created employment opportunities for many local workers. This growth overcame the economic saturation that hit the agricultural sector. It has overcome the risk of unemployment, and has become a relatively stable source of alternative income, hindering rural people from drowning into severe poverty or full proletarianization (cf. Wolf 1992, 252).

However, this condition requires some social costs. While various kinds of workers can access employment in the industrial sector, they often face highly precarious jobs, both within factories and in home-based industrial works. Although women have more opportunities for industrial work, this selective employment was primarily a capital strategy to reduce labour costs and to enforce labour discipline. Such strategic labour criteria are widely adopted by industries operated in highly competitive global market and production.

This is where locality becomes an important part of this strategy. A previous study affirms that the local rural labour force provided an advantage for the capitalists to control due to their relative docility and the tendency to be less militant (Silvey 2003). Local workers' close ties to family-based social relations and other local social networks such as kinship and neighbourhood have funnelled the capital controls, confining especially the capacity of workers – particularly women – challenge their employers (Silvey 2003, 144-148). Nevertheless, the submission of workers, particularly women, is not solely caused by the gender and patriarchal relations embedded in the social institutions within the community but also by the exchange of interests between industrial capital and family (Wolf 1992).

The availability of rural workers, especially young women, creates socio-economic resources for exchange between the locals reliant on the rural economic sector and the industrial companies. The industries are seen as saving the village economy from the stagnation in employment and worsening poverty. Conversely, the rural economy, including agriculture and secondary economies linked to it, acts as a buffer for industrial workers when they were hit by economic turbulences such as layoffs or healthcare costs, etc. Since parents or other family members withstood in the rural sectors, they serve as reliable social support for workers.

The industry benefits, however, not only from the supply of labour, but also from the workers' socio-economic dependence on their families. The first benefit was that the structure of relations allows companies to suppress low wages (Wolf 1992, 251). Secondly, it is this dependent relation that also reinforces the traditions of children docility – especially the daughters – towards parents and husbands (for those who are married). The tradition of obedience becomes an instrument for the family to compel the workers to maintain their jobs that

benefit for family and the entire community. Such relations have been becoming stronger today, especially with the spread of precarious labour markets where job security has become a significant struggle for workers. For the locals, both families and workers perceive that maintaining employment was more beneficial than challenging employers for only marginal improvement in working condition. They are inclined to avoid any form of resistance that might jeopardise their job security, although in fact, the workers' everyday discontents were varied and no less important. Maintaining employment is always perceived as crucial for the sustainability of collective income. Avoiding Layoffs and the descent wages, consequently, became a central issue for workers and the unions in employment relations.

This is how wage issues, including job security, becomes the ground upon which the unions define and institutionalise the workers' interests they fight for. This perspective maintains and re-articulate the concept of interest formed by the New Order labour regime in the past. Therefore, I presume that the tendency to limit the focus of workers' interests to workplace issues is also reinforced by the way the local workers and the unionists established their movements and defined their constituents. It also explains why they have remained consistent in their orientation amid changes in the structure of the labour force resulting from the development of current market-friendly labour regime. They even persisted despite the opportunities to build community-based activism and political experiments. These issues will be discussed further in the next chapter which examines the dynamics of how unionists and workers informal-leaders in Semarang, who maintained workplace-based activism, grapple with the complex categories of labour created by the company's production structure, fighting for their interests of constituent they claimed.

Chapter 4
In Search of Representation

Introduction

For nearly two decades, since the fall of authoritarian regime, workplace-oriented unionism has remained as the dominant character of trade unions in Indonesia. However, the membership of these unions has recently been eroded by the increasing flexibilisation of labour both at the central and peripheral layers of production. The increase of such labour fragmentation deprives unions from controlling effectively the existing categories of labour and undermines the normative unions' representation roles in the workplace.

The workers and the unions in Semarang are no exception to this problem. Under a global market-driven labour regime, capital controls over various categories of labour, some of which are outside the traditional workplaces and dispersed into communities, pose a significant challenge to unions in sustaining workplace-based struggle strategies. Focusing solely on members' welfare has made unions being trapped into corporates' divisive strategies in managing labour since a large section of workers have been excluded from union representation. Even when opportunities to build an inclusive movement came to unite workplace and community activism, unionists still found difficulties to escape from the hegemonic orientation of workplace struggle.

This chapter describes how the Semarang unionists, who maintained a workplace orientation, deal with heterogeneous labour forces under the existing labour regime. I argue that corporate labour control has been the primary explanatory element of this context. The preference of workplace orientation has put the union caught into an increasingly powerful regime of labour control, extending from the workplace to the broader community – including households. This chapter focuses primarily on the experiences of local unionists who were organised under SPN (National Workers Union), the second largest local union but the most active one in the region as I also described in the previous chapter.

The first section of this chapter illustrates the historical background of the emergence of this union in Semarang following the national political transitions.

It illustrates how the union leaders established the new independent union and how they reproduced new leaderships while also dealing with workers' fragmentation due to the split in the union.[89] The second section explains the social processes by which the culture of workplace unionism had been maintained, continuing the past legacies and adjusting to current industrial-relations system. This section shows how the preference of such union orientation confined the interest in sustained political experiments and community activism, despite the available opportunities and supporting networks. The third section describes how workers and unionists dealt with the everyday challenges within the factory. A particular case is presented for exemplifying the actual workers experiences in the factory. This section illustrates that the failure to preserve workers' militancy has opened wider ways for hegemonic corporate power to maintain the control over union activism, which continuously disrupted the potential development of union representative roles particularly in dealing with the fragmented labour created by corporate strategies. The last section shows how the decentralisation of production had separated a particular segment of labour from their fellows in the factories. This section explains how the workers and the unionists were equally subdued by the corporate hegemonic divisive strategies.

4.1. The Emergence of Local Unions and Workers Leadership

The trajectory of modern trade unionism in Semarang today is disconnected from the emergence of notable early radical labour movements (see Chapter 2 and 3). Until the early postcolonial period in the first half of the 20th century, unions in this region remained strong, playing representative roles not only in workplace economic issues, but also in political struggles (see Chapter 2). However, during the 1960s-70s, the New Order regime wiped out all of the militant, left-wing union movements (see Chapter 2). The following 30 years was marked by state control of the working class. Semarang, as happened elsewhere in Indonesia during the New Order era saw the de-politicisation of the working classes, and the restructuring of industrial relations through the streamlining

89 This split took place in the midst of my fieldwork period. Therefore, even though SPN remains the primary unit of analysis in my research, the existing development of the new union (KSPN) is inevitable in the whole discussion of the Semarang case. This is particularly represented by the facts which appeared during the course of this research: confusions swept the workers at the grassroots level as to which organisation they affiliated. Some of them were aware of the change, but many others were not, and they still regarded themselves as the SPN members. This transitional period illustrates the confusion of identity and the chaos of organisational representation among them. I argue that such an empirical situation has been an important methodological consideration in my study.

of workers' representative system into a single state-controlled trade unionism: the SPSI. The subjugation of the working class bred a submissive generation of union activists through hegemonic culture of Pancasila Industrial Relations) and institutionalised control of workers' representative system. This systematic and deep subjugation begat a significant legacy to the subsequent generation of present-day trade unionists as some structural and cultural elements remain in practices, and some of this old generation also still exist, at least, within the first decades of the new democratic labour regime. This picture represents how the unionists of SPN in Semarang were dealing such dynamics of unionism and labour condition in the region.

4.1.1. From the founders to the new generation of unionists

The genealogy of SPN in Semarang can be traced back to the schism of SPSI in 1999, following the end of the New Order era. The major split began at the national level, as described in Chapter 2, and extended to branches across different regions throughout Indonesia. In Semarang, with tens of thousands of members, SPSI also broke up into various new independent unions. According to Semarang Labour Statistics (BPS), at least seven new local unions were established by former SPSI members between 1999 and 2004 which became affiliated to new national trade unions.[90] Until early 2003, the SPTSK (Serikat Pekerja Tekstil Sandang Kulit; Leather-Garment-Textile Workers Union) was the largest new fragment, which subsequently became the seed of the birth of SPN in the same year.

Although the 'need to break away from employer-leaning unions' was the most common reason for seceding from the SPSI, the emergence of new unions in Semarang in the early years did not yet indicate the presence of a significant new face of unionism. The SPTSK itself was characterised by unchanged leadership patterns: dominant old-fashion elites and a failure to promote union transformation. Huda[91], a senior unionist of SPN, admitted that it was not easy for the new unions to abandon long-established traditions shaped by the past strong political regime.[92] This orientation of the movement and the practices still reflected the historical background of many union leaders.

90 The unions are SP-BUN, SP-KEP, SP-Farkes, SP-Kahutindo, SBI, and SPTSK which in the following years turned into SPN, although, SPSI itself still exist until today. See table 3.3

91 A pseudonym.

92 Interview with the former chair of SPN branch of Semarang, 8 May 2015.

Huda is arguably emblematic of a New Order era union leader. On one hand, he played a central role in the exodus of workers from SPSI and was one of the key founders of SPTSK which then became SPN in Semarang in 2003. However, unlike most employer's hostile views on union leaders, Huda represents a leadership style strongly shaped by past corporatist-union culture. His fellow described, "[his leadership] style was similar to the former regional SPSI leader. He was not hot-tempered (*berangasan*)."[93] Huda appeared as a corporate-friendly union leader who also maintained pacifying relationships with local government officials. In the New Order era, he was awarded as an exemplary employee by the company where he was employed. Huda admitted that, as a unionist, he was very active in attending numerous company-provided trainings.[94] However, participating in company trainings does not only generate skill transfers, but also internalises corporate values. Corporate language was inherently embedded in his performance, marginalising the language of movements that most militant unionists would normally adopt. To him, a union was the organisation of workers' social activities and the institution by which workers learned about corporate mission, rather than an organisational instrument of the working-class struggle. Hence, the union under his leadership was characterised by programs that contained such a mission. Instead of providing intensive training on standard labour rights, he encouraged educational programs to increase union members' production skills in employment. He initiated wider networks by signing cooperation between the union and the Faculty of Economy of a local Islamic University in Semarang in 2000 to upgrade the productive managerial skills of employees. Thus, his era of leadership was widely recognised for its lack of militancy.

A change in union leadership marked a shift for the SPTSK unionists in Semarang when they switched their affiliation to another union, the SPN. This change mirrored a similar shift at the national level (see Chapter 2). The new face of this union, as indicated by its name, signalled the unionists' intention to completely abandon the old form of unionism, aiming to broaden and diversify its membership, while members from the garment and textile sectors remained the majority. In Semarang, the signs of transformation became evident with the election of Abdi as the new leader, replacing Huda as the chair of this new union.

93 Interview with Abdi, the leader of SPN Branch of Semarang, 5 May 2015.

94 Interview with the former chair of SPN branch of Semarang, 8 May 2015

Abdi, unlike his predecessor Huda, was from an older generation of leaders with a strong will to reform the union. His motivation for change stemmed from his own experiences working at the largest textile factory in Semarang, a national company, where he led a factory union.[95] Six years with SPSI in a textile factory during the New Order era provided him with valuable experience in organising workers' resistance in a union-hostile environment. His unwavering resistance against management ultimately led to the risk of exclusion from employment, prompting his full retirement. Unlike Huda's friendly perception of company management, Abdi held an opposing attitude. Since then, he dedicated himself entirely to union organisation without any formal jobs in the industry, assuming a branch leader position from the early foundation of SPN in Semarang.

Abdi was a transitional generation of trade unionists. For him, the workplace was the primary social environment where he gained experience in organising people. Despite studying at a prestigious private university in Jakarta during New Order era, he had no involvement in student activism against the authoritarian state's political control of campus life. Abdi's experiences in labour conflicts, such as the ones at the textile factory during 1990s, served as his main reference for early leadership in the workers' movement, alongside the changing atmosphere of the labour regime during the Reformation Era. Abdi could not fully escape conformist values in industrial relations as he was indoctrinated with the ideology of corporatist unionism from the past regime. Even though, he was deemed "too vocal" by his SPSI senior leaders compared to many local unionists in the past period, his militancy was still confined by the values of corporate conformity induced by seniors. According to him, thereby, workers and employers engage in relationships that were constantly combined by strife and harmony.[96] Likewise, unionism is a workers' organisation with a combination of resistance and accommodation against employers. Thus, while Abdi inherited inevitably some old corporatist values, his evolving perspective on industrial relations and labour movement was becoming more pluralist. This asserts that common typologies of the nature of labour movements and industrial relations, as many theoretical literatures show (Salamon 1922, 30-38; Watson 2012, 286-289), are basically an

95 The factory, owned by a consortium led by one of the sons of Indonesia's second president, Suharto, emerged as a prominent entity in the country's textile industry. Under the managerial leadership of a distinguished figure in textile production, the company experienced rapid growth. This figure also held influential positions in the Indonesian Textile Association (API), the national employer association (APINDO), and the national business chamber (KADIN). The leadership and ownership structure of the company illustrate its connections to national elites and business circles. (Interview with Abdi, the leader of SPN branch of Semarang., March 22, 2015).

96 Interview with Sumanta, 22 March 2015.

analytical categorisation rather than an empirical perspective conceptualisation (Blyton and Turnbull 1998, 23). Activists and labour organisations in reality, especially in a transitional phase, are likely to adopt a combination of values.



Photo 3: A regular meeting of union-officials in Semarang attended by a young generation of unionists.

Abdi became a symbol of local union reforms and embodied a transformational perspective. Utilising the opportunities of the new democratic labour regime, he actively recruited younger generation of worker activists from various local companies, encouraging their participation in union activities. He Initiated discussions on current employment issues, and promoted active engagement in tripartite institutions, particularly for securing local annual minimum wage increases. His leadership strategies were characterised by dialogues with local government officials, collective actions, and direct involvement in dispute settlements at the factory level. Together with other unionists he initiated some dialogues with local government officials, but also organised several collective actions and engaged directly in dispute settlement at the factory level, including established local networks and alliances. The change in leadership opened avenues for younger unionists to participate with more worker-centric orientations while accommodating some old leaders and their perspectives.

The new generation, disconnected from the past labour regime, brought a different atmosphere to the SPN in Semarang. Joining unions during the

Reformation era, they were more familiar with the discourse of current labour system. Standard collective bargaining was a predominant theme in union activities and discourse. Through formal and informal meetings, these union officials learned about labour laws, viewing them not only as legal knowledge, but also as essential tools for defending workers' interests (see Photo 3). Union organisation became a substantial subject of conversation, drawing experiences from daily life in factories and external sources such as fellow unionists from different regions and NGO-provided training.

The emergence of the younger generation in union leadership marked an orientation shift shaped by struggles and tensions in their respective factories. They played a central role in developing union activism at the regional level, with workers from major companies becoming key union leaders. Younger unionists like Catur and some other fellows, mainstays on whom Abdi relied, were instrumental in establishing networks with other union activists, participating in labour trainings, and fostering new collective values. By 2014, SPN in Semarang had successfully recruited 30,412 members from fourteen large companies in districts of Ungaran, Bawen, Pringapus, and surrounding areas, making it one of the largest and most notable unions in Central Java.

4.1.2. Union Split and Elite Conflicts

The heyday of SPN in Semarang lasted about a decade (2003-2013). In 2014, another split fractured this organised labour once again. Surprisingly, Abdi and several elite members of the SPN branch decided to leave SPN, establishing a new union with a nearly identical name: K-SPN (The Unity of National Workers Union). This departure created some tension within SPN and its bases. Other unionists, local employers, and local governments were surprised by the developments. The move of SPN key leaders to KSPN triggered internal conflicts between those who joined KSPN against those who remained in SPN.

The split ignited fierce debates, particularly between Catur and Abdi, unfolding in various settings from face-to-face meetings to quarrels on social media. Catur, ironically Abdi's closest disciple for the past few years, chose to stay with SPN, alongside a few other less militant leaders. Catur strongly criticised Abdi's decision, labelling it as unreasonable and a betrayal. Abdi defended his move, terming it a *hijrah* (emigration) instead of a split.[97] He argued that his

97 *Hijrah* is an Arabic word frequently associated with Islamic faith, signifying transformation or, literally, emigration. It originally refers to the emigration of Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca

disappointment with the slow development of SPN was the major reason for the *hijrah*. However, Catur and his colleagues strongly objected, contending that the organisation was not as vulnerable as Abdi portrayed. They argued that if it was indeed vulnerable, it reflected the failure of Abdi's leadership itself. Catur claimed that Abdi had been warned multiple times about organisational constraints within SPN and strongly advised to make decisive changes, but no concrete corrective measures were taken. Thus, for Catur and his colleagues, the *hijrah* was implausible.

The split within the SPN of Semarang, despite the polemics surrounding its motives, was primarily driven by elite contestation rather than substantial organisational issues as claimed by those forming the new union. This split originated from the strong patronage of the SPN key leaders in Semarang to Bambang Wirahyoso, the SPN national leader.[98] The split was triggered by elite contestation at the National Congress of SPN in January 2014, where Wirahyoso lost his position as the incumbent to Iwan Kusmawan from Bandung SPN branch. This failure prompted Wirahyoso's decision to leave SPN, establishing another new union: KSPN, followed by a number of unionists in Semarang.

Wirahyoso was a prominent national SPN leader who had significant support from the large SPN membership in Central Java, particularly in Semarang, for both his union leadership and political activities. Wirahsoyo was viewed as a symbol of success for regional activists reaching the highest national position. He also maintained close and longstanding connections with local SPN leaders. His successes were strategic sources of political capital, as demonstrated by the substantial support he received from Central Java in union elections and political cooperation with Partai Keadilan Sehjatera (PKS; the Prosperous Justice Party). During the chaotic 2014 National Congress, in which Wirahyoso lost control of several Central Java branches, he retained the support of eleven key union branches in order to move to the new union. This highlighted the influence of

to Medina in 622 AD, symbolising a shift from chaotic communities to a favourable environment for the development of Islam (Ali and Leaman 2008, 52-53). The migration symbolises the transformation from the bad to the good. Indonesians have adopted this term to describe such a shift or transformation, particularly amidst the growing influence of of Islamic practices in communities (Inayah, Liestyasari and Pranawa 2020, 92-23). Abdi employed this term to describe the move of unionists from SPN, an organisation he deemed difficult to grow, to KSPN, which he viewed as more conducive to facilitating change (Interview with Abdi, 22 March 2015; Catur 27 march 2015).

98 Catur recounted in a conversation with me on 31 May 2013 that Abdi confessed to Catur that one of the reasons of the split was his loyalty to Wirahyoso.

regional identity on strategic ties between national elites and local unionists.[99] This regional identity played a significant role in the rapid replication of the split in Central Java, causing severe damage to the SPN's base in the region compared to other branches in Indonesia.

The exodus of the leaders of the Semarang branch compromised the local SPN at multiple layers from branch level to factory level and impacted both formal leadership and informal groups in everyday activities. This organisation suffered the loss of key figures who played crucial roles in SPN's development in Semarang. The majority of frontline activists and strategic thinkers involved in organisational growth moved to KSPN. Additionally, nine out of fifteen factory-level organisations, previously vital for workers mobilisation, shifted affiliation to the KSPN.[100]

This situation is relevant to the remaining official leadership within the SPN body. Most leaders who stayed lacked experience in negotiating with companies. Amidst the chaos, Huda, a former corporate-leaning leader deeply in traditional union culture, was reinstated as the SPN branch leader replacing Abdi, reflecting a union leadership crisis. Following the split, Catur was also hit by two labour upheavals in the same year, leading to his withdrawal from most union activities, as will be explained in the next section. Despite calls from fellow unionists to take charge the day-to-day operations at the abandoned SPN branch, Catur focused more on his own small-scale entrepreneurship. Only occasionally, he engaged in informal dialogues with dissatisfied factory workers regarding the union leadership changes.

The unionists' powerlessness was exacerbated by the loss of supporting infrastructure. The hierarchical structure almost collapsed, with national and provincial SPN leadership unable to function due to many leaders leaving the organisation.[101] This left the abandoned SPN leaders grappling with legal

99 While some key unionists of Semarang chose to follow Wirahyoso and joined the new union, all unionists from Pekalongan were among those who defended the SPN (Interview with Catur 27 March 2015; and it was also confirmed in my conversations with the SPN unionists of Pekalongan on 26 March 2014).

100 SPN's membership in the USG Garment Factory is the largest, with over eleven thousand members. SPN also had sizable members in both the Batamtex textile factory and the Golden Flower garment factory. Meanwhile, of the nine organisations affiliated to KSPN in the factories, only two are the largest. One of thse is Tapak Company, having more than 2500 members. The rest only numbered less than a thousand.

101 Bowo, the union leader from Pekalongan City, was elected immediately as the new chair of SPN Central Java provincial branch following the emergency situation. However, he and his new administrators

uncertainties resulting from the split. Catur and colleagues accused the new union of illegality due to a lack of collective consent among union representatives and a violation of SPN statutes. They also protested against the local government's acceptance of the new union without scrutinising carefully its formation process. However, the absence of structural support within SPN hindered leaders from advancing their protests continuously.

The second setback involved the loss of financial and material resources. Union funds and organisational equipment, including the office building, were redirected to KSPN-management. This transition of resources occurred smoothly, as Abdi, the former SPN branch leader, had control over them during his tenure. Catur and colleagues attempted to reclaim the properties, but lacked negotiating power, legal recourses, and even solidarity among the new SPN leaders.

The loss of control over material resources had profound symbolic and psychological effects for both SPN leaders and its members. A particularly noteworthy aspect was their forced acceptance of an offer from the local Manpower Office (Disnaker) to use a space under the same building, known as the Tripartite Joint Secretariat (Sekber Tripartit), shared with the SPSI and the local Apindo (employer association). A loyal SPN union leader at USG company, acknowledged that losing an independent office reflected a loss of pride and the material symbols that once represented their existence and collective strength. The relocation to shared premises with employers and another union was seen as a compromising position that could impact their image and independence within the labour movement. [102]

For the union officials, the loss of the material symbols and the material resources had a major impact in eroding their capacity to defend their base. This crisis, according to the new SPN leaders, led to a substantial loss of the access to their members in certain factories where KSPN promptly claimed workers as its own. This was particularly evident in Tapak Company[103], a European shoe-making corporation, where the emergence of KSPN caused fragmentation among the workers.

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were not in powerful position to tackle the effect of splits. Although the split did not plague the SPN of Pekalongan, Bowo himself was facing turmoil within the union he led following their defeat in the legislative elections (see further chapter 6).

102 Interview with the SPN representative at the USG, the largest garment factory in Semarang, on 15 May 2015.

103 Tapak Company is a pseudonym for the mentioned factory. It is only applied in my study.

Although it remained the second-largest union after SPSI, SPN's membership faced challenges due to the chaos at the grassroots level regarding representation. While Abdi, a key figure in KSPN, claimed that they wouldn't seize membership from other unions,[104] SPN unionists accused KSPN for lacking transparency, leading to confusion among workers at the shop-floor about the union change and their actual affiliation. A women worker from Tapak Company expressed her perplexity to me in Javanese language:

> After the union has been turning to be KSPN, I texted Eri [the new union leader]: what is going on with the SPN? What is the difference between KSPN and SPN? And, what is the difference between the dues I pay now and the previous one? If, they are the same, why should it change to be KSPN? But he kept silent, leaving me in confusion.[105]

Similarly, a former SPN unionist at the same factory, shared the overwhelming questions from fellow workers regarding the uncertain situation.[106] Workers discovered flyers distributed by new KSPN leaders about the union change, but there was no explanation provided for the reasons behind this shift. It was not until rumours gradually spread and visible conflicts erupted on the union's Facebook account that workers began to realise the extent of the situation. The disputes were evident between old union officials defending the SPN and new union officials representing KSPN. Workers also noticed changes in the way the new union officials interacted with management, shifting from a previously hostile relationship to a more accommodative stance. This lack of clear communication and understanding left workers perplexed and uncertain about the direction of their union affiliation and the implications for their collective representation.

The splits and the emergence of new unions have been a recurring theme in the SPN's development over the past fifteen years. This pattern, not unique to SPN, characterises many unions in Indonesia (Juliawan 2011, 352). Many splits are driven by leadership contestation rather than fundamental organisational issues or broader movement concerns. In the case of Semarang and SPN, it reflects particular union elites' intentions to preserve their power. Catur explained to me that there seemed to be no reasonable ground for some union leaders to establish the new union, except to maintain their existing power. This elite contestation,

104 Interview with Abdi on 22 March 2015

105 Interview with the ordinary workers and the former SPN member at a European shoe-making factory, on 18 May 2015.

106 Interview with the former SPN member at a European shoe-making factory, 18 May 2015.

without resulting in fundamental organisational changes, has only led to organisational breakdowns, with both sides losing significant human resources, wasting energy, and materials. This contrasts with the transformation of SPSI to SPN in the past, where there was a more substantial shift in organisational characteristics.

4.2. Building Interests, Constituency and Union Values

4.2.1. Mainstreaming wages as workers' economic interest

Despite the split between SPN and KSPN, there is no significant difference in their orientation of interests. Both unions prioritise the fight for workers' welfare through industrial relations institutions as their primary goals. Workplace-based issues take centre stage in what is commonly known among unionists and workers as a *normative* struggle.[107] The term *normative* refers to labour rights stipulated under state labour regulations. Unions, including those with their origins in the SPSI, typically focus their activism on welfare issues as regulated by labour law. This characteristic persists even among independent unions like SPN/KSPN in Semarang.

Among various *normative* welfare issues, wages were a major concern, preceding other critical issues such as precarious employment status, health and safety, corporate hostility towards unions, and the development of union organisation. Wage mainstreaming is evident not only in union official goals but also in everyday workers' discourses, collective actions, and political moves. Unionists in Semarang intensify their activities in wage issues particularly during the annual determination of minimum wages, engaging in calculations, internal discussions, consultations with other union leaders, negotiations with government officials and employers, and preparing for actions involving workers from local factories.

During my visits to local SPN/KSPN offices and meetings with leaders of a range of local unions, wage issues dominated conversations. Discussions often revolved around the gap between the sixty components of local Decent Living Needs (Kebutuhan Hidup Layak; KHL) and the Government Regulation PP-78 enacted in 2015. This regulation was deemed undermining the opportunity for negotiations on minimum wages under the collective bargaining system (see

107 The term of *normative rights* was frequently mentioned by almost all union leaders I interviewed, as well as in their conversations among themselves.

chapter 2). It was indeed a hot issue among unionists across regions, leading to national strikes (*Mogok Nasional*) at the end of 2015 for protesting the regulation.

Despite constraints, the wage issue remained the central focus driving workers' struggle in the workplace, consistently extending into the political realm from year to year. Every end of the year, the determination of the minimum wage stands out as the most blatant battleground for wage struggle. In this arena, workers advocate for minimum wage increases, the employers resist; and the state, represented by local government officials, hold political power that influence both sides. This dynamic often stimulates disputes and political interplays between these tripartite actors.

Since its inception, the SPN of Semarang has regularly mobilised its members at the end of almost every year for demonstrations in front of either the local labour office or regent office. These actions are aimed at putting pressure on the local government to decide on a higher minimum wage, particularly when the determined minimum wage falls below the recommendations issued by the local wage council (see Chapter 3). Workers interpreted such a decision as defeats against employers, making collective actions as an attempt to build political legitimacy for their struggles to secure better wages. In essence, workers intentionally involve the state in the field of production relations to improve their wages. Generally, local governments often restrain high minimum-wage increases to enhance economic attractiveness for capital investments, contributing to greater regional revenue.[108] However, favourable decisions on minimum wages sometimes arise in exchange for political support that the local government leader, especially the incumbent, needs to secure victory in Regional-head Elections (Pilkada), as witnessed in Semarang in 2015.[109] This intricate interplay between workers, employers, and the state underscores the complexity of wage struggles within the broader political and economic landscape. The question may arise: if labour wages have provided political spaces for labour movements, why did the development of workers' struggle in Semarang never lead significantly into broader class politics, retaining persistently its workplace-based economic orientation instead?

108 Interview with the woman leader of KSPN/SPN at a shoemaking-factory, on 7 April 2015; Abdi, on 22 March 2015; and with Bondan and Bambang Kasrianto, the members of DPRD of Semarang Regency, on 19 May 2015.

109 Interview with the woman unionist at a shoemaking-factory, on 7 April 2015; and a union leader from Health and Pharmacy Union (SP-Farkes Reformasi) on 22 March 2015.

For workers in Semarang and elsewhere, wages have always been a political struggle. However, the struggle was often relatively isolated from other forms of resistances within the context of production relations. The struggle over wages became separated from other equally problematic issues – such as precarious employment, bad occupational health and safety, and layoffs and inappropriate severance pay – instead of locating them together under a set of integrated frameworks that connected one issue to another. All these issues, in fact, were embedded in the overall structure of production relations in which the capital controls the labour for maximising the production with minimising the costs. Thus, workers' struggles actually had been compartmentalised into several separate labour issues.

These fragmented actions were obviously evident in a number of labour cases. For example, when workers at the Morich Company, a local garment producer for Nike, went on strike to protest violence perpetrated by a Korean manager against workers, the workers perceived it as a single problem, separate from grievances about the absence of transportation benefits and poor meal allowances that burdened the overall wages. The workers framed their narratives around the specific despotic behaviour of the manager, detached from broader issues of precariousness they faced daily. A migrant worker of this company, revealed clearly that they only received two thousand Rupiah (about 12 euro cents) per day for their meal allowance, while the Statistical Agency of Semarang Regency (2014, 315) recorded that food consumption and transportation contributed significantly to the regional inflation rate, respectively 5.5% and 8.75%.[110] The shop steward at this company, argued that the union had urged the management to address the needs of these precarious workers, but these requests were refused, and the unionists failed to set an effective strategy to tackle the issues.[111]

The workers' struggle on wages was also often detached from the varying degrees of precariousness of the heterogeneous workforce. A local SPN leader employed in a leather glove-making company, admitted that precarious short-term contract workers constituted more than 80% of the total workforce in his company. Additionally, hundreds of home-based female workers were also involved in the production chains. These workers, according to him, received their wages without additional benefits like transportation fees and a premium

110 Interview on 2 April 2015.

111 Interview on 6 April 2015. For a comparison, see also chapter 6 on how female workers in Pekalongan managed to extend their demands from one issue to many others which eventually unveiled a wider scope of labour problems in the workplace.

pay for attendance, while they were engaged in the same labour process. However, the unionist simply suggested that these workers, particularly the homeworkers, should independently urge the management to meet their demands without receiving significant direct support from the union. He emphasised, "They should demand on their own. Don't ask us [the union] to fight for them". His argument rested on the notion that it was the homeworkers who sought the jobs. "The company never offered these positions", he said. Throughout our conversation, he consistently used the term *us* and *them* to distinguish permanent workers from these precarious workers. Similar to this was the situation of the female homeworkers of seven hundred households who worked at Tapak Company in Semarang that exported its products to the European market. Having a long working hours, low wages, and other form of precarious working conditions, they were excluded from union memberships and their voices were underrepresented in the company (see further Section 4.4 of this chapter).

These illustrations highlight gaps in the workers' wage struggles in Semarang. The framing of wage mainstreaming tends to be narrow, focused on formal institutions periodically, without addressing the extensive challenges faced by the heterogeneous working class and the broader issues of precariousness. While wage increases may benefit the majority of industrial workers, they often do not alleviate the overall precariousness of the working class.

4.2.2. Wages Beyond the Workplace: networks, communities, and electoral politics

The way the unionists and workers in Semarang perceived the meaning of their movements which narrowly focused on wage increases, rather than political interest, is evident in how they responded to the opportunities and resources available outside the workplace. The character of this approach can be examined by looking at how they developed their networks and how they engaged with the electoral politics and broader community issues.

Networking is a strategic element for the development of labour movements. The networks typically involve partnership among various entities including labour unions, NGOs, local intellectuals, students, community leaders, politicians, and occasionally government officials. In Indonesia, labour alliances stand out as the most strategic form of networks that most unions use for consolidating them as a movement. This serves several purposes. It acts as a source for circulating information, knowledge, and constructing awareness of the movements. Similar to patterns observed elsewhere, alliance also provides a platform for defining

constituencies, understanding oppositions and mobilising participants for larger collective actions (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). It is important, however, to note that alliances serve as informal strategic groups rather than formal institutions, with some enduring despite changes in membership, while others are short-lived due to internal conflicts (Brooker and Meyer 2019, 263).

In Semarang, various alliances where SPN and KSPN unionists also join, such as GERBANG, GEMPUR, and FPBN, were formed as vehicles for wage-related struggles.[112] These alliances contributed to reproducing issues of wages and workers' welfare as dominant discourse. The discourse in these alliances touched on broader topics, linking wages to the state's economic interests, political forces, and capitalism's influence on labour policies. However, discussions on such broader perspectives often remained confined to a small circle of unionists within the alliances, not effectively reaching lower-level unionists within the organisational structure.

Consequently, the transfer of those ideas to union representatives at lower levels in factory hierarchies was also limited. In meetings at branch-level offices and annual plant-level unionist gatherings, discussions often focused on technical aspects of internal union management, labour laws, and negotiations with management, overlooking the complex realities of labour problems both within and beyond the workplace. For instance, discussions at a Tapak Company's annual plant-level meeting, attended by a union facilitator from GERBANG, primarily concentrated on the welfare of permanent workers, ignoring the hundreds of home-based workers within the same factory. The discourse tended to reproduce the dominant language used by management, as evidenced by the exclusionary terminology *mitra* (partner) used to designate home-based workers (see Section 4 of Chapter 4). Hence, the alliances established thus far have primarily served as instruments for mobilisation rather than functioning as equal sources for the reproduction of knowledge across different workers and unionists at various hierarchies. This limitation prevents the development of a comprehensive understanding of the labour relations they engaged with every day.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have also been a crucial element in union networking in industrial regions of Indonesia. They provide supporting

112 GERBANG (Struggle Labour Movements) of Central Java was the largest workers' alliance in Central Java, while GEMPUR (Ungaran Workers Community Movement – a local alliance of Semarang) is only established for workers in Semarang. FPBN (National Labour Advocacy Forum) is an alliance of workers in Semarang and Yogyakarta.

resources for movement participants. Unlike union alliances, NGOs are typically organised by activists who are not part of workers communities (see cChapter 2). NGOs primarily focus on providing information, advocacy, research data, network expansion channels, training, and both political and financial support (Ford 2009 , 86-87). SPN/KSPN unionists claimed to have established relationships with regional NGOs working on various issues with diverse constituents, such as LBH, Yasanti, Laskar Merah Putih, local Pattiro, and Perisai. [113]

Despite these relationships, some local unionists in Semarang were criticised by some NGO activists for their excessively narrow focus on labour policy issues, and lack of engagement in the advocacies for diverse local marginalised communities such as peasants, fisher communities, the urban poor, and those affected by government development projects. A local activist of LBH cited the example of farmers' protest in Rembang, the neighbouring region, against the establishment of a cement factory during 2014-2017, emphasising the local unionists' limited attention to such significant cases drawing national concerns.[114]

The difficulty in embracing broader constituents was also attributed to unionists' general attitude toward NGOs. Many factory-level unionists were unfamiliar with the relevance of NGOs in labour movements. Some union representatives even expressed scepticism, influenced by management's discourse discrediting the roles of NGOs in labour relations, suggesting that unions should focus solely on the interests of workers.[115] Additionally, unlike the branch level unionists, ordinary union members on the shop floor had minimal interaction with NGO activists, creating a gap in concerns and discourses between the two groups. Face-to-face meetings between local unionists and NGO activists were rare, with any information exchanged often limited to a small circle of union elites at the branch level.

113 LBH is an NGO with a vast network across regions in Indonesia, working in legal advocacy for the marginalised. Laskar Merah Putih and Pattiro are both NGOs focus on advocating local public policies, while Perisai in domestic labour. Yasanti is an NGO for informal women workers, based in Yogyakarta, with branch in Semarang Regency. The discussion about Yasanti will be elaborated further in a separate section of this chapter.

114 Interview with the activist of LBH of Semarang City, on 22 May 2015; See also the case of the protests of peasants' of Rembang. Accessed January 29, 2022. https://nasional.tempo.co/read/845199/penyebab-petani-rembang-blokir-pabrik-pt-semen-indonesia

115 Interview with the SPN/KSPN unionist at a local garment factory, on 6 April 2015

Other experiences of unionists also affirm such tendencies as is shown by the engagement of SPN unionists of Semarang in a cross-regional program initiated by ACILS (American Center for International Labour Solidarity), an American-based NGO.[116] This program aimed to broaden the role of local trade unions beyond the workplace in order to strengthen the grass-root's participation during a time of political transition. The SPN of Semarang, as one of major targets due to its rapid union membership growth in Central Java, received financial assistance, mentoring, and training from this program. In this activity, the unionists identified equal access to education and healthcare for workers' families as key priorities, backed by an internal survey indicating these were significant components of workers' expenditures, constituting 30-40% of their wages.[117] During the program, SPN leaders collaborated with local unions and NGOs, engaging in dialogues with local governments regarding the utilisation of regional budgets. The union succeeded in influencing changes in regional policies, such as removing building fees from students' tuition fees, making education more affordable for workers' families, and advocating for equal access to local Social Health Insurance (Jamkesda).

Despite these achievements, this non-conventional union activism came to an abrupt end after five years, coinciding with the program's closure. A unionist from the local SPN contended that the discontinuity in union activities resulted from an over-reliance on NGO funds for activities.[118] However, the root causes extended beyond funding issues and external dependence. The concept of expanding union activism into the community was not firmly ingrained in the SPN leaders' understanding of labour movements. The focus remained confined within the program framework, leading to a loss of orientation in a broader labour movement.

While union leaders broadened their welfare concerns from wages to include education and healthcare, this expansion was primarily directed at a limited beneficiary—union members. The local home-based workers confirmed that they never even heard this program.[119] The cessation of discussions on community-

116 ACILS, also known as the Solidarity Centre, is an NGO based in the United States, founded by the AFL-CIO in 1997. Originating as a workers' organisation in the U.S., it has since evolved into having the largest international network among such organisations. See further: https://www.solidaritycenter.org

117 Interview with SPN/KSPN branch official, 28 May 2015.

118 Interview with SPN/KSPN branch official, 28 May 2015.

119 The exclusion of the home-based workers from this program was re-confirmed by local NGO activists from Yasanti; in separated conversations with Rima and Karyanto, a few years after my fieldwork in 2022.

based activism further also underscored the discontinuity. In conversations with union officials during the fieldwork, these ideas and discourses did not resurface significantly as future alternatives. The primary focus and discourse persisted on wage struggles, affirming what LBH activists had disclosed about the exclusionary nature of labour movements in Semarang. The excessively narrow focus on the wage struggles of union members not only excluded other diverse marginalised groups in communities, but also neglected other precarious labourers who were increasingly becoming part of the local workforce.

Another similar pattern is evident in the involvement of unionists in electoral politics, specifically during the 2009 and 2014 National Elections. The unionists' participation in these elections did not reflect a strong and well-organised political motivation among local unionists. The decision to compete for legislative seats in the 2009 elections was not genuinely a local initiative, but rather a national directive from the Central Executive Board of SPN, which had agreed to collaborate politically with PKS (Prosperous Justice Party), an Islamic Political Party (see Chapter 2).[120]

This directive triggered a sense of unpreparedness among SPN branch-level union leaders in Semarang, resulting in disorganised political moves.[121] The appointment of Abdi and another unionist to participate in the election did not run as smoothly as expected. The PKS branch in Semarang refused to act as the supporting political machinery for the union candidates, providing no financial or technical support for their campaigns.

At the grassroots level, confusion prevailed among workers during the campaigns and on voting day, marked by competing political rhetoric between union candidates and party candidates. While PKS cadres emphasised Islamic identity, unionists focused on labour issues, particularly the improvement of wages and workers' welfare. Workers, especially union members, questioned the benefits they would gain from voting for union candidates, prompted by widespread vote-buying practices among rival party cadres. Despite Abdi's efforts to campaign on issues such as better wages and welfare by traveling between factories, many union members did not perceive this as a compelling political bond or a moral

120 The union national elites had this political intention since 2006 and PKS was chosen for collaboration as it was the only party which showed a welcoming response to the union's interest, and it was the only one which had interest strongly in mobilising support for the working classes (Caraway and Ford 2020, 128).

121 A field note of a focus group discussion conducted by the activists of YAWAS, 19 June 2009; Interview with Sumanta, 1 June 2015.

obligation to vote for him. The money distributed by political rivals through vote buying proved more attractive and binding. The election results proved this unequal competition, as parties' candidates garnered more votes, while Abdi received only 250 out of the targeted 3,000 votes, and other fellow unionists even received fewer votes.

In the 2014 legislative elections, Abdi and his colleague, Ari, sought another opportunity by collaborating with different political parties, specifically the Democratic Party (Demokrat).[122] However, the absence of official support from the elites of the Central Board of SPN, increased widespread distrust among union members regarding the political motives of the union, and the lack of support from local political parties made their campaigns heavily reliant on individual efforts rather than organisational resources. Once again, they had to contend with the prevalence of vote-buying practices by political rivals with strong financial backing, a challenge that union candidates were ill-equipped to overcome.

Unionists faced the additional challenge of competing with long-standing political ties between certain sections of communities and specific political parties, influencing the political choices of workers at the grassroots level. Families and neighbourhood leaders played significant roles in pressuring the political choices of workers, with women workers, the largest constituents of local unions, being particularly vulnerable to such control. Some married female workers admitted seeking the opinion of husbands, siblings, or parents when deciding how to vote.[123] Even when family members did not exert direct pressure, their opinions became the primary reference for voting decisions, especially in villages where residents consistently adhered to certain political choices over the years.

For an example, a young unionist approached Abdi during the 2014 legislative elections, apologising for not being able to support him and expressing allegiance to a dominant different political party, PDI-P. Abdi acknowledged that he could not force the young unionist, recognising the influence of personal political preferences on the choices of workers in the factory. Abdi's preferred political party was less popular in the electoral districts in Semarang, leading

122 Partai Demokrat (Democratic Party) actually did not have a robust political base in Semarang. The union's candidates opted this party was simply caused by the ease of its requirements for collaboration. However, the candidates faced difficulties to garner supports from constituents traditionally aligned with the local PDI-P.

123 Interview with home-based workers for a glove-making factory, on April 9 2014.

to disappointing results for both him and Ari, each receiving less than three hundred votes.

The experience of local unionists in legislative elections highlights how their political endeavours were hindered by local political forces and internal conditions within the union itself. The dominance of local political forces has been considered a democratic irony in current local legislative elections, where control over resources, such as financial support and campaign organisations, and the political loyalties of communities are in the hands of local elites (Aspinall, et al. 2020, 510). This dynamic often excludes marginalised candidates, like union candidates, from gaining significant advantages in political competitions. The powerful collective force of workers, a source of collective identity for unions, faces challenges in transforming into effective political capital due to the domination of local elite forces and the long-standing social ties and identities entrenched in families and communities.

Examining the internal dynamics of the movements, the challenges in generating workers' political force have been influenced by how they define the interests of workers and constituents. The focus on welfare, confined within standard or *normative* labour rights, particularly on wages, has narrowed the frame of workers' activism, their narratives, and discourses. On the one hand, narratives on normative rights served as a strategy to defend basic rights. Workers used collective action to send a message to employers, governments, and the public about the legal position to defend their rights. This legitimate collective action aimed at defending primary interests. On the other hand, this boundary-making has limited the opportunity to broaden activism into the broader arena of class politics. The resulting narrowed space of activism was reinforced by workers' own definitions, further solidified by external influences.

The local government officials, for instance, often reminded unionists of the acceptable area of workers' interest by praising peaceful activities defending labour standards while discouraging participation in political activism. Similar suggestions came from local academics with whom SPN leaders engaged in dialogues. Likewise, even criticism from fellow unionists, as seen in the strong backlash to SPN unionist's presentation in 2008 highlighting community-based activities sponsored by the Solidarity Centre, also emphasised the exclusion of workers' political measures beyond the major area of *normative* interest from workers' activism.[124] These pressures impact how the local unions define their

124 The community-based activism was not only a vulnerable notion among many SPN unionists in

constituency: while union members remain the primary constituents, others—non-unionised workers, communities reliant on the local industrial economy, and other marginalised groups—are considered irrelevant or, at the very least, less relevant constituents.

4.3. Politics of Production and Workers' Struggles within Factories

As a workplace-based union, the nature of its struggles and the way it serves the workers' interests were also shaped by the social dynamics at the corporate level. The company serves as an arena where the production relations is intertwined with the broader labour regime, affecting the daily interactions between union and their claimed constituents. With over thirty thousand members, the unions affiliated with SPN in Semarang were organised under large-scale companies, mostly subcontractors producing commodities for international brands. Their typical production strategies and labour process determined the employed labour types and the dynamic of union activism. This was a result of their industries being integrated into global production chains and markets.

I present a case involving workers at the company level to illustrate this. This case describes the emergence and decline of union activism within Tapak Company, a European shoe-making manufacturer, employing a diverse workforce. It demonstrates how factory workers attempted to establish a new tradition of union militancy under the SPN banner, challenging old legacies and representing the workers' interests. However, these initiatives could not endure for long due to management backlash, which exploited the SPN split and sought to reassert control over the union to maintain production stability amid the international market's volatility. This case also serves as a prelude to the next section which explore the reality of workers employed by this company in the communities. It highlights how the union and workers grapple with the repercussions of the

Semarang but was generally unpopular among trade unions during that period. In March 2008, I unexpectedly met one of the Semarang SPN branch leaders, in a workshop organised by NGOs, in Bogor. During the discussion, he presented the success of SPN Semarang in the community-based program sponsored by the Solidarity Centre. He was not alone. Another participant, an SPN unionist from Sukoharjo Regency, Central Java Province, also shared his organisation's experience in lobbying for an increase in government budget for local labour inspection for fostering a pro-worker local government performance. However, these two presenters faced strong criticism from workshop participants, mainly union officials. Many considered the idea as deviating from the core focus of the workers' primary struggle: wage improvement. The prevailing sentiment among participants was that such ideas and activities should be the domain of NGOs rather than trade unions.

company's strategy to separate production spaces, showing the challenges faced by unions rooted in the tradition of workplace-based unionism.

4.3.1. A Factory under Competitive Markets

Tapak Company is an international shoe producer owned by a family of European investors. Tapak's Indonesia branch is only one of production sites across Europe and Africa. Established in Indonesia in 1991, Tapak specialises in exporting shoes primarily to European markets, with additional distribution in the US, Australia, Japan and China. By having total investment in Indonesia exceeding US$3.7 million, this company produced around one million shoes and one million shoe components annually. Using a combination of modern machines and traditional manual labour, Tapak is a moderate-scale company employing over two thousand workers who worked in the factory and around seven hundred home-based workers dispersed in villages in Semarang.

During my fieldwork between 2015 and 2017, the working conditions at Tapak Company reflected the evolving dynamics of employment relations influenced by past workers' struggles within the workplace. There was a noticeable increase in management control over the labour process, coupled with the union's apparent accommodation of the company's interests. While corporate management attributed these changes to the recent instability in European markets, the workers and unionists I interviewed believed that the major factor of changes was the significant strikes that occurred in 2013. These strikes, the largest ever in Semarang, marked a turning point that led to drastic shifts in company policies and management's stance. Nonetheless, despite of the workers' belief in strikes as the major cause, the increase in labour militancy itself served as a primary threat to the company's interests, prompting extreme changes in managerial behaviour.

4.3.2. The emergence of contention

Prior to 2009, the period at Tapak Company seemingly had 'quiet' employment relations on the surface which papered over underlying tensions. Tapak's management, largely led by European expatriates, sought to comply with the minimum provisions of Indonesian labour regulations. The Management paid new permanent workers according to the standard minimum wage regulation, which at the time was 1.2 million Rupiah,[125] while those who had worked longer

125 The minimum wage of 2012 equals to 75-80 Euro per month.

than a year received slightly higher wages based on wage-scale referring to the agreement between management and union. The workforce was divided into permanent workers who received a regular monthly wage, and temporary or non-standard workers – among others the casual workers employed in factories (*pekerja harian lepas*) and home-based workers – who were paid on a daily piece-rate basis.

While the management complied with the basic standards, worker grievances persisted. Permanent workers complained that their wages fell short of meeting their monthly needs. They raised the issue of a gap between the wage scale in government regulations (Ministerial Decree 49 of 2004) and the corporate wage structure. Similar grievances circulated among casual workers, especially when piece-rate workloads declined, potentially leading to wages below the local minimum wage. Another issue adding to the discontent was the limited rest hours. Despite not directly related to wages, the short lunch and midday-prayer breaks (*dzuhur*) were deemed inappropriate by permanent workers. With limited time for thousands of workers to queue for food and to use the prayer facilities, concerns arose, sometimes even leading to suspicions of discrimination in religious practices. The fundamental complaint, however, as asserted by some workers, was that the company had stolen workers' rights of rest period for the sake of corporate profits. Amidst this, the unionists at the time were perceived as being compliant, with workers assuming they lacked the courage to protest to the management. Additionally, the union was accused of neglecting the interests of casual workers, as the company management physically segregated them in a separate building, limiting interaction between different categories of labour.

The labour dynamics at Tapak Company experienced a shift in 2009 when Catur, a candidate with no prior experience in organised movements, was elected as the union leader.[126] His victory was fuelled by his persistent protests against management which initially stemmed from his personal dissatisfaction with his career development obstacles. He then turned his experiences into a protest against the entire factory working conditions. Catur, an employee in the information-technology division, became a leader known for his outspoken statements and leading work stoppages against the management. He was

126 Approaching to the union election at Tapak Company, many workers felt hopeless about finding a suitable new union cadre. Rather than identifying an alternative leader among the existing cadres, they unexpectedly found Catur, an ordinary member, as a potential candidate. Although they were not initially prepared to endorse him for the election, they persistently pressured the election committee to accept his candidacy, even ignoring the deadline for candidate submissions.

successful in garnering support from workers who shared similar interests. The emergence of his leadership shows how the rise of collective force could stem from personal interests and struggles, which were defined by key figures as a collective interest, and the existence of key figures who were able to articulate those interests antagonistically into a real challenge to power.

After replacing the old union officials with new recruits, workers witnessed the emergence of a fresh organised labour culture. Catur and other young officials quickly realised that the challenges faced by their predecessors in advocating for workers' interests stemmed from a lack of collective spirit among union members. Previously, varying interpretations of issues and urgency among individuals, groups, and different categories of workers had hindered effective communication. Internal organisational matters preoccupied union officials, preventing them from connecting with workers in various roles. This resulted in a failure to identify and collectively address real issues, determine the severity of problems, and formulate shared interests and strategies. Beneath a seemingly calm surface, there existed a significant gap between unionists and grassroots workers.

Under the new leadership, unionist established a strong connection between workers' representation and their level of activism. Catur emphasised that militancy was crucial for defending workers' interests, asserting, "Union officials must become a strategic layer of the working class, capable of both safeguarding members' interests and mobilising them as an effective force in negotiations with management." Although Catur defined the working class simply as those permanently employed by the company without ideological connotations, his determined leadership and consistent narratives about the antagonism between workers and management played a crucial role in fostering group awareness and boosting workers' militancy.

In addition to changes in organisational values, the new union officials implemented a structural reorganisation by establishing a larger group of shop floor representatives, consisting of twenty-five workers. The union also altered the nomenclature of the group from 'perwakilan anggota' (member representative) to 'komisariat' to symbolise and instil a sense of militancy and organisational discipline among union members. Abdi, the Semarang branch leader of the SPN, expressed concern about the size of the representative group, considering it to be too large for the company's scale, which only had 1,800 union members. By comparison, the 11,000 members of SPN in a local garment company had only 17 representative members on the shop floor.

Catur, however, stood firm in his decision, emphasising that the large size and different nomenclature of union representation aimed to mobilise as many workers as possible while expanding the scope of representation. The Tapak's union officials recognised that the size might not be fully effective in managing representation, but they expected that increasing representation in the union would revive members' trust in the union's roles and ignite their passion to participate in a movement against the management. Catur believed in the strategic power of the workers' mass, stating, "If we do not empower this mass of workers, we won't be strong. No matter how smart the union officials are, they will be meaningless if they only criticise the company policies without the support of the mass."[127]

Another reason for enlarging the Komisariat size was to reduce elitism among union leaders. The growing number of Komisariat members allowed greater participation of workers in the union body at the enterprise level. Catur argued,

> I have learned many times from the behavior of regional union leaders everywhere, especially those in higher positions in branch union offices. They often position themselves on par with those at the highest rank in the management of companies, falsely thinking that all the decisions they make always seem right and wise to the members.

This argument aligns with the account of a former prominent national leader of SPN who acknowledged that many union leaders tend to overestimate themselves, assuming an "equal" position with top management or government officials while actually creating a greater distance from their own grassroots. [128]

Another organisational change within the Tapak's union was the abolition of a union's election for group representation, a tradition upheld by SPN for years. Instead, they implemented a direct election format, employing a one-person-one-vote system. The objective was to dismantle the management's influence over shop floor representatives, as these layers were susceptible to managerial intervention. Line leaders, acting as worker representatives, were directly controlled by managers and often aligned with management interests. To enhance democracy, shop floor representatives were elected by workers in each production line.

127 Interview with Cature, former SPN leader in Tapak Company, 27 March 2015.

128 Interview with Lilis, a former union leader at the national office (DPP) of SPN, 2014

The initial three years of this new union leadership marked a critical period. Many workers, particularly women, remained apprehensive about becoming shop-floor representatives. Their insecurity stemmed from two reasons: navigating conflicts with management and facing family pressure.[129] Some male and female unionists explained that, in Javanese culture, women, especially those who are married, were expected to prioritise caring for their children and husbands over active participation in union activism, which is perceived as a masculinist activity. Consequently, mobilising female workers proved challenging. While this cultural aspect held some currency, it could be negotiated. Active campaigns highlighting the relevance of the union, union training sessions, small victories in negotiations with management, and, notably, the role model of some female unionists contributed to the increased participation of female workers in the Komisariat. This transformation became more evident after Catur's successful re-election for his second term of leadership, securing nearly a hundred percent of the votes.

Catur's landslide victory was perceived by unionists as the starting point of a new battle. With the strengthened Komisariat and the consolidation of permanent workers at the grassroots level, the company management faced growing difficulties in maintaining control over shop floor union representatives. After three years of consolidation and increased confidence among unionists in their own power, the union launched a major offensive against the management. From December 2012 to January 2013, Tapak's workers executed systematic moves that culminated in a large strike, intensifying the hostility of the management towards the union. Over 2,000 workers participated in the three-day strike, making it the largest and most militant attack on the company in Semarang. The strike received broad coverage from local and national media, drawing attention from local authorities and other unions in the region and beyond.[130]

The strike marked the culmination of agitation against unfair wage structures, triggering an outright rejection from the management. This response further fuelled a sense of anger amongst the workers, and discontent expanded to encompass broader issues. Grievances extended to other labour law violations, including inadequate break hours, poor working conditions for casual and short-contract workers, and a lack of protection for women workers with night-shift

129 Group interview with some SPN unionists of Tapak, 18 May 2015; and a female unionist, 7 April 2015

130 Some prominent local and national media, including Tempo, cover these disputes in 2013. The media link is not provided here to secure the anonymity.

assignments.[131] Union leaders strategically used these issues as leverage to force the management to address the workers' wage demands.



Photo 4: A union poster expressing protest against the inadequate wages as compared to monthly needs. The poster reads 'For God's sake, 1,397,500 Rupiah (around 84 Euros) is not decent.'

In response, the management countered the union's narratives by providing alternative accounts to line leaders in the shop floors. They hoped that this disconnection between line leaders and workers' representatives in the Komisariat would weaken grassroots support.[132] The management argued that the unionists were inconsistent in their demands. Despite these efforts, the union's tactic eventually proved successful. After three days of strikes, the

131 According several local unionists: the use of short-contract workers longer than legal requirement and no social security provision for contract workers were the most common cases in Semarang.

132 Line leaders are designated by the management as representatives within the managerial structure responsible for controlling production process. In this role, they not only engage in managerial interactions but also adopt the managerial system's perspective on labour processes and relations. Consequently, it is logical for the management to leverage them as allies in the struggle against unionists and workers at the grassroots level. However, this approach encounters challenges, particularly when production pressures exceed the acceptable tolerance levels of line leaders, as I will elaborate on in the following paragraphs.

management conceded to the wage demands but rejected improvements in working conditions of the temporary labour, urging the union to view it as a compromise. The unionists accepted this, recognising that the wage increase was the primary goal of the strikes.

The end of the demands for casual and short-contracted workers in the large strike highlighted the marginalised position of this worker category compared to permanent workers. Despite ongoing union advocacy for this group in smaller protests, this strategy heightened tensions between workers and management. The situation worsened when the management decided to lay off all short-contract workers, and the union found itself powerless to further defend their demands, especially as these workers were not official union members.

In numerous companies, such precarious temporary workers are often excluded from union membership, creating problems from both perspectives. These workers are frequently hesitant to join unions due to the perceived risk to their employment. There are documented cases where management promptly terminated workers who opted to join unions (Juliawan, 2010: 45-47; Tjandraningsih and Nugroho, 2008). Companies often utilise this category of workers precisely to evade union control, capitalising on their flexibility—easy hiring and firing (World Bank, 2009). This flexibility aligns with the prevalent corporate strategy to compete in the current neoliberal markets (See Deyo, 2001). Given this context, many unions exercise caution in encouraging these workers to join their ranks. Some unions exhibit a lack of interest in incorporating temporary workers, given the high turnover rates in this labour segment (see Juliawan, 2010: 47).

4.3.3. Management's backlash: the increase of labour control

With the resolution of the wage dispute, the management shifted its focus to countermeasures aimed at increasing labour control. Two strategic paths were pursued: reducing workers' militancy and tightening control in the labour process, with the overarching goal of ensuring production security and minimising the risk of higher losses. The workers' demands for changes in the wage structure had increased labour costs, necessitating a new strategy for sustainable production and maximum capacity while avoiding union disruption, particularly crucial in volatile markets.

To diminish workers' militancy, the management prioritised a form of "union cleansing," targeting militant activists known as "orang-orang kuat pergerakan" (strong movement-activists). The management compiled a list of alleged 'sins,'

including mistakes and work violations, such as repeated technical errors or sluggish work. In order to secure these measures legally, the management ensured first its compliance with standard labour rights, such as providing a decent wage based on the new scale, distributing benefits, and ensuring social security, including freedom in union activities, before imposing harsh sanctions. After collecting sufficient evidence of violations over several months, the management decided to lay off the activists, citing 'securing corporate efficiency and reducing redundancy' as an official reason.

While carefully dealing with the unionists, the management took more measured steps against Catur as the union leader. Instead of toppling him, which could risk a backlash from the workers, the management targeted the grassroots, disrupting solidarity and delegitimising Catur's leadership through counter narratives. The Komisariat and line leaders were targeted as key channels for these tactics. The management sought individuals amenable to their moves, offering personal incentives as rewards. As the 2014 union elections approached, the management silently encouraged some workers aligned with the management to challenge candidates from the unionist faction. This intervention fragmented workers in the rank and file, creating political noise around the elections. Rumours about union leadership spread among workers, coupled with increased hostility from management, making it difficult for Catur to organise his supporters. Finding increasing fragmentation among union members and unfriendly management attitudes, Catur eventually made a surprising decision to retire from the company, sparking disappointment and restlessness among his loyalists, leading to a decline in union strength.

The loss of key union leaders became a critical turning point in the downfall of militant unionism at the Tapak Company. The election of a woman, as leader during a chaotic election further intensified the turmoil, compounded by the impact of an organisational crisis in the region. The split in the SPN Semarang branch, resulting from organisational rupture and elite conflicts at the national board, led most branch leaders to move to a new union, KSPN. The confusion spread among Tapak's workers, and the situation in the factory deteriorated as some unionists in Tapak followed the lead of their patrons in the union branch. The newly elected leader and some other unionists unilaterally decided to change the union affiliation from SPN to KSPN without notifying or consulting the members. As a result, workers became fragmented into more factions, with many remaining unaware of the actual conditions due to the lack of union transparency. The broader chaotic atmosphere in the grassroots became inevitable.

Capitalising on this chaos, the company management escalated its control over the union. Following the successful dismissal of key unionists, the management sought to dismantle Catur's organisational legacies. They approached the new union leaders, urging a shift in union values from adversarial to cooperative. Considering the company's struggles with increasing market competition and the need to maintain the existing labour force, the management pressured the new union officials to adopt a more cooperative stance. They also suggested replacing union representatives by removing Catur's loyalists. Faced with organisational chaos at both the factory and regional levels, the new union officials had no choice unless taking a moderate approach, compromising with the management's strategy.

In line with exerting control over the union, Tapak's management implemented several reorganisations in production lines to strengthen their grip on labour control. A fundamental change was the shift in the gender composition of the workforce. The number of new female workers recruited surpassed that of men, while the number of male workers 'forcibly' laid off was higher than that of female workers. According to female unionists, this appeared to be a deliberate policy, as most female workers were perceived as more obedient to supervisors, line leaders, and especially male managers; while male workers, particularly male unionists, were viewed as potentially rebellious, as evidenced by previous disputes and strikes.[133]

Another change occurred in the labour process by intensifying control through more stringent individual work targets. Targets for each part were determined based on the type of shoe and its components, creating different vulnerabilities among various categories of labour. Workers in the assembling section of shoe components faced strict recording and careful calculation of working time, along with associated sanctions and consequences. A line leader in the department, expressed,

> After the strikes ended, the management was enraged! They treat us like workers in a garment sector. Every output is calculated, and our targets and work results are recorded. We work for eight hours. The number of items we produce is recorded and reported to the management office. Our monthly achievements are calculated. If it's bad, employees would be called for sanctions.[134]

133 Interview with the new union leader at Tapak Company, 7 April 2015.

134 Interview with the line leader at Tapak Company, 1 June 2015.

Even as a line leader, he was frustrated with increasing pressure from the management and deteriorating working conditions in the assembling section. Boredom and exhaustion plagued the workers, as they were forced to avoid overtime work as much as possible. They also complained that the substantial workload did not come with additional income due to limitations on overtime in this section. Overtime was considered a source of adequate additional income for single workers, except for those already married as it sacrificed family time. Meanwhile in the sewing section, less-than-optimal production output could lead to extended work on weekends, triggering unpleasant rebukes from management.

The increased stringent working methods and workload, and the demands for changes in union activism were interconnected conditions, representing the management's attempt to reclaim control over the workforce. The significant strikes led by Catur had indeed resulted in increased wages, especially for permanent workers with more than one year of service. However, the management sought to mitigate their losses, and the heightened pressure in the labour process became an additional cost for workers. Moreover, two years after the union elections or three years after the major strikes, the union militancy was hard to restore back

Internally, the new union officials identified the large composition of women in the Tapak's workforce as a constraint in rebuilding militancy. A female leader of the new union at Tapak noted,

> Our female co-workers have numerous responsibilities to consider. Today, women are no longer solely secondary wage earners (*pencari nafkah-sampingan*) to men. Many of them are also the primary breadwinner, becoming the backbone of their families. it is really hard for them to fight for the family.

Women faced objections from their parents or husbands for their engagement in union activism. Local traditions and religious values about women's duties in the household also further limited their agency. Some female union leaders have even contemplated not extending her activities in union activism beyond their term, planning to dedicate themselves to her family. In such circumstances, union leaders found difficulties to mobilise the majority of women serving as member representatives (previously known as Komisariat). Consequently, union leaders often relied on male line leaders to mobilise and collect grievances from their members. However, this created a reluctance and resistance among union members to deal with line leaders who were seen as naturally inclined to represent the interests of the management. As a result, the relationship between members and the union's representative apparatus remained continuously vulnerable.

The entire illustration above captures the dynamics of unionism within the primary workplace setting: the factory. This example illustrates how leaders emerged from grassroots, amidst the uncertainties of the union roles and the traditional leadership styles. This novel approach of leadership advocates a union transformation, dismantling old legacies in a manner perceived as militant, particularly when contrasted with the generally calm organising tradition in Semarang labour movements (Juliawan 2010). Despite lacking solid ideological roots, the integration of symbols from the militant workers' movement, coupled with the restructuring of the representation system to be more participatory and open, has proven to be an effective instrument in building workers' collective strength and advocating for their interests.

Nevertheless, this narrative echoes a familiar story experienced by local senior unionists, where vocal unionists faced challenges in sustaining active unions for the long term due to corporate counter-movements, forcing the unions to adopt a more accommodative stance toward management. Companies exploited the paradox of labour regulations to legitimise their actions by consistently fulfilling workers' rights, but also increasing control through both labour processes and informal interventions to subdue unions, for maintaining their production capacity in the market competition.

Simultaneously, organisational fragility is exacerbated by internal factors. The challenges faced by the union in Tapak Company mirrors the portrait of SPN at the branch level. The union split within the company arose not only caused by the fragmentation of the parent organisational structure but are also triggered by patronage relations between union leaders of different hierarchies, leading to chaos at the grassroots level. These repeated splits, militancy attenuation, and weakened leadership eventually prevent workers from stable institutionalisation of unionism.

In such a landscape, precarious temporary workers become the most vulnerable group. They had been sacrificed in the battle between management and the union, and their existence, both real and symbolic, remains largely overlooked in the dynamic of unionism. The subsequent section will explore further details on this aspect, particularly regarding the most precarious ones: the home-based workers.

4.4. Marginalised Workers beyond Factory

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the spread of flexible forms of production and labour has presented a challenge to workplace-based unions. To reduce production costs without loosening control, companies have adopted practices of flexibility like spatial separation of production, which involves shifting one or more parts of the labour process out of the factory floor into households within the community. Tapak, is one of companies in Semarang which has been using this approach for more than 20 years. Although the practice has originated during the era of state authoritarianism, the current market-driven labour regime has facilitated its expansion. While there are no specific regulations governing home-based labour, the regime's strong support for labour flexibility justifies expanding the use of this type of labour.

This section explores the impact of Tapak's production practices on working conditions in the community and the relationship between the home-based workers and the 'insiders' *(orang dalam)*[135] consisting of management, factory workers, and the labour union. The structure of production and labour processes has created a representation gap for home-based workers, leading to exclusionary and marginalised attitudes towards them from unions and 'inside' workers. I argue that the tendency to maintain this exclusionary attitude is influenced by labour control of the companies, which combines despotic and hegemonic elements that prevent unionists and factory workers from understanding the objective position of the home-based workers in the production chain. As a result, external groups and organisations were competing to fill the gap in representing the interests of home-based workers, increasing the complexity of relations and workers fragmentation.

4.4.1. From factory to the villages

A brief overview of the production structure and labour processes is essential for identifying how home-based workers are positioned within the overall footwear production structure. This objective description helps to reveal how the company constructs the production politics through categorisations, relations, and work instructions that obscure the subjective understanding of the unionists and other workers regarding the real position of the home-based

135 This is how the home-based workers defined the separation of 'us and them' within the factory social structure, indicating the impact of social categorisation created by the production structure that leads to inequality and exclusion.

workers. In other words, the production politics have created divisions between the home-based workers and the factory counterparts, making it difficult for them to receive adequate support

Tapak's footwear production process began in the factory, where the materials went through a dozen stages of production such as cutting, sewing, sole-making, and pressing. Permanent workers, assisted by temporary workers like short-term contract workers and casual workers, carried out these stages using machine processes. Once the process in the factory was complete, the outsole and upper parts were sent out of the factory for the manual assembly process.[136] Home-based workers in the community handled these tasks, which involved combining the two components through manual stitching to form the basic shape of a pair of shoes. This process was used for all footwear items that required manual assembly, except for shoes made using the pasting method that fully used machine technology.

Tapak selected seven villages in Semarang as centres where the company distributed shoe materials to workers for manual assembly. Tapak has also sent the components to local prisons, where convicts were employed for similar assembly. The company took benefits from prison's training program that was conducted internally for preparing convicts before released. The material distribution also took place in Tapak's factory with particular focus on reaching home-based workers living in locations beyond the seven villages.

The village offices (Kantor Desa) served as a hub for exchange and control, where workers submitted their completed tasks, and management representatives conducted a quality check before distributing new materials to the workers.[137] This routine occurred daily, with around thirty female workers gathering at the office from 8 am. They arrived carrying large bags filled with dozens of completed shoes, with bag size and weight varying based on the footwear type. Some workers arrived on foot, while others used motorcycles, and some were accompanied by family members. The quality check determined whether the workers would receive new material packages to take home and work on. If the quality did not meet the standard, workers were asked to fix the shoes on the spot. A similar pattern was followed in the factory, with workers bringing their

136 See the appendix on a diagram presenting the work process in producing the shoes in Tapak Company.

137 The village officials did not participate in controlling the production process. They only provided a space for the meeting between factory representatives and the workers. Tapak Compant rented rooms in the offices as distribution centres that connect factories with home-based production activities.

completed work to be inspected, repaired, and exchanged for new packages. In the prison, quality control officers utilised a room where convicts submitted their completed work.

4.4.2. Flexibilisation and the formation of home-based labour

Tapak Company recruited thousands of home-based workers in villages, whom they referred to as 'production partners' (*mitra produksi*); a term that is misleading and deceptive. By using the concept of *partners*, companies aimed at avoiding the compliance with labour laws and gained maximum flexibility in the recruitment, the use and the layoffs of their workforce. This is a crucial aspect of how the company created a segmented workforce. Despite being aware of the extreme inequality and vulnerability of this work, most of the factory workers and the unionists – including even the home-based workers – ironically accepted the use of the terminology. Most of them identify the term as separate category of labour and did not clearly understand how to locate this category within the standard employment relations. Only a few were trying to break away from the framing formed by this company which I explain in the following sections.

The home-based workforce employed by Tapak was almost entirely comprised of women, with the majority falling between the ages of 40 and 45 and being married with children. While no official data existed regarding their exact number, one of the home-based workers with over five years of experience estimated that there were more than 2,000 workers (including nearly 200 prison workers) based on her identification number that exceeded three digits. Local NGOs had also attempted to collect data on these workers and had recorded more than 900 individuals, though they suspected that this number was likely higher.

These numbers do not include the support workers that might be much bigger than the main homeworkers. The exact number of support workers is even more difficult to identify, as they did not always work regularly. Support workers consist of husbands, children, or other family members who assist with the assembly processes. The involvement of these support workers varies greatly, and not all of them work with the same load as the main workers. For example, Wani,[138] the first home-based workers I met, was assisted by her husband as a full-time partner, while her children were involved but stopped due to school. Similarly, the children of other workers assisted during their schooling years but discontinued their participation upon finding other employment opportunities.

138 Pseudonym.

Conversely, one home worker opted not to engage her children in the work due to concerns about their skill level, choosing instead to engage her mother as a full-time working partner. Yet another worker primarily worked alone, with occasional assistance from her husband. Such patterns were common among other home-based workers' households.

Some workers also shared their work with neighbours or friends through a practice known as *pocokan*. This is a Javanese term referring to sharing work at a wage price determined by the main workers, which was often lower than usual due to deductions for transportation and repair fees. While some workers used this system to provide job opportunities to others, others found it inefficient and chose to stop the practice. Some workers who received *pocokan* eventually became full-time homeworkers by applying to Tapak company for a change in status, which allowed them to receive full wages without any deductions. However, others chose to quit after a prolonged period of *pocokan* work.

Home-based workers do not always have a fixed status, as some of them might occasionally become *the insiders* (factory workers) for a certain period of time. The decision was made by the lowest level managerial officers, such as supervisors or line leaders specifically for home-based labour. The shift was driven by fluctuations in market demand. For example, when the company needed to ramp up production, it required additional temporary workers to perform factory tasks – such as shoe pasting, marking, putting on accessories, installing zippers, sole making, folding boxes – which were primarily the responsibility of permanent employees. Skilled home-based workers could be also recruited as quality control officers to assess the quality of the overall output of home-based tasks.

Recruiting home-based workers as factory workers was a common corporate strategy to reduce labour costs while maintaining control. Rather than hiring additional permanent employees during times of high market demand, companies often relied on home-based workers, who were cheaper and easier to lay off in times of low demand.[139] This recruitment process involved a change in the workers' status, from home-based to casual workers, who were paid on a

139 The utilisation of permanent labour is comparatively more expensive than employing flexible labour, such as home-based workers. This cost disparity arises from the necessity for companies employing permanent labour to comply with minimum wage regulations, which are consistently higher than the wages of home-based workers. Moreover, permanent workers are typically affiliated with labour unions, creating a layer of complexity for management in terms of workforce control. Additionally, companies are obligated to provide severance payments for layoffs, contributing to what managements complain as additional financial burden.

daily basis – instead of output quantity. They were employed for a short period of time, typically two to three months, depending on market conditions. This change in status also entailed a shift in the workers' way of working, as they were expected to perform tasks traditionally carried out by permanent employees.

Home-based workers offer company higher 'flexibility' in the labour practices, both because of the context of their production base and the informality of their work arrangements. Since there was no specific contract binding them as employees, the company could freely transfer and change their status between home-based and factory work. By labelling them as informal *production partners* rather than employees, the company also avoided labour inspections. One the one hand, it increased the capacity of control in the hand of management. Any refusal to work as a casual factory worker may result in termination of home-based work. On the other hand, this strategy gave company a high degree of flexibility, exceeding other categories of precarious labour such as short-contract workers or outsourced labourers. While, permanent factory workers were more rigid and less influenced by market fluctuations,[140] home-based workers are subject to changes in recruitment, placement, individual workload, remuneration, and other forms of work control.

4.4.3. Pursuing target and wages: working at home

Bringing factory work into the home created an intersection between factory production spaces and the social spaces of the family and community. The home thus became a site of economic exchange: the household provided resources to support the work, while the work became a common source of income for the family. However, the exchange made workers and their families vulnerable to exploitation as they became instruments for achieving production targets. Workers who undertook low-paid jobs also faced social and cultural challenges that arise from the domestic realm of the family.

The wage system used by a company is indicative of how work is organised. In the case of home-based work, the company used a piece-rate system that allowed for tighter control over the productivity of cheap labour. Under this system,

140 While permanent workers are generally expected to work until retirement, several cases in Semarang and other locations have shown that companies could expedite their retirement period, sometimes en masse, to reduce the number of permanent employees and replace them with short-contract labour or other flexible types of workers. This labour control strategy has become a popular choice for management, particularly in labour-intensive industries, due to intense market competition. Moreover, post-Reform labour regulations have made it easier for companies to carry out this strategy.

wages were paid per batch of ten pairs of shoes, with the price varying according to the type of shoe and the level of difficulty in their assembly.[141] The cheapest wage was for assembling sandals, which paid Rp 14,000 (around 85 cents in Euro) per batch, while the highest wage applied to the assembly of boots, which paid Rp 42,000 (around 2.5 Euros) per batch. However, the production of boots was only carried out during April-May as they were intended for the European markets during winter season. Most shoes made for all seasons are generally priced between Rp 19,500-35,000 (1.2 – 2.1 Euro) per batch, depending on the type of shoes.



Photo 5: Some women workers bringing their children to a distribution post in the village, where they attend to their childcare responsibilities while also carrying out repair works.

Workers typically took home two or three batches of shoe components that would then need to be assembled within two days. The more support-workers they invited to join, whether they were family members or neighbours (the *pocokan* process referred to above), the more batches they could take on. A worker, along with support workers, could typically complete thirty to forty batches in a month, with an average total income of Rp 550,000-800,000 (33.5-48.5 Euros). However, these wages were considered collective or family wages,

141 The home-based workers used the terminology of category that the company has created, that is *party*. Each party consists of ten pairs of shoes.

rather than individual wages, as they were derived from the participation of family members or neighbours. Thus, the actual value of the monthly individual wage was much lower. Moreover, they must also deal with transportation costs that further reduce their net income. For example, Wani and her husband, who lived approximately four kilometres from the factory where they collected the work materials, must pay a transportation fee of at least Rp 15,000 per month. This condition resembles the concept of "shared poverty" coined by Clifford Geertz, which refers to the collective condition of poverty in which an increase in wages does not significantly improve individual economic capacity (Geertz 1963).

The social value of wages is diminished when it comes to the type of work being done. The majority of the workers were housewives who performed assembly work while carrying out their daily domestic tasks, which are influenced by traditional conception of Javanese households where women are expected to maintain household duties. While the work was chosen for its flexibility, it added to the overall social burden of women in the household.

Starting from dawn, women engage in several routine activities such as parenting, preparing breakfast for the family, cleaning the house, doing laundry, which would go until approximately 9 am. Assembly work began after that and continued until 11 pm with breaks in the afternoon and evening for preparing meals and prayer activities. An industrious home-based worker was able to spend at least ten hours per day assembling ten shoes or five pairs of shoes. However, the gap between the time for domestic affairs and assembly work was usually only around 10 minutes. For young women with toddlers, the burden was even greater as they could not allocate care needs strictly. Thus, these young mothers often brought their toddlers to distribution posts in village office, where they carried out their childcare while waiting for quality inspections and doing some repair works (see Photo 5). Therefore, although this is a part-time job, the workload multiplies as the pressure of combination of domestic work and the burden of working women. As culturally constructed domestic tasks cannot be neglected, home-based workers lived with these burdens. As Maryati, one of the workers, explained: "Neglecting this task can risk the emergence of quarrels with the husband, especially if the husband is not involved directly or intensively in the work."





Photo 6 (left): A home-based worker is stitching together components to assemble a shoe.

Photo 7 (right): Tools used in assembling the shoes.

Despite the fact that assembly is a home-based job, it is inseparable from capital control, in which target achievement, punctuality, and neatness were strictly controlled by company management. A dextrous worker was able to complete a pair of shoes within two hours by working in a high degree of concentration. By contrast, a less dextrous worker would provide lower productivity due to lack of experience. Wulan[142], a dextrous home-based worker, refused the notion that this job could be done while doing domestic tasks freely. She argued, "This is a tough work. We must focus completely on it. We should *freeze the time* (*mematikan waktu*) [not be distracted by other things in order to fully dedicate to work]."

To increase their productivity, workers needed to find the right ways and tricks to work more efficiently. However, many workers struggled with the difficult and painful stitching process, which caused some new workers to quit after sustaining hand injuries (see Photo 6 & 7). The assembly of complex boot shoes posed a particularly high risk of injury if workers did not find the right techniques. Some

142 Pseudonym

senior workers had found ways to work around this burden, such as replacing the company-provided sewing needle with another and using soap to smooth out the punctures. Although this method was prohibited by the company due to its potential to damage the leather, some workers still used it to meet their productivity targets without compromising the quality of their work. For assembling complicated types of shoes, some workers solved this constrain by helping each other without any extra pay. Mona, one of the workers, explained, "it is only the solidarity that can overcome such difficulties. We often did it especially among those who know each other well."

The completed shoes are submitted to the quality control officer, either at the village offices or at the factory, within two days. The quality control officer ensured that the work met the required standards, and if not, the workers are required to make repairs. The most common mistakes that required repair were stitches that are too tight, too loose, or sloppy. The repair process took place on the spot, and it could be time-consuming. Young mothers often brought their toddlers with them to the quality control rooms in the village offices to make repairs. Sometimes, more deft workers were asked to help with repairs without additional pay, which was a source of complaints. However, refusal to repair the work could result in termination of assembly work. Therefore, it was rare for workers to defy against this instruction in order to maintain their employment.

4.4.4. From disputes to the emergence of informal leaders

Low wages and strict supervision had been two main sources of tension between workers and company management. While wages might not be a daily dispute, they were the most central issue. The wages of homeworkers were substantially lower than those of factory workers, even compared to short-contract and casual workers. The wages for home-based workers were mostly decided unilaterally by the company management. By contrast, factory worker wages adhered to regional minimum wage regulations and were decided based on the collective labour agreement reached by the union and the company management. The minimum wage at the time was Rp 1,208,200 (approximately 73.22 Euros) per month, which was 50%-100% higher than the average wage, as a collective income (i.e., the combined income of all family members), earned by homeworkers. If calculated on an individual basis within the household, the wages of homeworkers became extremely lower.

Although the wages for home-based workers increased periodically, it was at a slower pace than the rise of factory workers' wages. The home-based workers

considered that the wage system was unfair as it reduced severely the economic value of their work, threatening the continuity of the reproduction of labour power.[143] Some of the wage increases over the past 10 years were even the result of protests by the workers rather than employers' voluntary actions. For instance, in 2006, around 200 home-based workers went on strike because management withheld their wages while the wages of factory workers regularly increased through minimum wage negotiations. It was the first strike by home-based workers. A former home worker[144], who participated in the strike, shared her fear about the seventy police officers who were guarding the factory area while the workers protested from outside the factory fence. However, as a result of the strike, all shoe manually assembly wages were increased by 30%.

In 2013, a potential of wage increase emerged as an effect of large demonstrations initiated by factory union leader (see the previous section of this chapter). The negotiations during the protest, however, resulted only in the increase wage for the factory workers, while deferring the wage increase for home-based workers until the following year. However, paradoxically, it led to tightening of work controls, followed by a massive reduction in casual workers. Less productive permanent workers, including key union activists, were laid off. Supervisors closely monitored also the speed of work and the productivity of all categories of workers, including homeworkers who were recruited to be factory workers, through timekeeping.[145] The pressure from quality control supervisors became even more intense. Wulan, a home-based worker who was recruited to be a quality control officer at the prison, complained when she was accused by her leader to be too lenient. She said, "I was scolded almost every day and told to be firm. But as homeworker, I know the actual situation of this work. I went to my friend, and crying, [I said] I didn't want to be quality control [officer] anymore."

143 The average wage for an individual homeworker is only approximately 50%, or even less, of the Semarang district minimum wage. Additionally, the average minimum wage typically is just slightly above the standard for a decent living (KHL). In 2014, for instance, the minimum wage was only 2.7% higher than the KHL, which amounted to Rp. 1,176,817.77. This pattern is observed in many regions, particularly where labour unions lack strong influence, resulting in minimum wages lower than standard decent living. In practice, the home-based workers' wages, amounting to 50% of the minimum wage, severely constrain their ability to meet basic needs such as food, health, transportation, and housing, not to mention the educational needs of their children.

144 She is no longer working as a home-based worker and is currently earning money by selling foods, mainly to factory workers, which she considers more profitable and provides greater time flexibility .

145 Interview with line leader (1 June 2015), former unionist (18 May 2015), and two homeworkers (9 April 2014, 10 April 2014).

As a result, increased tensions turned to be a daily situation especially in every session of quality inspection, both in the villages and the factory, including the prisons. Most of the women were pressured to achieve the production output based on quality and quantity targets. While most workers adhered to the instructions, a few others boldly challenged the front-line managerial officers. Conflicts were often unavoidable.

An increase in wages occurred in 2015 which were an unexpected consequence of the protests. The workers' protest actually aimed at the Collective Labour Agreement (CLA) which was drawn up by the company that specifically regulated the employment relations of the home-based workers. The main issue in the protest was about the prohibition of home-based workers from protesting. The CLA was prepared unilaterally by the company without negotiation with workers. Instead of being successful in forcing the company to comply with the demands of declining the CLA, the demand was exchanged for an increase in wages through an unexpected negotiation carried out by a worker who claimed to be the workers representative. Although the increase in wages was profitable, this event created internal tension within the home-based workers themselves.





Photo 8 (left): A worker, carrying a bag filled with shoe components, prepared to return home to assemble the shoes.

Photo 9 (right): Home-based workers gathered at the distribution post in the village, submitting their work to the Quality Control (QC) officer for careful inspection.

The strikes, protests and negotiations can be closely related to the roles of key informal leaders among the home-based workers. In each village, there were workers who informally represented the voices of the colleagues. Some of these informal leaders emerged with the help of local NGO activists, as I will explain later. Some of them had long experience of working in factories, giving them

a better understanding of labour relations, workers' rights, and the widely felt sense of injustice.[146] This had been an important reference in understanding the work situation at Tapak as home-based workers.

However, the stronger impetus to become informal representatives mostly arose from the daily conflicts between workers and front-line managers, such as QC (Quality Control) officers and home-based labour line leaders. These conflicts reinforced workers' sense of marginalisation within the production system, but they also raise their awareness of the potential for resistance. For instance, Wani refused three times the offer to do assembly work in the factory. She suspected that the offer was a hidden way for the line leader to confine her activities outside the factory more strictly. As a result of her refusal, she was suspended an exaggerated-accusation of wrongdoing: untidy stitching and torn shoe. Then, she complained to a higher-level manager, who seemed more willing to listen to workers' voices. In his complaint to the manager, she emphasised the need for fairness and reminded the manager that many workers made similar mistakes. While visiting and negotiating directly with higher-level managers, which they called *going up* (*naik ke atas*), could sometimes be effective in reducing pressure in the short term, it often proved ineffective in the long run, especially when market demand was high. Nonetheless, these negotiations have given management first-hand experience with workers' courage to stand up for their rights.

These workers who were active in voicing their working conditions were well aware of the significance of the home-based work's position in the production system. This helped them recognise their potential strengths. Several experiences demonstrate this valuable understanding, which became a reference for negotiations. The first is a comparison of the economic value of the product vis-a-vis working conditions. They knew the selling price of the products they made, based on verbal information from "the insiders".[147] This knowledge helped them to imagine the degree of exploitation they experienced. It was useful for negotiations with higher level management, to argue against what they considered as "unreasonable wage calculations". Armed with hand-written approximate calculations, Wani highlighted the imbalance between wages received and hours

146 Before working with Tapak Company, Wani and his husband, worked in the metal factory during 90s. They learnt much about the despotic treatments of employers and the managements, and the way workers organised themselves in holding strikes.

147 They heard rumours from the insiders (factory workers) suggesting that the shoes cost more than one million Rupiah (more than 60 Euros). My search through the company's online shopping site found prices ranging from 90-150 Euros per pair of sandals or shoes. For confidentiality reason, the web link is not provided here.

worked, as well as the needs of their families to survive: such as food, clothing, health, transportation, children's education, etc. For this reason, she demanded that, at the very least, the repair work that was not received payment so far be rewarded with additional wages. Despite being unsuccessful, they had voiced it.

The second experience is related to an understanding of the significance of their work position. They recognise that the type of work they handle is part of the core of the company's production. Mona even demonstrated the importance of their work by showing me the stitching of the soles of the finished products she had worked on, saying, "Look, this is not a side job because the results are [physically] obvious. This is the same as assembling using a machine." In a separate interview, other critical homeworkers like Wulan, expressed the same sentiment, "if we [all home-based workers] stop working for two days simultaneously, all shoe production [that uses stitches] would come to a complete stop." The workers were proving their essential existence. This understanding has also demonstrated their awareness of the gap between the central position of their work and the marginalised and precarious status of home-based workers. Therefore, there is a significant gap between the circulation of production in real terms and the position of the workers as the real producers.

4.4.5. Organising resistance amidst fragmented representation

Despite the emergence of several vocal informal leaders among the homeworkers, organising the homeworkers into a mobilised force has proven difficult. While hundreds of homeworkers had participated in mass protests, these actions had been largely reactive and lacking in an institutionalised organisation. Many others chose not to participate in spite of supporting the morals of the struggle. The vocal homeworker leaders expected to establish an organisation in two optional ways: either by joining an existing union or building their own recognised organisation. However, both options have proven difficult, due to three main sources of vulnerability. First, the majority of homeworkers tended to avoid conflict. Second, unionists had an exclusionary orientation. Third, NGOs that claimed to advocate for the workers created debilitating competition among the different organisations.

The informal leaders of the homeworkers expressed their frustration with the majority of homeworkers who were reluctant to organise and fear negotiating with management. Mona said, "We found it difficult to get them together. Even though they are willing to pay contributions [to finance joint activities], many of them still refused to take part in meeting activities let alone in organisation."

She added that workers who had been involved in organisations were even often reluctant to directly confront management about working conditions. In fact, according to Wani, all discontents were actually related to reasonable basic rights of workers, such as wage increases, holiday allowance (THR), rejection against termination of employment for a common mistake. Umi, one of the active workers said that what they demanded was still part of labour standards. "We just don't want our wages to be too low. We don't even insist on being paid the minimum wage." However, some others also expressed a more fundamental demand: "We want the recognition of our rights as workers." This statement refers to their status as partners which they thought worse than that of factory workers.

The position of homeworkers as partners (*mitra*) in the production relations has been the source of vulnerability as it constitutes a false status of the relations. This partnership is different from the concept of social partnership in the European industrial relations tradition, which has a long history of consensus building through institutional support for negotiations between workers, unions and employers' representatives (Keller 2004, 211-253). At the Tapak Company, the partners relationship lacked an institutional structure that allowed for dialogue. Collective Bargaining Agreements had been concluded by the company without any real negotiation with the home-based workers. The absence of employment contract, apart from the registration of workers' names, illustrates the precarious relationship of workers. The practices of partnership are contradictory as they are marked by unequal working relationships. The fear of the majority of workers having a dialogue, let alone arguing, with the QC officer sufficiently illustrates this inequality. Although the use of a labour force structure dominated by village women is not a consequence of the concept of partnership, it confirms this inequality. The use of female labour massively is typical in labour-intensive industries that take advantage of the tradition of women's submissiveness and obedience to establish tight control over their workforce (Momsen 2010, 210).

The vulnerable position of home-based workers is not only caused by their false-partner status but also by their high dependence on precarious work, which discourages them from confronting the company management. For many workers, especially for those whose partners had low-paying jobs in the informal economy or in farming, assembling shoes was not a sideline but the main source of income instead. Since the average age of workers and their partners was around forty, implying the presence of children at home, they found it difficult to secure more stable jobs like those who had permanent status in factories. Therefore, the threat of losing their shoe assembly work was a risk that could

jeopardise their family's finances. As a result, they were willing to tolerate poor working conditions as long as they could keep their jobs. This structural inequality makes their position very weak when dealing with the company management. Thus, when the management tightened work control after the 2013 strike, most workers did not resist strongly, except for a few bold ones who challenged the management for collective interests, while others merely complained and relied on those informal leaders.

While a handful of informal representatives tried to fight for better working conditions of all home-based labour, local trade unions remained aloof. In my interviews with the homeworkers, they complained of the indifference of the unionists both at the company level and at the district level. Likewise, in every meeting I had with unionists, the discourse on homeworkers was almost absent, both in daily conversations and in official union meetings.

The SPN union only raised the issue of homeworkers on a large scale during a major demonstration in 2013 led by the Catur leadership (see earlier in this chapter). This issue was a part of a package of demands of various issues, particularly wage increases for all categories of workers at Tapak Company. However, the issue of homeworkers was only a minor concern. Furthermore, it was not supported by much interaction between the unionists and the homeworkers, even while the issue was raised in the protest actions. Wani told me that he had discussed homeworkers' rights with SPN leaders at the provincial level during an official meeting, but there were no concrete follow-up actions at the district and company level. This effort was further hindered when the company laid off a number of active unionists following the demonstration.

After the management of the union changed and a new organisation called KSPN emerged due to union split, the issue of homeworkers was once again neglected. When I attended the annual general meeting of union members (*rakerta*) in May 2015, there was no discussion about home-based workers. The discourse revolved solely around permanent workers and union members. The issue of short-contract workers and casual workers was even only mentioned briefly. Unionists at the factory and regional levels perceived the home-based workers simply as a category set by the company's management, namely, the partners (*mitra*). Consequently, the unionists excluded the home-based workers from potential constituencies of the trade union. The dominant discourse of SPN and KSPN only revolved around wages and formal institutions, as previously explained in this chapter. Even if they discussed the issues of employment

status, such as the rejection of outsourced labour and excessive use of contract labour, home-based work outside factories was not a central concern.

The focus on wages and neglect of other critical issues demonstrates how union leaders have failed to grasp the social relations of the production system. While informal women leaders among home-based workers, such as Wani and Wulan, had recognised the significance of their job position in the production system and the potential for resistance, union leaders lacked the same perception. Across different levels and hierarchies, the unionists failed to perceive the underlying structure of production relations which was concealed by company's narratives, discourses and concept of partners. Instead, the unionists and factory workers reinforced the company's narratives about the irrelevance of the workplace arena beyond the factory walls - in the community and the household.

A new understanding about the home-based labour began to emerge among a small circle of union leaders at the factory level, when TURC, a labour NGO from Jakarta, held a union-workshop on this issue in mid-2015. The NGO introduced the notion on the linkages between production structures and the labour process in home-based labour, which assist them to uncover the real social and economic relations of this work. While this step was undoubtedly useful in making a small breakthrough for the relationship between the unionists and the home-based workers, it does not improve significantly the existing problem of the lack of representation. The union's shift in attitude towards home-based workers has been facing both internal and external constraints. Internally, it was constrained by the traditional union activism model that emphasises factory-workplace issues, which has been firmly established and institutionalised. It is also worth noting that it is also a legacy of the past corporatist-union tradition perpetuated by most union leaders at both the corporate and regional levels. Externally, the company's tendency to maintain a decentralised production strategy is a significant constraint. Decentralisation is a favourable form of labour control that was supported by local governments.[148]

148 Local NGO activists described that Semarang manpower office officials used the language that aligned with company management, referring to homeworkers as *partners*, instead of home workers. I witnessed this first-hand during a dialogue meeting between NGO activists and the local government at the provincial level, where the officials seemed hesitant to acknowledge the existence of these homeworkers. They cited the national regulations as preventing an explicit recognition (Observation 6 May 2015 at the meeting between NGOs and Askesra [Assistant to Governor on People Welfare at the Central Java Province]).

Filling this representation gap, NGOs played a critical role in advocating for home-based workers. They provided trainings, organised meetings, conducted research projects, engaged in dialogues with local governments, and encouraged union involvement. The International Labour Organisation (ILO), TURC (Trade Union Right Centre) based in Jakarta, and some other organisations had also entered into this area in Semarang. Among these organisations, Yasanti has had the longest and most intensive engagement with home-based workers. It has been working on this issue in Semarang since 2008, and its most significant contribution has been to raise awareness about the precarious position of home-based workers, to identify potential leaders, to build a workers' identity, and to assist them to legal recognition.[149] Although the Tapak's home-based workers were not the only group of beneficiaries, they were the largest group that Yasanti has supported.

Yasanti's interaction with Tapak's homeworkers began through their acquaintance with Wani, a former factory worker who switched to working from home after being retrenched. This marked the beginning of Yasanti's shift in focus from factory workers, which had begun from 1982, to the issue of homeworkers. Since then, Yasanti's activities have received positive responses from home-based workers in local villages, which enabled the organisation to identify potential leaders.

This organisation provided support by organising workers' meetings, which were aimed at workers from various companies, including Tapak's homeworkers. Some groups continued to hold their own internal gatherings. For example, some workers from a sporting goods factory preferred to have periodic *arisan* meetings.[150] However, the most important consolidated meetings among Tapak's workers took place on the day of distribution. These meetings were held

149 The foundation of Yasanti in Semarang is a response to the region's industrialisation (Istiatun and Khasanah 2011, 35-49). While Yasanti's activities on homeworkers may be relatively recent, but the organisation has been advocating for groups of women industrial workers in the Semarang area since 1982. Yasanti's presence in Yogyakarta also traces back to the same year. Despite being a small organisation managed by a woman activist and supported by only 4-5 other activists with loose ties, Yasanti has successfully forged collaborations local union leaders and other NGOs and donor institutions.

150 *Arisan* is a traditional gathering activity that holds various meanings depending on cultural context and social class, influencing its function, purpose and resources. Typically attended by adult women, especially those who are already working or married, *arisan* involves regularly collecting funds from each member and then circulating them on rotation. The gathering serves not only a means to poll funds but also a platform for socialisation and fostering a sense of togetherness and cohesion among members based on shared identity, whether it is territorial or based on other social bonds.

informally in places such as village offices and Tapak's factory, where workers exchanged information and encouraged negotiations, while waiting for the inspection process and taking on additional tasks. Sometimes, Yasanti activists visited these meetings to discuss and observe.

Despite difficulties in maintaining routine meetings due to timing issues, the informal leaders of the workers and the Yasanti activists still found them valuable for sharing their complaints and expectations with grassroots workers. The activists played an important role in these meetings by educating workers about their legal rights and encouraging collective awareness of shared challenges. The meetings also aimed to identify informal representatives who could bring workers' complaints to quality control officers, line leaders, and even company managers.[151]

NGOs took strategic steps to build networks with other groups and organisations that have greater influence. This activity was carried out by various organisations at the local, national, and international levels, with Yasanti often playing a major and sustainable role. In collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and European NGOs, these organisations brought the issue of home-based labour into wider public policy discourses, at both the national and international levels. Some activists also engaged in dialogues with local governments at the provincial level, together with representatives of home-based workers from various regions, to push for legal recognition of the homeworkers.



Photo 10: Home-based workers participating in 2015 International Labour Day (May Day) celebrations in Semarang with the support of a local NGO.

151 The workers' complaints can pertain to various aspects of their work, such as the work or production process, wages, and treatment from quality control officers or supervisors. The issues raised by the workers include sewing needle damage, difficulty in stitching new shoe materials, non-existent repair fees, and undue pressure from line-leaders that is considered unjust by the homeworkers.

On one hand, the steps taken by NGO activists provided hope to homeworkers for more favourable possibilities. However, as they expanded the networks and mobilised wider external resources, the situation became more complicated, causing concerns and tensions among various groups of workers as well as the activists. For instance, workers realised that the steps taken by NGOs in collaboration with the ILO to bring their issues into public policy discourse might directly impact them (ILO/MAMPU 2015). Some workers were also concerned about the NGO activists pressuring Tapak companies by involving international NGOs, causing some home-based worker leaders to feel alienated and raising concerns of unintended impacts, such job loss. Meanwhile, workers and some other NGO activists preferred approaches directly involving immediate authorities, such as initiating dialogues with the Central Java provincial government. The divergent approaches among NGOs not only created confusion and alienation among home-based workers, but also sparked rivalries among several NGO activists competing the most effective strategy.

Until the end of this field research, there have been no significant changes in the situations faced by home-based workers, who continued to work in precarious conditions without effective representation to make their voices heard. Instead of being able to unite into an organisation with the support of NGO activists, they found themselves entangled in patronage conflicts with different NGO activists, leading to divisions among their informal leaders. This vulnerable condition led to further fragmentation among the workers in the grass roots.

Summary

This chapter has underscored that workplace-oriented unionism can extend beyond the confines of traditional understandings of industrial workplace, such as factories. It has demonstrated how such unions can find themselves engaging with industries that include home-based work which have been integrated into the social fabric of homes and communities. The exclusion of spaces beyond the conventional workplace by these unionists reveals the power relations inherent in defining the workplace. The deliberate separation of home-based workers from factories, designed to maximise capital accumulation, highlights an unequal power structure where unionists and even factory workers are often unaware of the existence of other such categories of workers within the same constituency.

Workplace-oriented unionism also does not imply complete isolation from social and political experiences beyond the conventional workplace. This case study has revealed the involvement of Semarang unionists in electoral political

experiments and community-based advocacy. However, reducing political steps to conventional interests, especially the wage struggle, without understanding broader socio-political foundations undermines their own political endeavours. Failures in electoral experiments and discontinuity in social advocacy programs indicate that the reductionist orientation does not add value to workplace-based struggles.

Thus, the character of workplace unionism is fundamentally shaped by the goals of the struggle and the development of organising culture of union. Many unions with a similar orientation prioritise the so-called 'normative' interests as the core of their movement's goals, highlighting the significant influence of the state in defining workers' and unions' sphere of interests. This, however, also reveals how unionists interpret these ideas separated from the evolving and intricate capital strategies that surpass the 'normative' conception. This suggests that unions, especially those struggling to move beyond the legacies of New Order state corporatism, face difficulties in shedding state hegemony over the labour regime's design. Such unions often become preoccupied with wage issues as the central discourse, neglecting critical attention to subtle capital strategies shaping an increasingly challenging labour structure for unions to organise.

I have shown that the antagonistic relationship between labour and capital, both within the workplace and extending into other aspects of life, is not solely sufficient for building critical awareness about the forms of exclusion and fragmentation among workers created by capital. My findings show that conflicts in the workplace generate varying levels of awareness among different groups of workers and unionists. The accumulation of conflict experience is crucial, particularly evident among home-based worker leaders and certain critical young unionists. However, senior workers or those occupied solely within the factory environment, distancing themselves from critical groups outside the labour movement, exhibit a different perspective.

PART III PEKALONGAN: UNIONS, WORKERS AND COMMUNITIES

Chapter 5
Industrial Working-class in an Urbanised-Economy

Introduction

The industrial city of Pekalongan presents a different landscape from Semarang. Unlike Semarang, where globally recognised company names are displayed on boards in front of large and modern factories, are concentrated in a specific area, Pekalongan's industrial scene is more dispersed. In this city, the majority of the factories are spread out over a larger area and are integrated into the densely populated residential areas in the eastern and northern sectors of the city. Small-scale home industries are scattered throughout the city's kampungs. Workers in uniforms traverse the entry and exit points of factories, but their numbers do not seem as numerous as those in Semarang. In contrast to Semarang's larger factories, Pekalongan's industry consists mainly of small and medium-scale enterprises with smaller labour force.[152] Despite these characteristics, Pekalongan remains an industrial city, with a longer history of industrialisation than that of Semarang. Its historical significance has deeply influenced the city's social structure and culture, transcending the smaller size of its industrial labour force.

This chapter describes the specific context that has shaped the dynamics of working class and labour movement in the city. The central question of this chapter: how have the social conditions within the city been constructed throughout an extensive historical trajectory marked by shifts in political and economic regimes, which have then contributed to the establishment of a social ground on which local labour movements have cultivated as detailed in the forthcoming chapter?

152 Industries were also scattered in the regency separated from the city. They were almost twice as big as those in the city of Pekalongan. However, they were generally small-scale industries with a small number of employees. In fact, comparatively speaking, the number of workers in the two regions were still much smaller than that of labour in Semarang. Over the past three years, it has only accounted for less than 35% of the total workforce in Semarang. For almost a decade, from 2008 to 2016, the number of industries and workers in both Pekalongan's regions was relatively stagnant, even slightly decreased. It was different from the industrial and the workforce growth in Semarang, which increased rapidly in the same period. (See figures A1 and A2 in the appendix).

The first part of this chapter explains the historical roots of the formation of the urban industrial working-class. Despite changes in the industrial economy from the colonial era to the present, the social structure and culture of the working class have been passed down from generation to generation. The second part of the chapter discusses the development of the working class in relation to the growth of urban industrial economy, which largely depends on domestic markets and production chains, while also being influenced by the dynamics of the global economy. The following two sections focus on the emergence of working-class organisations, which development coincided with political changes in the city during the Reformation era. This provides the context for understanding how the region provides political opportunities for unions and labour activists to extend their activism beyond the workplace.

5.1. The emergence of industrial workers

The introduction of the industrial economy into the social life of Pekalongan began in the mid-19th century. Two sectors that drove this transformation were sugar and textile production. Sugar industrialisation was initiated by the Dutch Governor-General Van den Bosch in 1830, employing the *cultuurstelsel* (cultivation) economic system, which forced indigenous cultivation of sugar cane plantations for pro-colonial sugar manufacturing (Wasino and Hartatik 2017, 40). Unlike the textile industry that emerged afterward and continues to develop today, the sugar industry in Pekalongan declined after the end of Dutch colonialisation. Nevertheless, the sugar industry has laid an important historical foundation for the emergence of industrial labour force in the region.[153]

The advent of the sugar industry and sugar cane plantations in Pekalongan, including other regions in central and eastern Java, marked the integration of local economy into the international economic order in the colonial era (Sulistyo 1995, 10-30). Its presence was driven by the Netherlands' need to generate more revenue to overcome the domestic economic crisis and secure a prominent role in the increasingly competitive European markets. Sugar became one of the strategic commodities in the markets. Through a coercive *cultuurstelsel* system, the Dutch colonial state assumed the central role in managing directly the economic

153 The literatures of the history on socio-economic structures and social movements that arose in Pekalongan during the colonial era generally present the heyday of the sugar production economy. The works of Knight (1993) and Lucas (2019), for instance, show the enormous influence of the revival of the industry at that time, especially in the Residency of Pekalongan. Meanwhile, literatures on the rise of the textile industry generally represent studies of postcolonial Indonesian economic development, as found in the works of Achwan (2011), Chotim (1994), and Wasino and Hartatik (2017).

production of colonial regions. Native farmers were forced to convert their rice fields into sugarcane fields for leasing and periodically submitted the yields to the colonial government at low prices (Knight 1993). Thanks to the expansion of plantation, this system resulted in a substantial capital accumulation for the Netherlands, making Java one of the world's second largest sugar producers after Cuba in the first two decades of the 20th century.[154]

The practice of the *cultuurstelsel* system in regards to sugar production, as a form of state monopoly capitalism, intensely transformed the social structure of Pekalongan. The system shifted the production relations of farmers from being independent food producers to becoming industrial plantation labourers working on their own lands for the Dutch (Wasino and Hartatik 2017, 37-47; Cahyono 2001, 91-93). Through collaboration with the European and the Chinese owners of sugar factories processing plantation products, the Dutch colonisers controlled the entire production chain – from agricultural land to factory processes – along with European market channels (Sulistyo 1995, 29). Local feudal lords, known as *Bupati*, who were indigenous employers and competitors in the same sector, were gradually displaced from their production base through colonial political pressures. They were even incorporated into the colonial production structure by being placed in charge of the production of plantation (Wasino and Hartatik 2017, 43-44).[155]

This process of capital accumulation mobilised extensively indigenous people, compelling thousands of labourers in Pekalongan, including those employed in sugar factories, to engage in the system (Sulistyo 1995, 25-30). This growth created a massive proletarianisation of indigenous people. The exploitation subjected workers and farmers to extreme poverty, significantly impacting the socio-economic life of sugar plantations and factories in Pekalongan, including other regions in central and east Java. The oppression ignited immediately widespread collective resistance, ranging from small scale protests to strikes and volent uprisings, like the murder of the Dutch in Pekalongan in 1864 (Lucas 2019, 3).

154 Until the first decade of early 20th century, there had been 17 sugar factories established in Pekalongan (Lucas 2019)

155 Heads of villages and districts were also often part of Dutch colonial production regime as they expropriated people's lands and earned income from the colonial government by tenancy. The *cultuurestelsel* excluded the ordinary people from their own economic resources and increased segregation between the people and the local feudal.

Despite the Ethical Policy launched by the Dutch in 1901 to curb excessive state exploitation in the colonies (see Chapter 2), social conditions in the sugar industry saw minimal change. Labour exploitation persisted as the management of sugar industry shifted from the state control to private hands. Poverty remained prevalent following the development of the sugar industry across Java. The Ethical Policy, on the one hand, highlighted the effects of proletarianisation on the segregation of social classes intersecting with racial identities. The social hierarchy ranged from indigenous landless farmers and factory workers and land tenant farmers as the lowest social class. Above them were indigenous people who held higher feudal positions, while Chinese entrepreneurs held privileged positions, and Europeans occupied the highest social positions.

The Ethical Policy, on the other hand, also provided a political opportunity that transformed violent social conflicts into widespread uprisings, fostering the emergence of movements organised by the Islamic association, *Serikat Islam* (Islamic Union), both its right and left wings (see chapters 2 and 3). The movements were inspired by the influence of the Dutch leftists advocating for a class based anti-colonial resistance that spread in Pekalongan and various regions in central and east Java.[156] Lucas (2019, 36) has argued that the proletarianisation of the labour population and this organised resistance, played crucial role in shaping the character of Pekalongan's militant working class, despite the movements failing to establish sustainable political power.[157]

As the dominance of the sugar industry in Pekalongan waned with the decline of the Dutch colonial era, the development of textile industries, particularly in batik making, began to replace economic dominance. Although batik making had been present in this region since the mid-1800s (Savirani 2015: 92-93), the rapid growth of these industries gradually changed the regional socio-economic structure (Wasino and Hartatik 2017: 171-181). The ethical policy, in this context, provided an opportunity for the collaboration between the European bourgeoisie and local businessmen in this sector (Achwan 2011).[158] The introduction of new

156 Sarekat Islam was often generally divided into two groups: the rightist led by Cokroaminoto and the leftist led by Semaun. In Pekalongan, the left Sarekat Islam formed Sarekat Rakyat (People's Union) which led resistances and rebellions in sugar cane plantations and sugar factories.

157 Lukas intriguingly demonstrates that the revolutionary consciousness of the oppressed class in the colonial era was not solely constructed from social conflicts in colonial and racist production relations. It also emerged through cultural elements, including the introduction of egalitarian language used overtly as a tool of class resistance, the portrayal of leftist leaders in puppetry, the incorporation of Islamic values into leftist doctrines and political discussions, and the creation of traditional songs that encapsulated resistance to oppression and colonialism (Lucas 2019, 230-241).

158 Textile products had existed in Pekalongan since 18th century when the local middle class the colonial

weaving machine technology by the Dutch colonial administration marked a significant milestone for the emergence of textile factories run by the indigenous middle class, enhancing production capacity (Achwan 2011).

Initially, the bourgeoisie, comprising individuals from various cultural backgrounds such as Chinese, Arab, and local indigenous middle class, reaped benefits from collaborating with Dutch entrepreneurs in developing the batik economy. However, a notable shift occurred, transferring the dominant position to indigenous entrepreneurs affiliated to Islamic associations when the Japanese took over colonial rule from the Dutch. Under the Japanese colonial regime, these Muslim entrepreneurs took control over textile production and markets (Achwan 2011, 38-40).

Despite the brief period of Japanese occupation (1942-1945), the Muslim bourgeoisie maintained their dominance as Indonesia gained independence on 17th August 1945. In the early independence period, their influence even expanded, attributed to the economic protectionism policies of the young and nationalistic Indonesian government, aimed at dismantling socio-economic colonial legacies (Achwan 2011, 48). This policy was intended to protect indigenous entrepreneurs from the dominance of Chinese-descent's businesses, who had been accused of leveraging the Dutch colonial regime to control access to production raw materials since the era of the sugar industry (Savirani 2015, 94; Achwan 2011, 57).[159]

The protectionist policies spurred the growth of the textile industry in Pekalongan and other textile-producing areas in Java (Setia 2013, 303), becoming a crucial source of livelihood for the local population. Jobs in batik-making, involving weaving and other manual labour, including the lowest category of labour, such as coolies, were in high demand. Before the New Order came to power and established a state-bureaucratic hegemony over national socio-economic life, working in the batik industry held a higher level of respect than civil service (Achwan 2011). Some individuals today still recall how their parents would

Dutch collaborated in the production (Savirani 2015). VOC, the Dutch multinational company, sought to monopolise the commodity of batik by producing and expanding its trade in Europe in 17th Century, however it ended with failure for poor quality and lack of attractiveness in European markets (Boow 1988).

159 Nevertheless, Achwan has written: "Ironically, the ethnic Chinese, who were politically and economically cornered by the Sukarno government, managed to consolidate their capital and emerged as members of the elite circle towards the end of era. The Chinese ability to enter the power elite has been considered as an important precondition for the growth of Chinese conglomerates in the present Suharto period" (Achwan 2011, 41-42).

threaten to marry them off to civil servants if they did not obey their parents' orders.[160] While employment in batik-making improved the socioeconomic status of the urban middle class, the income that it generated was often limited to sustaining the daily lives of the working class. The abundance of jobs in this industry, however, did serve as a preventive measure against long-term unemployment.

The contrast between the social conditions of the textile industry and that of the sugar industry raises the question of whether severe social unrest similarly appeared in the textile industry. It is hard to find historical records of the extent to which social unrests, radical resistance, and working-class consciousness in the heyday of the colonial sugar industry permeated the lives of workers in textile industry in Pekalongan both in the colonial era and the postcolonial periods. This difficulty parallels the scarcity of studies outlining the massive transfer of farmers and workers from the declining sugar economy, especially to other economic sectors like textile production, after the end of Dutch colonialism. Most historical records and social studies of Pekalongan textile industry are dedicated to the organisation of production in textile economy and the bourgeoisie class. (Achwan 2011; Chotim 1994; Wasino and Hartatik 2017).

Some studies suggest that the absence of marked social unrest in the traditional textile industry, predominantly in batik production, can be explained by the typical structure and culture of production relations in this sector. In batik production, the family plays an essential role in shaping production relations, with industrial labour frequently comprising family members, and sometimes even having familial ties to the employers (Achwan 2011, 101-102; Chotim 1994, 59-63). The personal social relations embedded within these production relations differ from the structure of relations in textile factories in West Java, which rarely rely on kinship or family relations (Setia 2013)(Tossin and S 1979). Such social relations in Pekalongan might significantly contribute to reducing potential conflicts, explaining why radical consciousness and leftist movements of the sugar industry did not extend to the working class in the traditional textile industry.

During the New Order era, the likelihood of conflicts was even smaller, given the state oppression of labour movements. Thus, it was not only the social and cultural elements within the traditional textile industries that kept Pekalongan workers relatively calm in the field of industrial relations, but also political

160 My own field note of 15 October 2010 from previous research: taken from my conversation with Amin, the chair of Pattiro branch of Pekalongan, a branch NGO on local budget advocacy.

silencing by authoritarian state. Some studies have pointed out that textile and garment industries, across regions, actually enjoyed the export-oriented economy endorsed by the state policy during the eighties. However, there had been extensive criticism of the increasing gap between the economic gains of the sector and the distributive advantages that the workers were supposed to enjoy as the real everyday producers. The New Order's cheap labour policy combined with the political silencing led to workers marginalisation (see Chapter 2). As the New Order's authoritarian regime approached its end in the nineties, the heyday of textile economy gradually declined due to increased international market competition (Achwan 2011; Wibisono 1989). This placed workers in a more vulnerable condition. It also cultivated growing discontents, however, creating potential for transformation into resistance under changing political regime.

5.2. Industrial workers in an urbanised economy

After the fall of the authoritarian New Order in May 1998, Indonesia experienced another stage of economic transformation. During this time Pekalongan's economic structure became more complex. The post-authoritarian regime's extensive liberalisation policies opened the door to new investments from various regions, including foreign investments (Savirani 2015: 84-85). While domestic capital remains dominant and textile industries continue to play a crucial role to Pekalongan's economy, this city has developed into a modern urban economy characterised by diverse economic sectors. Traditional economies coexist with modern textile and garment production, food manufacturing industries, and various modern service sectors such as trade and finance.

The city currently displays a more diverse physical landscape. Approaching the city centre from the west side, three-star modern hotels line the road near the old Dutch colonial-era train station. On the opposite side, there is the prominent Sri Ratu department store which was founded by Chinese- Indonesian entrepreneurs from Semarang. Other significant stores surround the city square. Slightly to the south is Carrefour, a large supermarket under French license established in the early 2000s. Various hotels, banks, smaller franchised supermarkets, restaurants, and company offices are scattered along the main roads connecting to the provincial roads in the north coast. Factories are dispersed in different parts of the city. Along the north coast, canned seafood factories established by South Korean investors coexist with the villages of fishers, whose fresh fish supply chains are crucial for these companies. Medium-scale textile and garment factories, established by local Chinese descents since the New Order era, are

located in the centre and east, while both medium and small-scale factories are integrated with residential areas.[161]

While various service sectors have expanded gradually, the development of manufacturing industries, particularly in textile production, have grown only slowly. Following the fall of the New Order's economic forces, the democratically elected governments have enthusiastically expanded national economic liberalisation, intensifying competition in textile production. Small-scale industries, especially in batik textile and garment production, faced tight competition with large-scale producers from other cities in Central Java, particularly Yogyakarta and Solo, which dominate major batik markets in Indonesia. Although Pekalongan producers managed to survive, they could not compete as strongly as during the previous golden era of protectionism. The situation became even more pressuring for large-scale non-batik textile industries, especially after Indonesia, within the ASEAN framework, agreed to implement the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) in 2010.[162] Domestic markets and production in textile and garment continued to decline (Satya 2018, 18-19).

The burden even increased due to the lack of government's protection of the sustainability of the local production. Local entrepreneurs in non-batik textile production, with limited capital for technological modernisation and transformative management capacity (Satya 2018, 26), the invasion of low-price China's products, narrowing their market niches (see Photo 11). Consequently, some producers are slowly forced to streamline their workforce to reduce economic burdens. Between 2009-2014, several medium and large companies shut down their factories as they could no longer survive in the competition (see also Chapter 6). This stagnation made the situation of textile industries in Pekalongan somewhat less positive when compared to other cities in the Central Java. Since the decline of Suharto's economic policiies, there has been no significant increase of new textile factories. Moreover, some large industries, such as canned seafood factories, which had opportunities to grow in the first

161 The Central Bureau of Statistics defines a large-scale industry as an enterprise with at least one hundred workers; while, a medium-scale industry is a business with twenty up to ninety-nine workers; and small-scale industry is the one with five to nineteen workers, and home industry is smaller than small-scale industry. while the ministry of Industry, Trade, Cooperative, Small-medium scale enterprises (ITCS) make definition based on the scale of investment. The large-scale industry refers to enterprises which has at least five billion Rupiah investment, the medium scale refers to those with two hundred million to less than five billion Rupiah, and small industry are those with smaller investment.

162 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Countries) and China agreed to implement the ACFTA in 2010, and Indonesia ratified the agreement in 2011. (see https://kemlu.go.id/index.php/portal/id/read/118/halaman_list_lainnya/kerjasama-asean-dan-mitra-wicara#!).

decade, began to face economic threats, particularly after the government policies that prohibited massive fishing at sea, resulting in disruption of production.[163]

This slow growth in Pekalongan had raised concerns among locals regarding its impact on the decline in job opportunities.[164] This city alone has smaller labour force than other industrial regions in Central Java such as Sukoharjo, Kudus, Semarang.[165] Even when combined with the number of workers in Pekalongan Regency, they remain the smallest.[166] This contrasts with the labour population in Semarang (Regency) which is much larger and continues to rise with the development of the industrial economy.



Photo 11: A female worker operates a weaving machine at a textile factory in Pekalongan. The industry faces significant pressure to compete in the market due to outdated technology.

163 In order to save the environmental habitat of ocean, the ministry of Maritime and Fishery banned the use of large fishing boat, called *cantrang* (https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2015/02/24/183642526/NaN). While securing the environmental sustainability, it created a pressure on maritime industrial chains, threatening the unemployment of among others the labour of canned fish factories.

164 This sluggish growth is seen from the number of industries, its contribution to the urban economic, and its employment capacity to absorb the labour (see figure A.2 and A.3. in the Appendix)

165 Workers in this case refers to those who are working in establishments. This is categorically more specific than the labour force which covers all categories of labour, including those who are working independently as individual free lancers, or working in informal economy like street vendors.

166 The combined population of Pekalongan City and Regency surpasses that of Sukoharjo, Kudus, and Semarang Regency. Nonetheless, the number of workers who worked in establishment remains the smallest. The gap between size of population and the workers might shows that a considerable portion of workforce in Pekalongan is engaged in informal economy without any formal establishment. There is no reliable data on the existence of this economy. However, the economy appears vividly in the everyday life of people in the city. Every morning street vendors almost everywhere open stalls selling foods, drinks, cigarettes and any personal needs. They close during the day and open again in the afternoon to late night.

The local government's statistics of 2012 indicate that the population of industrial workers in Pekalongan covered 69.5% of the total workforce of the region.[167] However, nearly 74% were workers in small industries, most of which are not strongly linked to the production chain of the larger industrial economic structure - especially the modern factories. Most of the workers are casual labour without any written contracts, with high labour turnover (Chotim 1994, 50). On the other hand, those working in large and medium-scale modern manufacturing industries constitute only around 25% of the industrial workforce. This number has even stagnated for nearly two decades. There are only five large enterprises each employing only hundreds of workers and rarely recruiting new labourers. Small increase occurred only in middle to lower scale enterprises employing short-term contract workers.

The working classes in Pekalongan can be divided into two categories – those who are employed in modern large enterprises and those who are in traditional small establishments. This creates a dual labour market. The life of a few large and modern establishments in the textile industry of Pekalongan runs alongside hundreds of traditional small industries without stable institutionalised linkages between them. The chains of production primarily circulate only between the same small-scale establishments, except for the supply of undyed clothes from factories to the batik industries (Achwan 2011, 58-60). Large and medium-sized companies, especially those in textiles, send their products to broader markets and do not primarily rely on local batik producers. The chains of production are relatively separable, relying on broader labour markets.

Large companies usually recruit workers who have graduated from junior or senior high school for operator positions and a smaller portion of workers who have graduated from universities for upper positions such as supervisors or administrative personnel in management.[168] These workers are generally employed on permanent or short-term contracts, subject to minimum wage regulations, and other protection systems such as social insurance, severance pay, and trade union membership. This contrasts with the conditions in small textile industries, which generally involve informal work relations with thousands of unskilled casual labourers, using piece-rate and an informal wage system, excluded from the minimum wage system and standard labour protection. The

167 Kota Pekalongan dalam Angka, Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Pekalongan 2012, 62.

168 The Young generation was no longer interested to maintain their work in Batik industries as their parents did in the past. Most of them were interested more to work in the factories as they offered better wages than working in traditional industries (Chotim 1994, 49-50)

recruitments in small establishments often rely on interpersonal relationships between relatives and friends.



Photo 12: A traditional labour market in the district of Buaran, Pekalongan. Young men predominantly occupy the roadside, awaiting offers for short-term jobs typically found in home industries

The small establishments producing batik depend on the availability of unskilled labour for manual work from the daily labour market. This labour market is a real market in the district of Buaran, where young people, mostly men, sit on the roadside, waiting for the others to offer short-term jobs (see Photo 12). This differs from the canned fished industry in the north coast. The Korean-owned modern production relies on the economy of the fishers' small-scale businesses. However, both have completely different labour markets. Similar to textile factories, canned fish factories also use formal labour, rely on formal recruitment with written contract and follows national labour regulations; while the economic life of the industry's workers range from fully informal to semi-formal business.

Beyond the segmented labour markets, another informally traditional labour market intersected with the labour market of the modern large and medium companies. Known as *Pasar Tiban*, this long-existing informal market consists of street vendors in Pekalongan selling daily household and personal needs, including affordable foods. This non-taxed market operates only in the afternoon to evening, utilising pedestrian streets or one-third sections of the roads in several districts of Pekalongan City. Since the early 2000s, this market has served as a crucial safety valve for laid-off industrial workers (see Chapter

6). During unemployment, they spent severance payments to sell goods on the side of roads. Some of them stay on the roads for an extended period, others view it as a transitional phase before securing a new job, and the rest are active employed workers seeking additional income. Thus, in recent years, this market has played a significant role in labour market circulation in the formal economy—not only for accommodating laid-off workers but also as a support system against low wages and limited wage increases amid continuous economic pressures in Pekalongan.

While wages in Pekalongan are not the lowest in the Province of Central Java, they rank the lowest among the major industrial regions in this province.[169] In 2013, the minimum wage in Pekalongan was 980,000 Rupiah (60 Euro) per month, whereas the Semarang Regency had reached a higher figure, of 1.051 million Rupiah (65 Euro) per month. Despite a 53% increase in the minimum wage in Pekalongan in 2016, it did not change Pekalongan's position relative to Semarang.



Photo 13: Colouring is a fundamental step in batik making, often performed by casual labourers who receive low wages in doing so.

The minimum wage serves as a vital benchmark for workers to assess the extent to which they can cope with economic burdens. The capacity is particularly limited for new employees, as most companies seldom pay them more than

169 See further Provinsi Jawa Tengah dalam Angka, Badan Pusat Statistik, 2015.

the minimum level, considering it a "standard normal wage" rather than a real minimum requirement. Similarly, longer-employed workers also experience only small increases in their wages. The more precarious condition is felt among workers in small-scale industries in Pekalongan, where most establishments follow an informal employment system instead of complying with national standard regulations.[170] Analysing the trend of the minimum wage for nearly a decade since 2009, the minimum wage in Pekalongan consistently remains lower than that of Semarang. Although the trend indicates annual increases, the gap between both regions is progressively widening. This emphasises the limited capacity of businesses in Pekalongan to implement significant wage increases and other welfare incentives, such as increases in transportation fees and overtime pay.

Unions in Pekalongan face significant challenges in advocating for wage increases and other welfare benefits. The fluctuation of annual minimum wage growth in Pekalongan over nearly a decade is more dynamic than the relatively linear increase observed in Semarang (see figure A.4 in the Appendix). This reflects the intense contestation between employers and workers in Pekalongan. While employers strive to reduce production costs due to increasing market pressures, particularly in textile production, workers fight to ensure that annual minimum wage increases surpass the standard of Decent Living Needs (KHL). The statistics from 2009 to 2018 reveal only marginal increases in the minimum wage each year. Unions and workers persistently pressure the local government to establish a higher minimum wage, despite resistance from employers.

Wage issues often lead to prolonged labour disputes between workers and employers, and these disputes, in turn, can result in mass layoffs, sparking broader industrial conflicts. Local statistics and newspapers from 2009 to 2015 indicate that disputes related to layoffs were even more prevalent than wage disputes. In some instances, these disputes were triggered by company shutdowns, as employers found it economically unviable to continue under increased market pressures. Since 2009, workers demonstrations have occurred at numerous companies. One of the most significant cases was the dispute at the Mujatex textile factory, which laid off more than nine hundred workers at once in 2010 (see also Chapter Six). Another notable case involved the sackings at Sri Ratu, a large local department store that continued to incur losses and could not withstand the competition from larger-capital competitors with

170 For example, a worker in the lowest hierarchy in batik production, like 'buruh keceh' (manual cloth-colouring labourer), is paid on a daily basis, earning 40 thousand Rupiah (2.4 Euro) per day for only a one to two-week informal employment contract.

modern management from Jakarta like Borobudur Department Store, Matahari Department Store, or foreign franchise companies like Carrefour Supermarket. These cases began in 2010 and concluded in 2015 with corporate shutdowns and the layoffs of hundreds of workers (see also Chapter 6). Similar cases occurred during the years, including disputes in textile factories like the Retota Case, as well as in other factories such as Blue Sea, Maya Food, etc. (see Chapter 6).

5.3. Labour movements and social unrests

Local labour disputes ignited by wages and layoffs often led to intense labour unrests. The local statistics recorded at least 68 cases of industrial disputes involving 4,701 workers between 2009 and 2011.[171] The disputes involved various organised actions, either on a massive scale or orchestrated by small groups. Demonstrations took place in factory yards, on the streets, in front of government offices or the local parliament building. The workers and unions also engaged in blockading the North Coast highway in 2013 to demand minimum wage increase.

The mass actions were not just response to disputes; they were also attempts to show their collective force to entrepreneurs, local governments and the public. Some workers' collective actions even expanded beyond traditional labour issues as they joined the social protests organised by local coalitions of various groups in the grass-roots. These protests addressed issues like electricity tariff increases and street vendors' rights in 2016. The workers also joined a peasant's rally in 2012 that was followed almost a thousand participants, protesting the land appropriation, in Batang, the neighbouring regency. Their engagements indicated the diverse interest of their activism (see further Chapter Six). Workers also held public demonstrations as a means to publicise their situation. Street actions organised by workers captured local people's attention and media coverage, presenting the Pekalongan workers in front of the locals as more "radical" compared to local religious movements.[172] Thus, the workers' public exposures both on the streets and the media have created accumulation of

171 Not all disputes led to strikes. Only specific disputes triggered mass strikes. However, there are no reliable official statistical records on the strikes. Most information about strikes were collected from the local mass media which covered extensively such events.

172 A correspondent journalist from a national private TV broadcasting station shared insights how the locals compared a local militant union with FPI (Islamic Defenders Front) which was notoriously considered radical. He said, "FPI might be powerful in Jakarta and people are often afraid of them. But here, the SPN is more powerful than FPI". In conversation with a local correspondent of RCTI on 5 June 2010

knowledge among the locals not only about workers as labour but a local active social movement.

Although the number of workers involved was smaller than those in traditional small industries, the workers in modern and larger companies played a crucial role in organising local workers' movements. Trade unions at these modern companies, particularly the two major ones in the city, SPSI and SPN, were key players in organising protests and demanding pro-labour policies and working conditions. While SPSI, the larger organisation, displayed less militancy in collective actions; the newer organisation, SPN, born in the era of reformation, in contrast, took a more active role in workers' actions.

Similar with the union development in Semarang (see chapters 3 and 4), the emergence of this new labour union in Pekalongan was influenced by changes at the national level. The split of the old SPSI during the early reformation period paved the way for new organisations, with SPN having the most significant opportunity to grow in the city. Enabled by the large number of textile workers within SPSI during the authoritarian regime, they became the embryo of this new organisation in the democratic era. Starting first with SPTSK-Reformasi as the new union in 2000, it evolved further into SPN in 2003.

The membership of SPN in Pekalongan, although initially dominated by textile workers, gradually diversified with workers from food industries and various service sectors joining. As of 2009, SPN had a membership of more than 8,000. The educational background of its members slightly varies, with a few holding university degrees, but the majority were high school graduates and lower educational levels. Many SPN members have roots in industrial working-class environments, and some belong to families with a hereditary connection in the batik textile industry, serving as either labourers or batik makers. Despite the absence of social unrest in the batik industry, the dynamics of this economy have exposed modern industrial workers to various issues concerning production relations.

The emergence of SPN broke with the tradition of peaceful negotiations with employers by adopting a contentious bargaining. Since its formation, SPN has played an active role in addressing labour issues, especially wage increase, layoffs, and other grievances. The local tripartite body became an annual arena of contestation as SPN continuously pushed for higher minimum wage demands until the Government Regulation no.78 (PP.78) of the Central Government

curtailed their aggressiveness, undermining the negotiation system in minimum wage stipulation. [173]

Nonetheless, the prominence of the Pekalongan labour movements, led by SPN, is not solely attributed to their militancy in the conventional labour issues illustrated earlier, but also recognised for their broadening activism that has been unfolding since the early period of Reformation.[174] While unions elsewhere primarily focused on workplace-based issues, unionists and workers in Pekalongan, extended their activism to address social issues that involve workers' rights as citizens of the city such as public healthcare, urban poverty, and local budget monitoring. The peak of such non-traditional labour activism was their involvement in electoral politics, relying on their own organisation as a political machine. This political experiment began during the General Elections of 2004 and gained increasing boldness in subsequent Elections. As a result, the union's base transformed as its constituency encompassed various groups beyond workplace membership, such as fishers, street vendors, and other local urban poor.

5.4. Labour movements and Urban politics

The character of labour movement in Pekalongan has been shaped not only by the internal organisational development and the local economic structure, but also by its urban politics. As I described previously, Pekalongan had been one of the historical hot spots of social conflicts in central Java since the heyday of the Dutch sugar industry. It is important to note the difficulties in finding sources of the social history of Pekalongan that correlates directly to all tensions spread along a historical time line from the colonial to the post-colonial eras. Nevertheless, Pekalongan stands out as one of the few regions in Central Java labelled '*daerah sumbu pendek'* (literally, a region with short-fuse), prone to socio-political conflicts in the post-colonial periods, particularly during the New Order era (Basyar 2004, 53).

173 Statistics of wage in Pekalongan shows that the minimum wage growth always fluctuated before 2015. However, since the implementation of Government Regulation no.78 of 2015 with mathematical calculation of annual minimum wage decision, the fluctuation disappears and the local wage growth is declining.

174 Top SPN leaders in Semarang admitted humbly the prominence of SPN in Pekalongan, expressing their admiration for the militancy of their fellows in Pekalongan. Despite having small size in membership, they were able to cover various issues and most importantly they had strong bargaining position in dealing with the local governments and local employer association. Interview with Catur 31 March 2015; Sumanta 5 May 2015; Nurdin 12 December 2017

Two significant incidents of violent social conflicts marked the end of the New Order period in Pekalongan. The first, in 1995, involved a racially ethnic clash between Javanese Muslims and Indonesians of Chinese descent. Triggered by a case of religious blasphemy, where a schizophrenic local resident of Chinese descent tore the Qur'an, the incident on November 22, 1995, sparked outrage among Javanese Muslims, leading to a citywide riot two days later. (Rahayu 2016). Indonesian Chinese-owned shops and two large textile factories, Kismatex and Lokatex, were damaged and burned by residents.

The second incident, in 1997, was more extensive and coincided with 28 other riots across Indonesia, signalling heightened national social and political tensions a year before Suharto's fall. The 1997 riots in Pekalongan resulted from fierce competition among political parties during that year's elections. Major riots on March 24 and 26, 1997, during the unofficial campaign period, saw supporters of the Islamic party (PPP) destroying Golkar Party's campaign attributes throughout the city. This led to the destruction of Golkar's political campaign stage, provided by the local Golkar officials for famous a famous artist and a popular preacher sent by the Golkar Central Office in Jakarta to win sympathy for the Islamic base of in Pekalongan. The peak was the destruction of the locals' houses, and the burning of dozens of Indonesian Chinese-owned shops and banks by the Islamic party supporters (Trijono 1997, 28-35).

Despite their brief duration, the two riots are consistently documented as significant socio-political upheavals in the New Order era. They reflect three key aspects: firstly, the enduring socio-political influence of Muslims in the city, a power dynamic established since the Dutch and Japanese colonial eras; secondly, the social tensions mirror the historical structural changes in Pekalongan, involving conflicts among diverse social groups; and thirdly, the transformation of Muslim social forces into political entities, embodied by political parties, underscores the connection between grassroots movements and local political elites.

As I have outlined above, the rise of economic power for the Javanese Muslim middle-class in Pekalongan was propelled by the textile industry's growth following the collapse of the sugar industry and early post-colonial economic protectionism in Indonesia. This transformation not only benefited the local bourgeois middle-class but also extended to business groups of Indonesian Chinese and Arab descent, along with the local working class. The shift occurred gradually as Indonesian Chinese expanded from controlling raw material trade routes for batik cloth production to establishing more extensive batik printing factories (Rahayu 2014). This expansion exerted pressure on the traditional

textile market dominated by hand-written batik products of the local Javanese Muslim group. The resulting competition acc racial sentiments, a phenomenon not unique to Pekalongan but widespread during the New Order era due to the dominance of small groups of Chinese businesses protected by elites (Chong 2018, 36-37). The outbreak of riots in Pekalongan in 1995 reflected this structural tension, manifesting through symbolic processes such as allegations of religious blasphemy.

The flamability of the "short fuse" to explosive reactions emerged two years later during the 1997 General Elections when Muslim groups felt threatened economically and politically at once. The strong political base of Muslims in Pekalongan at the end of the New Order era was undeniable. Despite Golkar undemocratic victories nationwide under the Suharto regime, this political machine failed to secure the winning in Pekalongan in the last two elections in the New Order era: 1992 and 1997 (Trijono 1997, 31). The Golkar party continued to face defeats in Indonesia's first democratic elections in 1999 (Basyar 2004, 51). The 1992 and 1997 elections saw victories for the rival party, PPP, which was supported by the majority of Muslims in Pekalongan primarily organised by Nahdlatul Ulama - the largest local branch Muslim mass organisation.

Significant changes marked Pekalongan's political landscape during Indonesia's democratic. The PPP's initial triumph shifted in the 2004 democratic elections, with Golkar seizing victory by exploiting disruptions in the PPP's base due to political reforms. The PPP, which had been supported the NU base, experienced internal divisions as the effect of the emergence of new Islamic parties. This benefited the "new" Golkar in Pekalongan. Golkar's populist campaign successfully countered the image of Suharto's authoritarianism, attracting votes from the local working-class and urban poor groups who previously supported Islamic Parties (Rahmah 2019). Since then, Golkar has succeeded in regaining control of the political arena in Pekalongan.



Photo 14: During the 2014 Elections, numerous campaign billboards and posters of legislative candidates from various political parties were erected along the roadsides in Pekalongan, indicating intense political competition also for unionists wishing to engage in this event.

Social unrest and political changes in Pekalongan showed how the dynamics of the local economy in Pekalongan did not stand apart from political influences. Muslim bases, especially organised by the NU, played an important role as a symbol of challengers as well as social and strategic political forces to face against the New Order's political and economic power.[175] The strength is also amplified by racial sentiment over the dominance of Indonesian business groups in Pekalongan who generally gave political support to Golkar during the New Order era (Rahayu 2016). However, this local political map has changed significantly in the era of Indonesian democracy (see Photo 14). The Muslim base is no longer monopolised by one political party. In fact, Golkar's populism in the first decade of reform managed to attract widespread support. Muslim groups shared their support for this party. Ideological ties were no longer the only essential political capital. Moreover, the practice of vote buying also influenced the elections in the Indonesian Reform era (Aspinall and Berenschot 2019, 35), excluding the ideological ties for pragmatic relations between constituents and the legislature, leading the Islamic base divided. The former leader of the Pekalongan DPR described this situation by saying, "in this election, an area that has been green [base dominated by PPP] so far could suddenly turn blue [base

175 Despite the lost in undemocratic elections in 1992, 1997, Golkar, in collaboration with military and bureaucracy – known as the ABG coalition [ABRI-Birokrasi-Golkar] remained in power in Pekalongan. The military had a tradition of taking the position as the local major and the chair of parliament was always held by a representative from Golkar.

dominated by new Islamic Political Party, PAN]. The blue one could turn green or red [based dominated by PDIP]".[176]

The shift in the political landscape provides a strategic advantage for local trade unions, particularly SPN, in garnering political support. The internal divisions within local Islamic parties have a limited impact on them, as they were not reliant on these parties. The populist approach of local Golkar party leaders offered an avenue for them to initiate political experiments. Despite the absence of dependency on Islamic parties, personal and group relationships between union leaders and organisations under NU persisted, rooted in traditional connections within Pekalongan's daily life. This situation serves as valuable social capital for expanding union organisations into broader arenas.

Summary

Pekalongan, known for its extensive labour history, has undergone many significant transformations that make it challenging to assert that present-day traditions of labour movement directly replicate historical patterns. The authoritarian rule of the New Order era disrupted radical labour movements, severing connections between the existing movements and those prior to the New Order. Despite extensive labour unrests during the colonial period, their impact on subsequent movements, even during the peak of the textile industry, seems limited.

Nevertheless, Pekalongan's history reveals critical political-economic shifts that influence the current labour movement. Firstly, the economic transformation in Pekalongan, particularly the growth of the textile industries, has established a prolonged concentration of the industrial working class. This has shaped a working-class culture grounded in production-based relations across diverse industries. Industrial works have embedded within their life. However, changes in the industrial economy, especially following a decade of strengthened economic liberalisation post-authoritarian regime, have significantly influenced the local working-class: stimulating increased labour unrests, but also providing opportunities for them to develop responses through alternatives of activism.

The second transformation refers to social developments that shape local political practices. Since the end of Dutch colonialism, Pekalongan has experienced the continuous adaptation of socio-economic and political forces from Muslim groups to changes in national and local political regimes. The process of

176 Interview with Bowo, the chair of DPRD of Pekalongan City, 23 January 2014.

industrialisation has given rise to a robust Muslim middle class and entrepreneurs, but also fostering the flourishing of Islamic traditions as a collective identity – even among the working-class. While social structures have evolved during the Reformation period, these influences persist at the grassroots level, impacting social relations, including the labour movement and its networks, as I discuss further in Chapter 6

Chapter 6
Inclusive Unionism and Fragmented Constituents

Introduction

The Pekalongan branch of SPN is different from the union activism of Semarang. The Pekalongan branch of SPN has actively promoted community-based interests. Their activism includes the formation of diverse coalitions, active engagement in various community groups, intensive interactions with the local polity, and experimentation in electoral politics. This approach aligns with what scholars define as "community unions" (Mollona 2009) (Stewart, et al. 2009), which I discussed in the Introduction. It is not an exhaustive and rigid concept when used to understand union development in Pekalongan. Instead, the emergence of this kind of unionism in this region is a historical product reflecting a transformation from a workplace unionism into a community-oriented one. This transformation was accompanied by numerous challenges.

This chapter explores the union transformation in Pekalongan amid changing local economic and political contexts in the early decade of Indonesian reformation, leading to a community unionism. The chapter discusses the consequences of these changes on the representation relations between the unionists and the increasingly diverse constituents. The first section of this chapter describes the emergence of the union in Pekalongan and the key unionists who occupy different layers of the organisation, where they learned experiences from labour conflicts and organising activism, providing a social foundation for union development. The second section explains how the unionists attempted to dismantle past union corporatism inherited from the past authoritarian labour regime, laying the foundation for further organisational transformation. The third and fourth sections discuss the main research question of this chapter: how did the SPN unionists in Pekalongan develope their union organisation into a community-oriented unionism and what social processes were involved? This is represented by wider networks of coalitions, expanding activism targeting the urban poor to defend their rights as citizens, and the union's experiments in electoral politics involving diverse constituents. These sections also examine the dilemma of the character of this form of labour movement, highlighting limitations and contradictions in achieving this orientation.

6.1. The Emergent Leaders: Paving the path for union transformation

The development of new unions in Pekalongan involves a significant contribution from the generation of unionists that emerged during local labour unrests in the era of the current labour regime, relatively disconnected from the past authoritarian era. This is in contrast to the situation in Semarang, where senior unionists took more dominant roles and faced challenges in dismantling the influence of the past authoritarian labour regime in navigating their local unionism. The social, economic, and political context of Pekalongan in this era exerted pressures and offered opportunities for the formation of distinct union leadership roles, which, in turn, shaped their interpretation of the direction of union transformation.

6.1.1. The Founders: Initiating a Distinct Local Union

The origins of the Pekalongan organisation can be traced back to the split in the SPSI Federation in 1998. Dissatisfied with SPSI's inability to safeguard workers' interests independently and enabled by a new democratic labour regime in Indonesia' reformation era, leaders of the Textile-Garment-Leather Union (SPTSK), one of the union divisions affiliated to this federation, decided to form a new independent union. Bowo and Basir, unionists at the Kismatex local textile factory, initiated the formation of a new local union in Pekalongan affiliated with the "new" SPTSK under the umbrella of a new federation, SPSI-Reformasi.[177] Thousands of workers from various local garment and textile factories immediately joined this new union.

This affiliation, however, was short-lived. In 2003, the union broke away from SPSI-Reformasi, adopting a new affiliation: SPN (the National Workers Union). The name change signalled a departure from sectoral exclusivity, expanding the union's base beyond textile and garment industries. Although these sectors still formed the majority of the membership, the union successfully recruited members from diverse industries, including service industries and other manufacturing sectors.

177 As a symbolic strong reaction to resist against the existing union, the workers who seceded from the SPSI established a new union with similar name with a new orientation: SPSI-Reformasi. The term *reformasi* gained popularity in the early years after the fall of Suharto, symbolising anti-authoritarian and democratic ideals in various organisations and activisms. Nonetheless, the structure of this union closely resembled that of SPSI, including in its nomenclature like SPTSK. This name was completely the same with another name under the "old" SPSI.

This organisational shift marked a milestone, setting the stage for the emergence of new key actors in the local labour movement. Changes in leadership at the SPN city branch level also occurred, influenced by the local political environment (see the political section of this chapter). Within a year of SPN's foundation in Pekalongan, the main leaders began expressing political interests, with Bowo engaging with political parties while maintaining his position as SPN branch leader. Basir transitioned to the Regional General Elections Commission (KPUD) searching for new experience in local politics before eventually leaving SPN.

In exchange for the vacant secretariat position, in 2004, Bowo appointed a new unionist named Budhy Prathamo (known as Budhy) to replace Basir. Unlike Bowo and Basir who experienced the New Order's authoritarian rule firsthand, Budhy represents a generation of unionists shaped by Post Authoritarian labour regime. He entered the workforce after the fall of Suharto's regime in 1998, avoided from direct exposure to tightly state-controlled labour conditions. Instead, he perceived workplace labour conflicts through the lens of the new democratic political culture.

Before assuming a leadership role in the local union office, Budhy was employed in a lower managerial position, as an assistant to a supervisor at Sri Ratu Department Store, a non-unionised company, owned by an Indonesian Chinese business family residing in Semarang City. Budhy quickly learned about workplace injustices and collective resistance. Motivated by poor working conditions and facilitated by Bowo and other local union leaders, Budhy and his colleagues clandestinely prepared and successfully formed a union affiliated with the SPTSK of SPSI-Reformasi. This, however, marked the beginning of prolonged tension between the Sri Ratu management and its three hundred and fifty employees, a story that will be further detailed in subsequent sections. Budhy's conflicts with management escalated into a personal conflict when the union's affiliation shifted to SPN following changes in the local union. This ongoing animosity from the management culminated in Budhy's decision to resign after five years of organising the union in that company, moving to SPN for a new role as a branch union secretary.

In contrast to other union leaders and members who grew up in industrial working-class communities, Budhy comes from a fairly wealthy rural family in a village in Salatiga. At the time, he stood out as the only union member who had completed university studies in Solo, one of the larger cities in Central Java. Despite his different social background, Budhy, who was part of the critical young

middle class, engaged in a wide range of activism and gained broad experience in a wide range of political issues. His unique combination of social networks included involvement in both religious-affiliated networks and the leftist student movement. This duality, typically in fierce competition in Indonesian political history (see Chapter 2), provided him with a distinctive learning process on his involvements in various activism, as he explained as follows,

> With SMID[178] student movements, I joined discussions, actions of solidarity, and labour protests in Solo. We discussed about the [authoritarianism of] New Order regime. By following the discussions and the [student's] actions, I became aware of the problems of the marginalised and the significance of networking. In GP Ansor[179] and Mosque Youth Communication Forum, I also learnt not only religious activities, but also followed inter-faith discussions that were organised against the pressures of [conservative] local leaders and regional government policy. These activities encouraged me to learn much, and build solidarities and the courage to organise.[180]

Budhy's wide range of experiences, contrasting with the factory-centric backgrounds of his colleagues, earned him a broader view on marginalised issues in diverse social environments beyond workplace boundaries. This distinctive biographical context highlights how it also provided wider networks, a social capital accumulated from his positions in the middle class. According to Bourdieu, social capital is inherently individual and is typically acquired based on one's position within a specific social class. Different social classes generate varying sizes of resources for creating this capital (Bourdieu 1986). This perspective contrasts with from Putnam (2000) and Coleman (1990), who conceptualised social capital as a source of broader social integration, often overlooking the inherent inequalities within the social structure and the roles of agency (Portes 2000; Tzanakis 2013).

178 SMID (Student's Solidarity for Democracy) was a student's organisation established during the Suharto's era aimed at mobilising resistance against the authoritarian regime. The organisation had branches in cities of university's students. The organisation is also linked with the underground leftist political party, the PRD (Democratic People Party) which was mostly organised by students, but connected with workers' and peasant's movements at the grass root level (Sastramidjaja 2016, 229) (Nasution 1994)

179 Ansor Youth Movement was one of the large wing organisations under Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Its area of activities covers broad fields of social concerns of the national youth that are parallel with Islamic values based on NU traditions, although in practice the activities inevitably intersect with political fields (Alamsyah and Yulianto 2018).

180 Field notes collection of my interview with Budhy Phratamo, 12 October 2010, updated on 11 January 2021.

6.1.2. Transitional Agents: Learning from the Battles

While senior unionists, particularly Budhy and Bowo, at the top level of the local SPN branch organisation were pioneers in institutionalising changes within the local union, younger unionists at lower levels emerged as transitional agents who inherited and advanced the ideas shared by their seniors. The process was underpinned particularly by the crucial experiences in production relations that shaped their trade union consciousness under current labour regime.

The labour disputes in Pekalongan during 2009-2010 have served as an arena where numerous young workers learned about their rights, strategies to challenge private and state authorities, and the ways to become a powerful organised labour force. This period witnessed the birth and cultivation of new transitional agents, guided and supported by their senior counterparts.

Several reasons contribute to understanding why these years were particularly significant. Firstly, they were characterised by a severe economic depression, particularly, in the textile industries (Budiyanti 2018, 128-131). To secure their businesses, numerous textile and garment companies in Pekalongan attempted to reduce labour costs, risking a wave of industrial conflicts involving unions and thousands of workers. Secondly, 2009 and 2010 marked the first large scale industrial strikes in Pekalongan since the reign of New Order regime.[181] These industrial conflicts immediately raised awareness among Pekalongan workers about the opportunities to resist and assert their rights. The third reason is connected to the transformative phase of the local SPN. In 2009, Bowo achieved a peak in his political career by being elected as the local parliament (DPRD) leader in Pekalongan City while concurrently holding his leadership position in SPN. The combination of these two positions bolstered the confidence of local SPN unionists of their own power and enhanced their leverage to challenge business pressures. Fourthly, 2009 also marked a phase in which SPN leaders developed diverse networks in labour movements, facilitating the exchange of experiences and strategic social support for their collective actions.[182]

181 The number of industrial dispute cases in Pekalongan City has shown relative stability each year since the enactment of the law on freedom of labour association, averaging around 29 cases annually (refer to Data of Industrial Disputes in Pekalongan City, 2001-2011, Disnakertrans Kota Pekalongan). However, there is a noticeable increase in the number of workers involved in these disputes since 2002, with a significant upswing observed from 2004 onwards, shortly after the transition from SPTSK to SPN, marked by the emergence of younger generation leaders. Between 2007 and 2010, the disputes involved thousands of workers, characterised by widespread protests, particularly related to layoff cases.

182 Further detailed illustration on the political moves of Bowo and the local unionists, and the roles of

Momentous battles: union militancy and the emergence of young unionists

Despite industrial unrest in various sectors, the labour disputes in textile-garment factories from 2009 to 2010 are among the largest industrial conflicts in Pekalongan. These conflicts significantly contributed to the initial consciousness of local workers and unionists about their own social class and potential strength. The most substantial disputes occurred in the Kismatex group textile factories. Involving thousands of workers organised by dozens of SPN unionists, the labour disputes transformed into a fierce collective action with political nuances. The disputes served as a testing ground for union leaders to persistently resist, combining political leverage in their actions, benefiting from their leader's political position.

Among the four textile companies of the Kismatex Group experiencing labour conflicts, Mujatex textile factory stood out as the most renowned arena of dispute. Lasting from 2009 to mid-2010, the dispute was ignited by a production crisis resulting from a sluggish national textile market and increased competition, particularly from cheap China's imported textile products.[183] The owners of Kismatex found themselves unable to defend the Mujatex factory, especially after shutting down three other factories.[184] At the end of 2009, Sritex, a giant textile company in Greater Solo, Central Java, owned by a local of Indonesian Chinese descent, agreed to acquire Mujatex.

The acquisition decision sparked labour protests at the Mujatex factory. The workers' anger arose for two main reasons. Firstly, the management unilaterally decided on the acquisition without involving SPN representatives. Secondly,

union networks will be discussed in separate special section of this chapter.

183 An owner of textile factory in Pekalongan expressed concerns about the business threats caused by the influx of inexpensive products from Bangladesh, Vietnam, and particularly China (Interview with Andi, The owner of the Tritex factory, 12 February 2014). This apprehension seemed justified, given that the national contribution of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in the textile and garment industry had been continuously decreasing since 2009 . Local media reports from the past few years also highlighted the growing anxiety among local and national businesses regarding the potential impact of the Asean-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA), implemented since 2010, on the local industries (Suara Merdeka, 20 January and 10 February, 2010)

184 Mujatex Factory faced a severe production crisis, being unable to compete in the local markets due to outdated machines they used. The head of personnel department of Mujatex told that most of the product they made, especially yarns for T-shirt making, were rejected by the buyers because the factory was unable to meet the developed standard of textile quality in competitive markets (Wawasan 30 December 2009).

word of mouth among workers revealed despotic labour relations practices in Sritex Company, causing restlessness among Mujatex workers for the acquisition. Workers feared that the change in company ownership would worsen employment relations. The discontent led to strikes, initially rejecting the acquisition, which eventually transformed into a demand for the layoff of all permanent workers as the owners insisted for not cancelling the acquisition.

The dispute unfolded over months, involving various actors from factory workers to the local politicians. Young female SPN leaders played a key role in mobilising workers, organising strikes, and raising demands within the factory. Meanwhile, local branch union leaders, led by Budhy, supplied legal information, facilitated negotiations, orchestrated protests, local NGO activists supports, including facilitated mediation of local Manpower officials. They also brought the case into the political sphere, leveraging Bowo's dual role (as the union leader and the chair of the DPRD) to seek support from other local political elites, particularly the local Mayor, against Sritex Company. Workers and unionists continuously pressed both the owners of Mujatex and Sritex by blocking the factory gates, leaving managements and owners locked inside, forcing them to settle the dispute. The unionists utilised local mass media to influence local public opinion, framing the labour dispute as their struggle against despotic employers and a contestation between local authorities and an external large company.[185]

While the workers' resistance was ultimately celebrated by local SPN leaders as a "great success," it ended in mass layoffs of eight hundred permanent workers, all of whom were also local SPN members.[186] This represented a significant loss of union membership, not to mention the other thousands of workers laid off for the shutdown of the other three Kismatex's factories.[187] It was, however, still considered a symbol of an achievement for the union leaders as this outcome met workers' expectations in terms of severance payments. Despite the loss of jobs, the leaders view the entire resistance and its outcome as a milestone in laying the groundwork for union militancy and the emergence of new young leaders.

185 The narrative was conveyed by some local SPN leaders and it was also extensively reported by local medias such as Radar Pekalongan and Suara Merdeka.

186 Field Note nterview with Khotib, an activist from Yawas, June 2010.

187 In a separate field note of my interview in 2010 with an NGO activist who joined the Mujatex workers' protest to provide assistance, he revealed that many workers were reinstated in Mujatex as non-permanent workers instead of returning to their previous status as permanent labour. Some others moved to new factories for new jobs, while the rest transitioned to the informal economy, such as becoming street vendors.

The following wave of protests

During the same period as the Mujatex case, several other dispute cases gained attention in the local community. While some involved small-scale enterprises like protests against layoffs at the Sentono Batik Cooperative and Mahardika Pharmacy, two noteworthy cases were the chronic dispute at the Sri Ratu Department Store and the industrial conflict at Blue Sea Indonesia (BSI), a canned fish manufacturing company.

The Sri Ratu dispute stemmed from workers' demands for a profit-sharing bonus and the closure of the employee cooperative due to mismanagement and lack of transparency in financial arrangements. The protests, however, escalated when the company laid off eighty-nine employees due to the lack of company's ability to face the presence of new competitors in this business. Despite not being as dramatic as the Mujatex case, Sri Ratu workers' street protests and boycott campaigns, drew significant local attention. SPN unionists, facilitated by Bowo, also brought the case into the local political space, engaging in dialogues with the labour commission of the DPRD. This dispute became a chronic issue, reappearing in 2014 with more complexities.



Photo 15 (by Mundochi): Surrounded by a group of police officers ensuring the safety of the protest, the union leader of a textile company delivered an impassioned speech at a workers-demonstration in Pekalongan. The workers were politically supported, demanding the right to unionise.

In the same year, an industrial conflict erupted at BSI, a canned fish manufacturing company owned by a South Korean business. This marked the emergence of bold female leadership in the Pekalongan labour movement. This presents a contrast portrait to the factory women workers in Semarang, who were mostly passive. Led by hundreds of militant women workers of the fish head cutting division in the factory, the disputes began with protests against the layoff of three workers and the furlough of twenty-one others.[188] The protest eventually escalated into demands for the enforcement of labour standards.[189] The dispute took nearly a year to settle, involving various actions such as strikes, street protests, and political engagement with local leaders.[190]

Despite the challenges in assessing the success of workers' collective actions, their engagement in each action had notable effects. Firstly, it led to the development of a new consciousness among the workers regarding their identity as a working class in contrast to the capitalists. Secondly, these experiences made workers aware of their collective forces, particularly due to the establishment of the union in the workplace and the attainment of gradual victories through organised pressures. The organisational movements under the SPN's flag provided evidence of a powerful collective vehicle in contentious actions. This organisational capacity increased their leverage in dealings with managements and local authorities, altering the way management perceived the strength of the workers (see Photo 15). The growth of such collective consciousness significantly influenced an increase in workers' enthusiasm to unionise and engage more with SPN branch leaders.

The mid-layer unionists

The labour troubles of 2009-2010 in Pekalongan had been the ground for shaping and reproducing new leaders across various levels of unions. Leadership, at both the branch and grassroots levels, naturally emerged through interactions with fellow workers and other supporters, confrontations with management, and dealing with local authorities. In cases like Mujatex, Sri Ratu, and BSI, unionists' militancy was generated through official positions in factory-level unions, where its effectiveness was tested in representing the voice of their members. While central figures like Budhy played central roles, younger unionists appeared and

188 Furlough in Indonesia (*merumahkan*) refers to the management's measure for not hiring the employees temporarily due to some reasons, either the employees' misconduct or the company economic crisis.

189 See Radar Pekalongan 29 April 2010; 14 May 2010.

190 See Suara Merdeka and Radar Pekalongan 14 May 2010.

actively participated in negotiations and information circulation, and bridging interactions among various supporting individuals and groups. Their involvement fostered a deeper understanding of union roles and responsibilities.

Disputes and collective actions not only represented instances of resistance, but also served as a source for knowledge circulation, offering valuable insights into the roles of unionists that proved beneficial for other workers and encouraged the emergence of new workers leaders and unionists in various workplaces in Pekalongan. Workers shared knowledge with each other through telling stories about their experiences. Additionally, the local media reports contributed in shedding light on the emergence of new leaders and the creation of role models. For example, media coverage highlighted the leadership of courageous female workers from BSI and recognised Budhy as the "Man of the Year 2010".

Thus, the period of 2009-2010 stands out as a crucial phase in the development of the local SPN, serving as the breeding ground for new leadership and laying the foundation for continued union transformation. This period yielded three significant consequences. Firstly, the emergence of young leadership differed from particularly their senior counterparts who grew mostly in the era of past authoritarian labour regime. Their involvement in contentious actions under current labour regime became a crucial subjective experience that shaped trade union consciousness. Secondly, the interactions and engagements of union leaders in these actions fostered bonds between workers and the union, while simultaneously strengthening the leadership of local branch-level unionists.

In 2012, a change in leadership occurred with Budhy resigning to assume a new position as an ad-hoc judge at the labour court in different region, and a young unionist, Dammy, taking over, appointed by Bowo. Similar to many other factory workers, Dammy gained organisational experience through his workplace life. He joined SPSI in 1995 at Tritex textile factory in Pekalongan, initially as an ordinary member of the union. However, with the national reform and the subsequent splits of SPSI, Dammy and his colleagues established a non-national-affiliation enterprise union in the factory. He eventually became the leader of this union, representing 110 members, which covered nearly half of the entire workforce of the factory. Following successful strikes by Dammy's union, they were invited to join the new SPTSK led by Bowo, impressed by their achievements. This merger marked the end of union conflicts and competition in the textile factory, as all union members eventually joined the SPTSK, which later transformed into the new SPN. This unification also elevated Dammy to a higher level of unions, facilitating collaboration with Budhy.

Similar to many other factory workers, Dammy acquired organisational experience through workplace. In 1995, he joined SPSI at Tritex textile factory in Pekalongan, initially as a regular union member. However, with the national reform and subsequent splits within SPSI, Dammy and his colleagues established a non-national-affiliation enterprise union within the factory, while the old SPSI remained existed. Over time, he ascended to the leadership role of his union, representing 110 members, covering nearly half of the entire workforce of the factory. Following successful strikes by Dammy's leadership, they received an invitation to join the new SPTSK led by Bowo, who was impressed by their achievements. This merger marked the end of union conflicts and competition in the textile factory, as all union members eventually joined the SPTSK, which later transformed into the new SPN. This unification also elevated Dammy to a higher level within the unions, facilitating collaboration with Budhy.

Despite changes in SPN leadership style, Budhy's legacy persisted, attempting to maintain militant values, leadership structures, and a commitment to community unionism (discussed further in the next section). Despite his leaving the union, the close personal relations between Budhy and the transitional young leaders endured through informal communication and personal interactions. In essence, Budhy's leadership gave a significant contribution in encouraging the new generation by effectively managing various resources during nearly the first decade of the local SPN.

6.1.3. Initiating Changes in Values

Strategic actions, contentious experiences, and the growing networks of workers in Pekalongan have significantly influenced the transformation of ideas, values, and consciousness within the local labour movements. These changes have marked an essential phase in the first decade as union leaders aimed to break down the traditional legacy of the past labour regime. They played a crucial role in disseminating new values and ideas among their members, particularly the unionists in workplaces.

The SPN leaders broke through the barriers between leaders and members, fostering new values, and encouraging various learning processes. They aimed to dismantle the traditional barriers inherited from the New Order's labour regime, which had created a distance between members and leaders at different levels. Unlike the past, when union leaders were often not genuine workers' representatives elected through democratic processes, the new approach involved actively opening internal dialogues between branch leaders and union members.

These dialogues, sometimes attended by others from the union's networks, created a new atmosphere within the organisation.

The union office also transformed into a vibrant hub of various activities, serving as a place for organisational meetings, gatherings, consultations, trainings, including journalistic interviews (see Photo 16). It became a site of integration for union members from various local companies, fostering shared interests, exchanging experiences and ideas, and building a collective identity as union members. The union office provided a platform for workers to discuss daily problems encountered in the shop floors, examine solutions, learn leadership skills, absorb knowledge and fundamental ideas of movements introduced by the leaders and other sources like NGO activists and invited academicians.



Photo 16: Workers from various companies gathered at SPN branch Office in Pekalongan for union training workshop

These occasions served as an informal training ground, facilitating knowledge exchange and internalisation of values beneficial for organisational goals and operational necessities of workplace unionist, such as negotiating with employers and organising contentious actions. Additionally, these informal dialogues provided leaders with more opportunities to establish bonds between branch leaders and workplace unionists, injecting values of labour militancy.

A Language of militancy

Language plays a significant role in shaping the new values of labour movements, acting as the symbolic tool in contentious politics. According to Tarrow (2013, 21), language is functional in constructing and diffusing contentious politics. Workers adopt and learnt specific words or phrases used for challenging existing power structures. They serve as a strategic framing against the dominant political culture imposed by the state and capitalists (Ives 2004, 90). Local SPN unionists and other activists within SPN's networks perceived the significance of strategic use of language. By adopting words that carry specific meanings to build a sense of class antagonism, they aimed to break the historical chain of cultural legacy from the past authoritarian regime.

A crucial example is the use of word "buruh" (labourer). This term emphasises workers' subordinate position in production relations, symbolising a resistance against the oppression of corporate authority. Therefore, SPN leaders preferred the term "buruh' over more neutral and formal terms like the words "pekerja" (worker), and "karyawan" or "pegawai" (employee), which were primarily promoted by the New Order regime to suppressing labour militancy (see Chapter 2).

Another crucial term is also "kawan," meaning comrade (or the more neutral 'friend'), which in the context of labour movements, refers to those sharing the identity of being a worker subordinated by employers. It fosters a collective bond among working-class members, emphasising a shared sense of union membership and antagonistic relations of 'us versus them.' This relation is linked with another frequently used term, that is "lawan," the opposition to 'kawan,' indicating whom to fight against. "Lawan" refer to those, like despotic management or corrupt government officials, whom the workers consider as opposing the workers' interest. It is often coupled with words like "berjuang" (to fight for or struggle) and "perjuangan" (struggle), used to boost collective spirit and generate a sense of injustice that workers should resist.[191] These words define the worker as a subject of contentious politics and are strongly articulated in dialogues, discussions, and orations during worker demonstrations

191 In a special training that is organised with NGO activists from LIPS and Yawas, held at Handoko's Omah Tani, Budhy and Ida the female union leader including several others proposed a new concept of unionism: the *struggle union* (*Serikat perjuangan*) to replace the old epithet yellow union that has been labelled to SPSI and its offspring unions which still keep its legacy. Nevertheless, it never developed well further as a robust concept although in practice it was intended to institutionalised the chunks of separated ideas on labour militancy and various forms of extended activism.

in Pekalongan. While such words were also used among unionists in Semarang, the use of such language have embedded deeply in the daily unionist behaviours in Pekalongan, contributing to their understanding of their objective experiences in the workplace.

Beyond fearfulness

The adoption of language and symbolic representations, such as union uniform, flag, and anthem, played a crucial role in shaping the identity of workers within SPN and breaking the chain of fear and inferiority. Emotive words like "lawan" (oppose), "juang" (struggle), and "buruh" (labourer) instilled confidence in workers, denoting the significance of class struggle. Similarly, symbols embedded in union uniform, flag, and anthem had a meaningful impact, particularly on the younger generation of workers, instilling pride and courage as union members.

These linguistic and symbolic elements, however, were not autonomous; they functioned as Laclau's empty signifiers, acquiring new meanings through the influence of hegemonic agents. The way workers interpreted these symbols was associated with the leaders' success in bringing workers' interests into the local political sphere and the increased popularity of the union and its leaders in the local public. This highlights how leaders defined language and union symbols, connecting them with various events.

The emotive effects of language and symbols complemented the learning process derived from workers' experiences in industrial conflicts. While describing the experiences of young unionists, Budhy explained that a direct engagement in disputes provided emotional experiences that created awareness of fear and fearlessness in the face of powerful forces.[192] He added that learning from such experiences, workers ultimately could break through mental constraints and overcome fears. Therefore, storytelling and the exchange of stories, especially about the celebrated protests in 2009-2010 and the significant 2012 protest blocking the north coast main road, became tools for instilling courage and fostering resistance among new members.[193] These stories reinforced the

192 Interview with Budhy, Pekalongan branch SPN secretary, 2 January 2014

193 In March 2012, unionists and members of the local SPN took a significant step by blocking the north coast main road that traverses Pekalongan city—an essential economic artery connecting the northern regions of Java. This protest was part of a series of national strikes organised by unions across federations, all aimed at demanding an increase in the minimum wage. The local SPN leaders had repeatedly communicated this strategy to their members and others, showing their ability to exert pressure not only at the district level but also at the provincial level

collective bond and skills needed to navigate challenges within the union, as admitted by another young SPN unionist.[194]

Framing the labour rights

Cultural transformation within the union was driven by the learning process, focusing on the substance of labour issues and the meaning of workers' rights. The transformation involved the understanding of two key dimensions. Firstly, legal knowledge became a crucial element, creating an awareness of workers' objective positions in employment relations. Trainings for SPN unionists in Pekalongan, facilitated by international donors, NGOs, and the union officials from higher organisational level, contributed to this awareness. The trainings were mutually strengthened by the real experiences transferred through labour disputes and negotiation process of collective bargaining agreements. These experiences shaped an understanding and consciousness among workers and unionists on their positions before employers, and the local government officials. Secondly, knowledge of the law was seen as an instrument of struggle. The local SPN union leaders, through informal dialogues and official trainings, raised awareness among members about labour law as an instrument for defending their rights. The leaders emphasised that, in the current democratic state, workers had a political opportunity to defend their rights. This cultural element of legal awareness aimed to motivate legally illiterate workers, bridging the gap in understanding labour law.

The increasing enthusiasm for militancy in the union culture gradually led to the unionists' attempts in extending union activism and constituents. Although the unionists' interest in electoral politics had existed since the early union's founding, their political interests gradually developed following their own experiences in local labour dynamics as discussed further in the next sections.

The limits of transformation

During the first decade of the post-authoritarian era, the development of the union culture played a pivotal role in shaping a new identity for unions in Pekalongan. The definition and embrace of leadership roles in local union highlighted the significance of their collective values, interpersonal interactions, and the meaning of their own power. For Pekalongan's workers, these values

194 Interview with a Pekalongan branch SPN young unionist who was also a leader of Paguyuban Pasar Tiban Community, 6 February 2014.

formed the foundation of their union's militancy, enabling them to advocate for the collective interests of their members and even extend their outreach to broader potential constituencies at community level.

There were limitations, however, in the organisational leadership of the union. The charismatic leadership of figures like Budhy resulted in personal dependencies among lower-tier leaders. The centralisation of reformative ideas in the hands of a few senior leaders, coupled with the gap in skills between senior and younger leaders, led to disorientation among the younger members, particularly when Budhy's leadership ended and was replaced by Dammy in 2012. Despite the presence of new leaders, the replacement sparked confusion among the younger leaders on how to develop further the union key ideas into operational measures. This included challenges such as dismantling the old culture of corporatist unionism, building workers' militancy, taking political measures in collective actions, and transforming the movement into a broader arena. The complexity of these ideas proved challenging for many young leaders who were still navigating the organisation. This highlights the critical issue of experience disparity between senior and younger leaders in the cultural transformation of the union.

6.2. Extending to Communities

The rise of young unionists, coupled with the dynamics changes in union leadership and strong impetus for union transformation, has significantly influenced the orientation of unionism and the labour movement in Pekalongan. Despite the celebrated successes, the persistent threats to workers' welfare that is highlighted during the labour unrests since the establishment of SPN in the city, emphasise the challenges faced by the unionists in pushing their demands on employers. These structural challenges, converging with local political opportunities, have prompted unionists to explore alternative strategies.

In this context, the social process of generating ideas and subsequent actions reflecting these strategies becomes crucial, navigating unionists toward community-oriented activism. The interactions between unionists and their networks become an essential element in this process, offering ideas, discourses, and institutional access to strategic resources that enable the expansion of activism areas. That is how the agencies respond to the existing threats and opportunities in order to establish an alternative model of unionism. In the following section, I also describe the social process of how the community-based activism has evolved, highlighting two forms of communities organised:

those under a programmatic advocacy, and those loosely-integrated into the labour movements. Finally, I discuss further how the unionists claimed these diverse constituents.

6.2.1. Threats from Workplace and Reinterpretation of Meaning on Workers' Struggle

While the local SPN's collective actions over the past decade have undeniably unsettled local companies, the actual achievements from these struggles have been notably limited. Most of these efforts focused on basic law enforcement to prevent workers from extreme precariousness rather than substantially improving socio-economic welfare. The majority of industrial actions were organised to safeguard workers from despotic layoffs and compel employers to comply with standard employment relations, such as converting non-permanent workers to permanent labour or ensuring overtime payment based on regulations. While some assertive demonstrations, advocating for an increase in the minimum wage, targeted the local government, the outcomes were also restricted. Despite the dynamic fluctuations in wage growth, the local minimum wage consistently lagged behind those in other major industrial regions in Central Java (see figure A.5 in appendix).

There was a variety of structural barriers. The majority of enterprises employing SPN members were small to medium-sized, primarily targeting the domestic market, and most were situated in Java (see Chapter 5). Only a handful were export-oriented, but their production size remained relatively limited. These enterprises typically had fewer than five hundred employees on average, with a lower formal educational level among the workforce. The technologies in use were often simple, with some even outdated, indicating the limited capacity of companies to expand production and increase profits (see also Photo 11). Some large textile companies had to close down during the first decade of the Reformation era due to economic depression (see Chapter 5).

This restricted capital accumulation set a rational maximum limit for workers to consistently advocate for wage increases and improvements in welfare. This limitation further exacerbates the precarity of workers during economic downturns. The SPN leader who replaced Budhy described the barrier as follows:

> Even if we are able to force the employers to raise our salary beyond the minimum wage, let's say two million Rupiah [€133 per month]: It even exceeds the KHL [the descent living standard] in Pekalongan, which is only 1.7 million

> [€113],[195] but will the salary truly ensure our well-being? It won't! Perhaps, we can save a bit, but what happens if we face illness? Our salary cannot cover it.[196]

His argument aligns with James C. Scott's use of Tawney's metaphor to describe vulnerable poverty, akin to "a man standing permanently up to the neck in the water, so that even a ripple might drown him" (Scott 1976, vii). In this context, the limited capacity of local industries in Pekalongan to grow easily submerged workers into a more precarious state of poverty. Additionally, this situation posed a threat to the sustainability of workers' struggles through existing unions.

Consequently, these threats underscored the unionists' necessity for a reinterpretation of the meaning of labour and workers' struggle. It became evident that reliance solely on the capacity of the local industrial economy to expand was no longer sufficient. This shift in perception involved recognising the social sphere beyond the workplace, where workers have additional roles structured within a state-citizen relations framework. Budhy, who introduced this concept within the local SPN, explained,

> The worker is not merely a labourer (buruh). While we are indeed labourers when working in a factory, at home, we have the same rights as other members of society. Workers' welfare is not solely the responsibility of companies but also the state. Therefore, workers are not separate from broader social affairs. So far, workers have sometimes been viewed in isolation, as if we were beings unable to integrate into society. In reality, a worker is also a citizen![197]

These arguments serve as an essential rationale for the expansion of the movement, involving the roles of community-based key actors and government authorities. Dammy, who embraced Budhy's perspective, articulated this notion by stating:

> That is the initial reason why we should go [engage with the] public. This is what I communicated to our members. It is about how the local government should take responsibility in fulfilling the people's needs. Consequently, we encourage our colleagues to assume strategic positions in public, even at the lowest levels like kelurahan (villages), or RT and RW (neighbourhood associations). Our objective is to influence public policy for the benefit of the workers. Access

195 The currency value equals to the rate valid at the time of the ongoing fieldwork, in which 1 Euro equals to Rp 15.040,00.

196 Interview with Dammy, the SPN secretary of 2012-2017 who replaced Budhy's former position, .

197 Interview with Budhy, 1 Januari 2014

> to health facilities, provision of rice for the poor, and educational facilities provided by the local government are crucial for us because they alleviate our burdens.[198]

As such, the unionists recognised that without evolving the labour movement, their struggles and the unions might become stagnant. Hence, their decision to navigate the union into another strategic political arena, by establishing linkages between individual workers as citizens, community roles, and the local state to pursue alternative resources, can be viewed as an attempt to secure the workers' fundamental interests (welfare) and ensure the survival of the workers' organisation itself. The latter objective is crucial for maintaining their capacity in negotiations with employers, leveraging existing opportunities beyond the workplace. Hence, this is not simply a rational choice to find an alternative space from beyond for the sake of welfare.[199] It is a strategic instrument for the labour movement itself.

Thus, the overall premise assumes that unionists in Pekalongan have indeed recognised the available political opportunity aligned with the workers' interests. The question then arises: how did they perceive this opportunity? How did they come into such a shifting perspective? This is where the interactions between unionists and their networks play a pivotal role in prompting the shift in notion.

6.2.2. Against the Mainstream: Opportunities and the Union's Networks

While many scholars often closely associate networks with mobilising resources (Tarrow 2011, 119-139) and view them as channels for acquiring larger membership (Porta and Diani 2006, 114-116) or form strategic alliances (Walker and Martin 2019, 169-171), other scholars consider networks as a significant contributor to the cultural basis, providing ideas and values, for a fundamental transformation of a movement (Dyke and Taylor 2019, 490-491). This is useful and evident in the case of workers in Pekalongan. Networks open channels for the circulation of new knowledge and values of movements, potentially leading to organisational change. Three groups of networks with different backgrounds

198 In interview with Dammy (2014) he often used the term of *public* to refer to the overall arena where workers play role as citizen in broader sense.

199 Tilly (1997, 83) has strongly criticized the principles of Coleman's rational choice (1990), contending that any individual or group decisions are not simply aimed at securing immediate benefits. Instead, they are influenced by a complex chain of causes, indicating the interdependence between the decision makers and their existing situations (Ritzer 2011, 451-452).

approached local unionists, offering different rationales but impacting on a similar outcome: a broadened labour movement. These three groups are formed by unionists relationships with a number of labour activists from NGOs concerned on the erosion of workers' movements due to increased precarious working conditions; activists from an informal association of farmers, who were actively building joint movements across sectors, and another local activists and grassroots figures who shared a common interest in improving the social conditions of the local marginalised.

Labour networks suggesting a community unionism

The early network emerged through collaboration between Pekalongan unionists and labour NGO activists from other regions, fostering an unprecedented relationship for most workers in Pekalongan. The initiative to collaborate originated from Fauzi Abdullah during early Reformation years (2003-2004). Abdullah is a senior labour activist affiliated with LIPS (Sedane Institute for Labour Information), an NGO based in Bogor, West Java, close to Jakarta.[200] Abdullah and his well-educated cohort sought collaboration with local unions, considering them closer to the grassroots than national ones. Besides, Budhy's personal networks from previous student activism also introduce the union to Yawas, another labour NGO from Semarang City.

The initial relationship of the unionists and the NGO activists evolved into new activities through frequent meetings and discussions, exchanging experiences and perspectives on potential movement development. This was an unusual situation for unionists in Pekalongan, unlike their counterparts in major industrial regions like Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek) and East Java, where collaborations between unionists and NGO activists have been frequent since the New Order era (Ford 2009, 92-106). Sharing experiences from other places provided richer knowledge for Pekalongan unionists and served as a bridge to changes in union's values, although many found it challenging to follow discussions with NGO activists, particularly when topics turned to academic-leaning issues. Budhy explained to me that "It was not easy for unionists in the beginning to adjust to discussions about elusive concepts like capitalism, neoliberalism, and politics of movements." Nevertheless, the discussions led to the maturation of ideas and offered a fruitful way to understand contemporary issues such as increasing

200 LIPS was a labour NGO based in Bogor, one of industrial city in the region of Jabodatabek (Greater Jakarta) The organisation was established by Fauzi Abdullah, a senior human rights activist who were involved in human rights advocacy, particularly in labour issues, against the New Order labour regime.

precariousness in working conditions, potential erosion of union strength, and the rationales of community-based struggles.

The relationship between local SPN unionists and NGO activists grew as attention across the country focused on a national labour issue: the new labour law (no.13 of 2003) perceived as a threat to secure working conditions and union bases (see Chapter 2). While most unions, workers, and NGOs were trying to find the ways through national level, dialogues between some NGO activists and Pekalongan unionists shifted toward community-oriented activism, utilising local resources. They began to see regional communities and local politics as an alternative strategic arena for workers' consolidation, surpassing national barriers dominated by opponents of "union-friendly" labour policies. They recognised that workplace was no longer seen as a strategic site for workers' struggle, not only due to unfriendly labour laws but also because of the incapacity of the local industries in Pekalongan to survive against market competition, limiting their ability to provide adequate distributive resources for workers' interests.

Community-oriented movements were not a completely novel development in Indonesian labour movements. During the New Order regime, workers and NGO and student activists adopted this approach to avoid backlash from employers supported by state bureaucracy and security apparatus. However, the rationale behind the idea differed from Pekalongan. In the past regime, workers established clandestine movements outside the workplace to outwit the state-led oppressive labour regime, using communities as a substitute social setting for building organisations and class consciousness (Hadiz 2001, 119-121). Workers were the sole focus of these consolidations and organisations. Other studies mention the involvement of community leaders (Silvey 2003, 145; Warouw 2006; Juliawan 2010), and families (Saptari 2008) as supporting agents for workers' actions and organisations, but not as equal subjects in a movement alliance.

While these supporting elements remain crucial under current market-driven labour regime, Pekalongan labour movements exhibit a different feature. Community engagement was expected to be more than just social support; it was expected to be a broader alliance comprising workers, their families and neighbours, including grassroots organisations. This alliance would exchange support to defend shared collective interests and transform into a socio-political force to achieve equitable access to welfare resources managed by the state. Despite the absence of material resources and direct political access resulting from the collaboration between SPN unionists and the labour NGO activists, the periodic discussions and training sessions they conducted together gave a

significant new perspective, especially among the unionists at the branch level, regarding the different concept of unionism.

Another Network: Learning from the Farmers

SPN also established connections with activists from Omah Tani, a community organisation advocating for local farmers in Batang, the neighbouring region of Pekalongan, who were fighting for their land rights against state appropriation.[201] Interactions with this community provided valuable lessons about the benefits of exchanging experiences in building militancy with those outside the industrial workers' community. One of examples of how the workers learnt the experience is evident in a joint rally in May 2012.[202]





Photo 17 (left): A woman, carrying her baby, speaks out at a farmers' rally in Batang.

Photo 18 (right): Nearly a thousand people turned up at an evening farmers' rally in a village in Batang to demand their land rights which were threatened with eviction by a government development project. A number of SPN Pekalongan unionists also attended the event.

At this rally, Over thirty SPN unionists, including young activists from LIPS and Yawas, visited Omah Tani in the green hilly area of Batang. There were also nearly a thousand farmers in attendance (see Photo 18). Local residents of different genders and ages gathered in the village, standing or sitting on the ground, filling village streets and yards, listening to speeches by Handoko, the leader of

201 The organisation was led by Handoko, an activist who was also a (pro-bono) lawyer and a former activist of PDIP (the largest political party in Indonesia – the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle). He also received Yap Thiam Hien Award as a national human rights Defender in 2016.

202 Field Note collection of my observation on 26 Mei 2012.

Omah Tani, and other peasant representatives, highlighting their struggles for defending their lands. The unionists were impressed by the enthusiasm of the farmers, particularly moved by an elderly man and a young woman speaking passionately while carrying her baby (see Photo 17). Some female unionists expressed emotion viewing a momentary effect of how Omah Tani activists mobilised entire households to participate in the rally. This gathering became a crucial moment in raising workers' awareness of other movements outside their field, offering potential references for broader movement involving different communities with related social concerns such as land rights, occupational rights, etc.

Despite large community of farmers, the interaction evolved into a knowledge exchange rather than an exchange of constituents. The unionists found the exchange of knowledge and experiences more valuable. Omah Tani activists became a mainstay from whom SPN leaders learned new knowledge, values, and political strategies. Handoko frequently provided his house for SPN's training sessions for unionists, learning the organisation from perspective beyond industrial labour. The farmers' organisation also facilitated a broader collaborative network with other unions across major industrial regions in Jabodetabek, especially when Pekalongan unionists engaged in a workers' political agenda in the 2014 General Elections (see section 6.3). Such interactions and activities raised awareness among unionists beyond trade union consciousness, fostering a sense of being part of a broader marginalised communities.

Networks leading to local public issues

Another network emerged through an entirely different thematic path: local grassroots activism involving a number of actors, including local NGOs, community figures, local government agencies, and international development agencies. This network becomes the milestone which significantly changed the direction of SPN model of unionism in that period. This activism focused on a governance improvement program aimed at the urban poor. The path was primarily approached through institutional mechanisms managed under the decentralisation program as part of the national political transformation, particularly during the early decade of the reformation era (Antlöv 2003, 82)(see also Chapter 2).

The presence of this program has been accompanied by a significant supply of international financial supports and technical assistance flowing to local governments and local civil society organisations to accelerate the

institutionalisation of public-participation (Antlöv and Wetterberg 2011). In Pekalongan, Pattiro was the local branch NGO which has engaged in this field since the inception of decentralisation in 2001, receiving financial and technical supports from international organisations such as USAID, Ford Foundation, The Asia Foundation, HIVOS, UNDP. They actively collaborated in promoting transparency in local government budgeting, subsidising for the local urban poor, and opening access for social welfare rights.[203] The presence of such program, facilitated by what Meyer (2010) called these nested institutions,[204] is determinant in creating an opportunity structure for the shift of the local union approach.[205]

Thanks to the personal relationships of Basir, the former SPN secretary, and the key leader of Pattiro, Budhy and some SPN leader engaged in intensive dialogues with this NGO activists, leading to the new interpretation on the workers social life and their role as citizens. Since then, the local SPN unionists have been involved actively in Pattiro's program, especially after Budhy was appointed as a workers' representative and given a formal key position at the Pattiro internal organisation in 2005.[206] The engagement of SPN activists in this program also initiated extensive interaction and partnership with various local organisations invited by Pattiro as representatives of various grass-root groups. Many associations and informal groups – such as organised students under the banner of Nahdlatul-Ulama Islamic organisation (IPNU-IPPNU), alumni of Pekalongan University, local environmental activists from NGO Bumi Lestari, and many other such community groups, including the batik makers' union – joined this concerted program.

The joining of SPN leaders marks a new approach in unionism in Pekalongan. The reinterpretation of workers' struggle has led them a different perspective on workers' roles, recognising workers' social position beyond the context of

203 Field notes collection of my interview with Amin, the first leader of Pattiro branch of Pekalongan, on 15 June 2010

204 Nested Institutions within the concept of opportunity structure refers to a hierarchical structure of institutions, ranging from local to international, which are powerful in influencing the opportunity of a social movement achieve its own goals (see further (Meyer 2003).

205 Most of these institutions are characterised by technocratic approaches, intending to institutionalise democracy on one hand, and secure a market economy on the other hand (Hadiz 2004, 701). The engagement of local SPN unionists in the program, facilitated by Pattiro activists, has sparked a paradox, leading the labour NGO activists from LIPS to engage in a critical introspection about their own proposed experiment to broaden labour movements (in conversation with Abu Mufakhir, 15 April 2015). Specifically, they were considering the potential consequences on the unions' agenda, which traditionally opposes market liberalisation

206 Additional complementary online-interview with Budhy on 17 February 2021.

the production relations. These changes allowed them in a wider engagement with community issues, raising the broader social issues and the significance to extend dialogues with local polity and parliaments. Further illustration of how this network evolves into community-based activism is presented in the following section.

6.2.3. Communities with programmatic activism

The inclusion of SPN as an institution, represented by some union leaders, in Pattiro's program became the focal point for the union's institutionalised attempt into their new activism. This program was structured with specific targets, well-defined plans, a clear division of labour, formal accountability, and clearly defined constituencies. Primary funding from various international donor institutions, as mentioned earlier, propelled these activities. With these resources, unionists collaborated with activists from Pattiro and other grassroots associations to develop and execute a program plan.

Their primary goal was to influence local government in establishing policies beneficial to the welfare of marginalised communities. Typical labour concerns like minimum wage negotiations and industrial disputes were absent as the focus shifted to public healthcare services and poverty reduction, aligning with the local government's development priorities (Sudarsono 2012, 25-27). These themes were in line with local government's priority of development. Especially public healthcare had received major attention by the administration of Syawie, the Mayor of Pekalongan who had been political partner of Bowo, the SPN leader (see further section 6.3).

The engagement of unionists in healthcare issue was eased by Syawie's political campaign in his victories in the 2005 and 2010 local elections (Pilkada), which led to the establishment of City Health Forum (Forum Sehat Kota).[207] This opportunity enabled them, together with various local grass-roots figures[208], to interact with local government officials to set up communication channels with community figures at the subdistrict level (Kelurahan), collecting public

207 The idea of this forum actually dates back to 1998 when WHO carried out a project "Healthy Cities". Pekalongan, and five other regions: Cianjur, Balikpapan, Bandar Lampung, Malang and East Jakarta, were selected to be a pilot project. This project provided a chance for HN Syawie to take it as priority of government policy.

208 This forum involved several figures such as religious scholars (*ulama*) from local religious schools (*pesantren)*, academicians, school teachers, community representatives, journalists and workers representatives.

feedbacks and expectations through a routine dialogue as well as a means of campaigning for public policy programs on local healthcare issues.





Photo 19 (left): A signboard in front of union office in Pekalongan indicates the union's activities in providing assistance for public services.

Photo 20 (right) : The activists of Pattiro and SPN unionists organised a meeting to discuss some programs related to public services.

Both the unionists and the Pattiro activists used this opportunity also to extend the advocacy by proposing a subsidy in health care services to reduce the economic burdens of the poor, particularly the industrial workers. With the support of Bowo, as also the local parliamentarians, they were eventually successful in endorsing the declaration of a Mayor Regulation (Perwal) of Regional Health Insurance (Jaminan Kesehatan Daerah or Jamkesda) in 2010 benefiting the urban poor until the national security system, BPJS (Social Security Agency), replaced it officially in 2016.

The success in promoting Jamkesda was followed by another achievement as SPN unionists and grassroots associations under Pattiro networks produced a strategic policy document titled "Document for a Strategy to Overcome Regional Poverty (Dokumen Strategi Penanggulangan Kemiskinan Daerah)." This document, backed by detailed demographic data, prompted the local authority to expand Jamkesda's coverage, leading to an increased budget from five hundred million to over one billion Rupiah. With these changes, union leaders launched effective campaigns on the ground, encouraging union members and the local poor to make optimal use of available healthcare services.

The engagement of unionists in these programmatic activities spurred the growth of organisational structures through collaboration with Pattiro activists (see figure 6.1), leading to the establishment of community centres focused

on reinforcing local citizens' rights (Sudarsono 2012, 22).[209] These centres evolved into specific functional organisations fully organised in the hands of the unionists.

FORMAPP (Forum Masyrakat Peduli Pekalongan; Community's Forum Concern on Pekalongan) was the first community centre. It was initially established in response to challenging annual negotiations in the local tripartite body for a minimum wage increase. The deadlock in the negotiations was resolved by a breakthrough solution from SPN leaders with the support of Pattiro activists: the workers accepted the minimum wage proposed by the local government on condition they expanded access to better education, healthcare services, and low-cost housing for workers.[210] This unprecedented success opened a unique channel for negotiations with local authorities in public services.

Subsequently, other community centres were established, including KBP3 (Workers Community for Public Services) and KPBN (Community of Women Workers and Fishermen), all led by unionists. While FORMAPP became a platform for inter-community group meetings discussing various public policies, the other two centres focused on raising awareness among marginalised urban poor about their rights to healthcare, education, and residential administration

209 The genesis of this centres traces back to 2005, emerging as grassroots initiatives during the political mobilisation for Syawie's candidacy in the inaugural democratic regional elections. Bowo entered electoral politics during this period, aligning with the Golkar Party led by Syawie. Concurrently, several SPN unionists joined these grassroots groups, drawn by Syawie's populist campaign focused on tangible welfare issues (Rahmah 2019, 68). As Syawie assumed the role of local mayor, the grassroots groups evolved into community centres, viewing his populist programs as a strategic avenue for advancing local citizens' rights. This transformation positioned the centre as effective vehicle for unionists' objectives. Jumali, a young unionist, was subsequently appointed as the centres' leader, tasked with advocating for citizens' interests to the local government and facilitating the flow of strategic information from the government to the beneficiaries

210 Indeed, the local government eventually extended support for accessing healthcare and education facility services, but housing provision remained unaddressed (Field notes by Abu Mufakhir and Bambang Tridahana, 22-24 June 2013). While low-cost housing development often been features in populist election campaigns, most initiatives ten to falter. In the same year, central government under Jokowi's administration, introduced housing program for the working-class as indicated by housing apartment construction in Semarang. However, this populist program has progressed slowly. (detik.com 21 Mei 2020 https://finance.detik.com/properti/d-5023421/apa-kabar-program-sejuta-rumah-jokowi). Likewise, Governor Anis Baswedan, victorious in 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, encountered difficulties in fulfilling his political campaign promise to establish a low-cost housing for Jakarta's urban poor with his Zero Down Payment Program due to the issue of financial feasibility and conflicting regulations. https://jakartaglobe.id/business/no-payment-mortgage-not-possible/

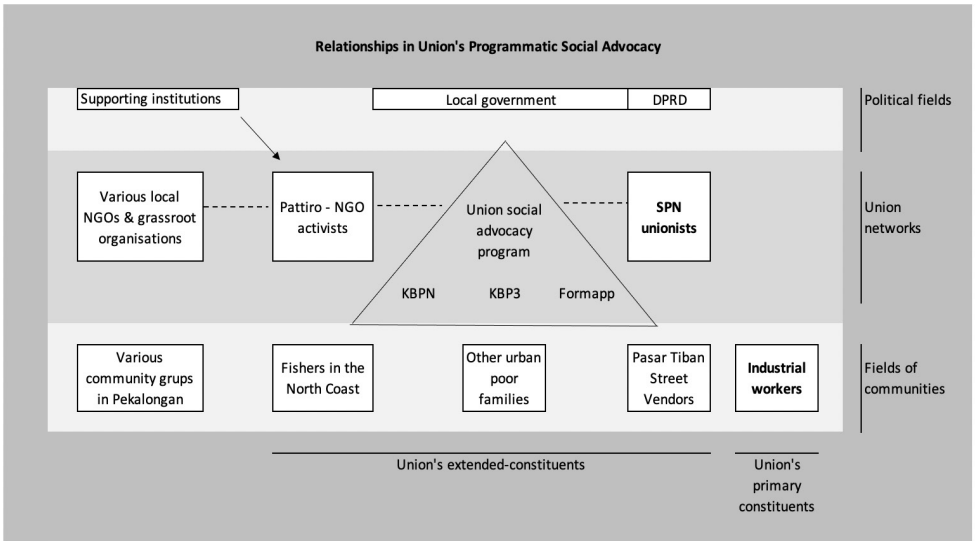
services. Additionally, these centres played a crucial role in advocacy, serving as channels for local residents to submit complaints about public services.[211]

KPBN, specifically addressing the needs of local women workers, prioritised those employed in the canned fish industrial sector and fishers' families on the north coast of Pekalongan. The rationale behind this priority was related to the socio-economic structure in these communities. The socio-economic life of workers employed in the local canned fish production factory was integrated with those who relied on the traditional fishing economy through a production chain. Thousands of these factory workers lived side by side with hundreds of poor fishing families in the north coast area. Therefore, communication between unionists and local beneficiaries, predominantly women in the fishing families, became more accessible through regular neighbourhood meetings (arisan) and other local assemblies, fostering discussions to enhance awareness of rights to public services. Unionists also provided advocacy and individual assistance, ensuring equal access to healthcare services like Jamkesda, which later transformed into BPJS.[212]

211 The centre also collaborated with eleven other local community centres operated by various grassroots organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Muslim Students' Association (HMI - Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam), batik makers' community in Pasirsari, the environmentalist student association, and village communities. The other complaint centres were also established at four locations of Pasar Tiban. See the following section for illustration on Pasar Tiban. For further details, see: http://pattiro.org/2012/11/pattiro-pekalongan-launches-public-service-complaint-month/

212 The unionists' advocacy for healthcare services was also driven by discrepancies in statistical data, resulted in the exclusion of a large number of the poor from accessing social security. According to national standard statistical measure, the reported number of the poor in Pekalongan had decreased. Consequently, some poor families in Pekalongan were no longer considered eligible for local social security (Jamkesda). However, local female unionists residing in the north coast contested this reduction, asserting that it was a statistical matter rather than a genuine decline. Ida, one of the unionists remarked, "I have seen that they remain poor, so how does the Statistical Bureau reduce the number of the poor?" She and other activists of KBPN and KBP3 and Formapp went to the officials of local Statistical Bureau and the Local Health Office to discuss this issue. Interview with Ida, 11 February 2021.

Figure 6.1



Despite receiving official funding support for a few years, these programmatic activities continued, leaving a lasting impact on non-traditional union activism even after the funding ended. Unionists maintained extensive networks with bureaucrats, politicians, community leaders, academics, and activists from various grassroots organisations. At the grassroots level, they established an institutionalised channel of communication and advocacy for poor families in the region. The BSI factory women unionists preserved regular village meetings, involving workers and fisher families on the North Coast, while young unionists in West Pekalongan congregated with neighbours to discuss access to national social security (BPJS).

The unionists' engagement in these social advocacy programs vividly illustrates the link between political opportunities arising from decentralisation and the workplace impasses faced by the workers, leading to the unionists' reinterpretations of the meaning of the workers' struggle. The interactions among unionists and other activists play significant role in this reinterpretation, revealing another arena of possible activism, and impacting on the making of a new category of constituents. Through this programmatic activism and intensive interactions with diverse groups, the unionists identified various local people, such as fisher families in the north coast, workers' families and neighbours, as the beneficiaries of their activism. This activism platform allowed them to engage with more diverse groups in the city as described in the following section.

6.2.4. Communities in loosely structured movements

The combination of experiences in programmatic activism and the knowledge accumulated from the unionists' interactions with other groups, such as farmers in Batang and labour NGO activists from other regions, has guided the SPN unionists towards a broader perspective on the social conditions in Pekalongan and the forms of advocacy they develop.

For example, some young SPN unionists played a leading role in settling a dispute between the national train company (KAI) and a workers' neighbourhood community, concerning land acquisition.[213] In 2010, unionists invited members to join a local mass demonstration in Pekalongan protesting increased electricity and fuel tariffs, perceived as burdensome for the urban poor. Other unionists were involved in defending the rights to education for workers' families whose children were at risk of dropping out of school. Some unionists also advocated for the widows of fishermen in the north coast of Pekalongan, fighting for severance pay for their late husbands who were lost at sea. Together with SPN members, unionists took on roles as community volunteers, participating in village consultative assemblies (LMD or LMK) to facilitate access to public services for those in need. To enhance the effectiveness of these extended roles, some union members were encouraged to participate in neighbourhood associations (RT or RW).

Of all the community-related activism, the closest intersection with workers' lives is the occupation-based organisation, Paguyuban Pasar Tiban (PPT), meaning an informal market of street vendors established only for a few hours on certain days. These traditional markets accommodated traders selling various household needs informally in the city of Pekalongan. Due to its flexibility, this market served as a safety valve for the unemployed, providing an alternative economic activity for those facing job losses, including those affected by the downturn of local batik clothes industries. Although there is no valid statistical record of the transfer of workers from industrial occupations to this informal market, the local union leader claimed at least eight hundred traders spread across four locations in Pekalongan.[214] With a net income ranging from Rp 10,000 to Rp 75,000 (0.60 to 4.5 Euro) per night, this market became the backbone of their survival amid fierce competition from both traditional and modern markets.

213 Interview with Edy, 3 June 2015

214 Interview with a Pekalongan branch SPN young unionist who was also a leader of Paguyuban Pasar Tiban Community on 6 February 2014.

The intersectionality of PPT and the SPN unionists was evident in its leadership, enabling PPT members to be the beneficiaries of Pattiro's programmatic advocacy. They collaborated in establishing Complaint Centres in markets since 2012 to facilitate grievances from street vendors and surrounding residents about the local environment, directing them to local governments. With SPN unionists in charge of the PPT leadership, some unionists also defended the vendors' interests, as demonstrated in a collective protest against the local government's decision in 2015 to outlaw street vendors, forcing them to move to an existing established market (see Photo 21). In response to this decision, hundreds of street vendors, supported by SPN unionists, took to the streets in protest, blocking access to busy roads close to government offices using their carts. Additionally, they brought the case to the local parliament, urging Bowo to facilitate negotiations with the local authority. The protest evolved into a political advocacy action, showcasing the collaborative efforts of PPT and SPN unionists to protect the interests of street vendors and challenge restrictive government policies.



Photo 21: Hundreds of street vendors, supported by some SPN unionists, organised street demonstration in Pekalongan to protest an eviction of their selling place.

The interaction between SPN unionists and various groups in Pekalongan highlights the distinctive nature of their unionism compared to most other

unions of that time. While the advocacy activities conducted by unionists and their members towards these community groups lack a structured program, these activities foster a sense of closeness between the union and diverse communities. This, in turn, reinforces the character of their activism, extending beyond the confines of the workplace. However, a crucial question arises regarding the effect of such non-regular activism for the union's primary constituents: the industrial workers. Does the involvement of unionists with these diverse groups contribute to the formation of a solidarity bond among various marginalised groups? This inquiry prompts reflection on the dynamics of representation between unions and these constituencies. The evolving situation illustrated above prompts a crucial question: Could all the targeted community groups engage in the union's extended activism potentially be claimed as new constituents of the local union?

6.2.5. Extended Constituencies, Strategic Alliances, and Collective Identity

Social movement constituents generally refer to those whose voices and interests are advocated by their representatives or leaders. Porta and Diani (2006, 145) refer to them as natural constituents. Owen (2019), however, provides a nuanced perspective by categorising them into two distinct types. He categorises Porta and Diani's term as beneficiary constituents for one category and introduces another type: conscience constituents. According to Owen, conscience constituents are individuals who indirectly benefit from the success of the movement' goals by engaging in indirect participation in the movement (2019, 26). These individuals are typically the diverse outsiders or sympathisers of the movement.

These diverse constituents become involved in movements for different reasons. While Owen's exchange theory approach (2019, 4-6, 40) helps distinguish different types of constituents, it lacks clarity on how the identification is constructed, which is crucial for understanding the collective identity in a heterogeneous movement. The identity of constituency is not solely defined by the institutionalised pattern of reciprocal relations derived from the benefits of the movement. Since a social movement is fundamentally the product of the contentious politics (Tarrow 2011, 6), the construction of identity is also shaped by such antagonistic relations between the movement constituents and the dominant opponents they are challenging such as the state (Meyer, Whittier and Robnett 2002, 19) or the capitalist forces (Cox and Nilsen 2014, 62).

Within a labour movement, the various community groups of non-industrial workers targeted may initially be categorised outsiders as they were not

inherently aligned with the core traditional interests of the union organisation. Community-oriented activism initiated by union leaders, however, have presented these outsiders with a nuanced dilemma: determining whether they remain true outsiders or could potentially evolve into integral elements of the movement. This question is pivotal as the main intent of the extended labour movement was to unite these diverse groups under a common banner by advocating collectively for their shared interests. To integrate union members into community-based struggles, a reciprocal support from other community groups becomes essential. Given the importance of collectiveness, the establishment of a collective identity becomes a significant focal point.

While unionists in Pekalongan achieved a degree of success in fostering cohesion among activists from various groups to support their collective activism, mobilising heterogeneous constituents at the grassroots level and claiming them as union constituents proved to be a more challenging endeavour due to their complex social structure. As the conscience constituents, referring to all groups of non-industrial workers whose interests were advocated by the unionists, they were literally the outsiders of the union movements.

Citizen's rights have served a central subject in shaping their relationship in activism. Their position is shaped by the common experiences of being marginalised by state policies – either national or local ones, some of which were even slightly oppressive as exemplified by the case of street vendors and land grabbing described earlier. The unionists had extended their own performance as the citizens' rights defenders. Nevertheless, such relationships do not elucidate the extent to which the they had reproduced the shared identity consistently as the constituents of the broader movements. Each community group had a distinct relationship with the unionists, as indicated in table 6.1. This diversity reveals a complex structure of the heterogeneous outsiders, which consequently creates some challenges in fostering a unified interest and shared identity between the unionists and the various communities they advocated for, which bound them as a social force: a community-oriented movement.

Table 6.1. Unionists-communities Relationships in the Extended Movements in Pekalongan

Groups and Communities Aspects	Urban poor communities under Pattiro's program	Vendor community organised by Paguyuban Pasar Tiban	Community and groups with dispute cases (in land, education, etc).
unionist engagement	All union leaders and some members	Union leaders (individually)	Individual leaders (individually)
Status of collaboration	Formal	Informal / symbolic	Patronage / symbolic
Organisation of collaboration	institutionally integrated under collaborative programs	Less structured	Individual collaboration
Community-trade union relations	Program-based Beneficiaries	Direct and Indirect beneficiaries	Indirect beneficiaries
Position of workers/ union members	Primary Beneficiaries	Symbolic relationship	Mixed
Length of relationship	Based on program; but then it is ongoing independently	Long-term due to shared leadership	Short lived
Economic resources	embedded in the program	Voluntarily community-based resource	Voluntarily community-based resource
Relationship of activists and group members with the dominant power	Cooperative	Oppositional	Oppositional
The dominant power with which the unionists/activists were dealing	(Local) state/ power holders	(Local) state/ power holders	(Local) state/ power holders

The first challenge arises from the fact that most unionists' advocacies and struggles circulated primarily as particular issues and did not develop significantly into universal issues that were connected with major grievances of the marginalised groups in the city. The unionists indeed played a substantial role in the advocacy of the accesses to healthcare services and to providing communication channels for the local poor to local authorities. However, these were only limited scope issues for the marginalised urban poor. The limitation is affected by the unionists' attachment to the institutionalised programs initiated by the Pattiro activists, which were structured under the international

donors' framework. Some of the early initiatives such as low-cost housing and reducing educational costs which received inadequate response from the local governments were not developed further well by the activists.

This contrasts with the Brazilian social movements in the 1970-1980s which succeeded in uniting community movements and labour movements under the framework of claiming full-citizenship rights that gave them a strategic weapon to force the state to facilitate the reproduction of labour power (Seidman 1994, 198). Through this strategy, the heterogeneous social segments of the social movements converged in a nexus that covered fundamental common citizens' issues. Public issues like transportation, health, housing, sanitation, electricity, were collectively translated as a common need for underpinning the reproduction of labour power, which Seidman (1994, 203) defines this as process of spill-over of labour activism into labour community. The movements transform the particular citizenship issues into a class-based struggle.

Some unionists in Pekalongan had been indeed actively involved in addressing various issues like land grabbing, workers' children's education, the rights of fishermen's families affected by accidents at sea and the rights of street vendors to peddle. However, most of these efforts remain limited in scale. They did not address these to broader communities of the city. For instance, while unionists advocated for the right to educational continuity for some workers' children, there were similar issues that affected many others in urban poverty pockets.[215] Similarly, efforts to address land dispute settlements fell short of addressing the wider settlement challenges experienced by the northern coast residents. These villages were plagued by coastal floods on an annual basis, causing significant disruptions to the livelihoods of thousands of fishermen and factory workers for several weeks.

The second challenge is the limited narratives about the unifying social bases. The experience of social movements in Brazil aforementioned above is an example of how they highlighted the reproduction of labour power,[216] serving as a unifying strategic element that aligns the interests of diverse communities

215 Some workers of textile factories told that they were obliged to pay additionally educational fees (*uang sumbangan sekolah*) for various items such as standard textbooks, school buildings, uniforms, which created additional burdens in family expenses. Similar grievances were also expressed by some people living in the north coast. (Interview with Darsih, workers of textile factory, and her husband. 1 March 2014; Mulyono, workers of textile factory, 21 March 2014).

216 This concept of labour power reproduction, as articulated by Marx, is crucial for workers to sustain their work capacity and support the socio-economic well-being of their families (Marx 1976, 275-277).

and that of the working class. Unionists and activists addressed various issues of inadequate city infrastructure, and connected these concerns to the essential requirements for workers to effectively perform their daily works. Concurrently, they also persistently advocated for better wages from companies. This fusion of class-based demands and the aspirations for citizenship rights harmonised the diverse constituents, and mitigated tensions between citizenship relations and class dynamics, through populist strategies devised by the activists of movement and political actors (Seidman 1994, 222-224).

Beyond those circumstances that facilitated for community-workplace integration, activists also undertook strategic measures to redefine the relationship between these two entities, particularly the interplay between workplace and community life (Seidman 1994, 202). The re-interpretation of that relationship was essential. It was articulated through narratives which permeated various spheres of public discourse. By constructing these narratives, a clear understanding of the subjects and entities being advocated for crystallised in the minds of both activists and the heterogeneous movement's constituents.

In the context of Pekalongan, the narratives of the links between those two subjects were localised intensively only among industrial workers. At union meetings with workers in several labour pockets of Pekalongan city, the union leaders repeatedly reminded the significance of the access to the local social security to secure their health which is necessary for performing their tasks in the workplace. They talked eloquently about the various needs of workers' everyday life – such as child caring and educations, and workers needs for holidays – that connected with workplace-related narratives such as wages and the risks of dismissals. They also discussed it in terms of coexistence of labour roles and citizenship roles within the set of roles of each individual of workers.

The unionists, however, encountered difficulties in creating comprehensive narratives when engaging with ordinary people within communities outside the union membership. An illustrative instance occurred during the 2014 legislative-election campaign for their candidates in impoverished urban areas, where the unionists seemed to segregate community-specific concerns from employment-related matters. In this context, the workers' legislative candidate and his team predominantly emphasised the unions' struggles while offering only vague references to community needs. Another SPN's legislative candidate even entirely neglected to communicate any narrative encompassing labour and community issues, focusing solely on his own role as a candidate. Meanwhile, in public discourse, the only known unions' specific contribution in community

activism pertained to advocating for social security and improved healthcare access. This awareness found its way through various channels, such as media outlets and neighbourhood leadership forums. [217]

Conversely, supporting activists, who were generally associated with the Nadhlatul Ulama (NU), predominantly emphasised the interplay between religious values, their religious organisation, and the everyday challenges faced by their communities. Other factions, such as student groups and the batik-makers' union, concentrated on illustrating the relevance of their respective activism to community concerns, particularly in terms of public service. Consequently, each faction – including also the union members on the grass root level – articulated its own connection to the community's needs and interests, without a unifying foundation that represent the interests of diverse constituents.[218]

The final challenge refers to the fragmented roles of representative figures. While the SPN unionists held prominent positions representing the interests of numerous union members and external groups, this did not necessarily align all these groups under a unified front with shared interests. This situation emerged due to the division of representative roles across various activist groups. An illustrative example is found within the street vendor community of Pasar Tiban (PPT). Despite the unionists assuming leadership roles within this community association, the members primarily perceived them as advocates for their interests in public advocacy and their personal struggles for livelihood. The way they ran this association hindered a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted roles of the unionists, who also represented the local working class. Consequently, the local industrial workers continued to be perceived by PPT members as outsiders with disparate interests. Although many PTT members were formerly employed in factories, they no longer identified with the industrial working class and had limited interaction with their former factory colleagues. Their focus shifted towards daily vending activities and the precarious, informal nature of their trade, diverting their attention from local industrial labour matters.

217 A few SPN unionists had been elected by the village (*kampung*) communities to be the neighbourhood leaders (Ketua RT/RW) in Pekalongan City.

218 I met a young ordinary worker at a company, a textile factory, where he was being employed, on 23 July 2021. He revealed that ordinary workers knew about the engagement of their senior fellows in Pattiro's community centres activities, particularly Formapp and KBP3, but many junior fellows did know much about the specific activities of these centres. Thus, it is reasonable if people from other communities were also unable to figure out the wider perspective of these collaborations.

The core issue lies in the absence of a unifying figures who became a symbol of representation for these diverse groups, resulting in a lack of connection among them despite being led by the same intertwined actors. As previously mentioned, all main activists engaged in the Pattiro networks were connected to the NU organisation, which had also led to unionists becoming involved in this movement. Nonetheless, Islamic symbols that were embedded into the activists exerted a more potent influence on the identities of various grassroots groups. A significant number of Pekalongan residents identified themselves as part of NU, rather than viewing themselves as integral to a broader working-class identity. The construction of NU's identity has evolved over an extensive history, while the development of a working-class identity in the city has fluctuated and was even dismantled during the New Order era due to its foundation on a fragile social context.

I argue that the most pressing challenge within the Pekalongan movements is, in fact, rooted in the constrained capacity of the unionists and primary supporting activists to establish hegemonic elements capable of uniting the diverse constituents. This situation is underscored by the absence of substantial discourses and narratives that could serve as a symbolic chain of equivalence, effectively connecting the disparate constituent groups into a cohesive front as initially envisioned. In contrast to several other social movements characterised by heterogeneous constituents, many activists have successfully introduced a fixed signifier, which takes the form of a consistent rhetoric, symbol, or name that effectively represents a collective identity of the groups involved (Howarth 2015, 66).

Within the context of Pekalongan, the existing sense of identity among community members has become fragmented across various groups, posing challenges for constituents to establish connections with one another. This situation highlights the failure of the unionists to effectively translate the well-formulated concepts articulated by their leaders regarding the imperative for workers to expand their struggle into the realm of citizenship. This expansion is not only aimed at aligning the workers' struggle with community interests but also at reciprocally aligning the community with the interests of workers. This issue becomes extremely essential when it comes to the political endeavours as discussed in the next section.

6.3. Politicising Union

Political activism is a prevailing characteristic of community unionism or social movement unionism (Moody 1997) (Waterman 1993) (Mollona 2009). Taking this direction will inevitably drag unions into political contestations with strong power holders. Incorporating diverse constituents with varying social backgrounds into this arena undoubtedly amplifies the intricacies of unions' political struggles (Schiavone 2007). For Indonesian unions, however, this path proves challenging due to their three-decade-long exclusion political traditions.[219] As a result, politics has become an unfamiliar domain for their endeavours. Even a decade after the fall of the authoritarian regime, many unionists remain hesitant to collaborate with political parties, and grassroots workers maintain reservations about potential detrimental effects stemming from the (re)politicisation of their traditional focus—workers' welfare (Caraway, Ford and Nugroho 2015, 1311). Conversely, some other unionists simplistically assume that the collective might of labour alone can function as a political force representing the working class.[220] However, this assertion lacks substantial empirical support at present. [221]

While it is indeed accurate that all workers' economic struggles inherently possess political dimensions, transforming workers into political forces necessitates significant ideological and organisational shifts. Thus, politicising movements through a community-oriented unionism within the Indonesian political landscape inherently involves risks of rise and decline. Such a transformative process with ups and downs is observable in the political evolution of SPN in Pekalongan. This journey was by no means characterised by smooth progression. The unionists' interpretation of political movements, opportunities, representations, and strategies underwent ongoing adjustments, shifting from one phase to another. These changes and disparities were not solely temporal but also influenced the social dynamics within the movement itself. Inevitably, internal tensions among unionists extended to the rank-and-file members. This

219 Therefore, the unions and the working class as political forces were still absent in the early period of political transition up to the second democratic General Elections (Törnquist 2004, 384). Although four new political parties appeared, claiming to represent the working class by bearing the names of labour (*buruh* or *pekerja*) in 1999 Elections, none of them had significant support from the working class and were well-integrated into the existing trade unions (Caraway and Ford 2020, 36-37).

220 This tendency was often found in several conversations with unionists from different union organisations and different regions, representing the lack of their experiences in political contestations due to the effect of past depoliticization.

221 A number of new parties claimed to represent workers, but there has not been any single labour party which successfully sustained until two decades since Indonesia's political reform.

dynamism, on one hand, underscores the dominant roles of union leaders in steering organisational development. On the other hand, it unveils the impacts of external political and economic forces. Consequently, this scenario significantly influenced the extent to which the interests of heterogeneous constituents were considered within political processes, shaping the overarching character of their movements as community-based endeavours.

6.4.1. Initiating political interests

The initiation of workers' engagement in electoral politics marked a departure from traditional labour interests for the SPN in Pekalongan. This shift, however, was not a meticulously planned collective agenda: it occurred abruptly and exhibited an elitist nature, lacking the systematic organisation needed to authentically represent the interests of the local working class. During this phase, the majority of local SPN leaders and members remained centred on workplace-based welfare, encapsulating their understanding of unionism in the phrase "The Union is all about wages." This perspective was prevalent among Indonesian trade unions, especially those that had severed ties with the old SPSI, inheriting a legacy of state corporatism that discouraged engagement with political matters.

The initial impetus for political involvement within the SPN in Pekalongan largely stemmed from external influences, rather than originating from within the union itself. NGOs and the allure of democratic elections emerged as significant factors shaping the union's early political agendas. The initial idea of political actions appeared after some Pekalongan unionists attended a voter education program in 2004, held by the International NGO ACILS (the American Centre for International Labour Solidarity).[222] This program aimed to encourage unionists to realise their potential strength and generate confidence to engage in electoral politics, breaking the widespread distrust of the working class towards political actions caused by the past authoritarian regime's depoliticisation (Caraway and Ford 2020, 137).

The SPN at national level union is arguably the first union that quickly made involvement in electoral politics as an official union program (Caraway and Ford, 2020, p. 131), although the initiative was never worked out neatly by the national leadership (see Chapter 2). When the central organisation entered into a political contract with PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, Welfare Justice Party; a party with Islamic orientation) for a collaboration in 2009 elections, none of branch unions

222 Interview with Budhy, 1 January 2014, and updated on 11 January 2021

in the regions followed the central instruction in a disciplined way. Instead, they were likely to move according to own local political conditions.[223]

In Pekalongan, labour NGO activists and local political conditions had played a significant role since 2004 in accelerating trade union political enthusiasm. Influential NGO activists like Fauzi Abdullah from LIPS and other activists from Yawas endorsed union re-politicisation. However, the political formulations were often too abstract at this stage, with discourse on labour politics mixed with broader issues of citizenship, lacking systematic organisational strategies within labour movements. Union politics, viewed pragmatically as union leaders' electoral experiments, often neglected the grassroots constituents as a significant political force. This approach, to some extent, was also caused by the unionists' doubts about the political capacity of the union base due to the legacy of past authoritarian regimes' political destruction.[224] This was indeed a common feature of labour candidates elsewhere. Opportunism and the immediate pursuit of local political opportunities characterised how Indonesian unionists set their electoral goals particularly in early elections of reformation era (Ford 2014, 342), contributing to the absence of consistent allegiance to a specific political party (Aspinall and Berenschot 2019, 67-69). This is how the unionists in Pekalongan also began their political moves.

It was Bowo who became the first unionist in Pekalongan promoted by the union elite circle to engage in the local electoral politics. He initially joined the Partai Demokrat (Democrat Party) in 2004, but later switched to Golkar, citing its strong local roots and attempts to shed its notorious image from the past authoritarian regime. Thanks to his collaboration with Syawie, a populist local Golkar leader who had been elected as the mayor of Pekalongan in 2005, Bowo gained a victory that sent him successfully to DPRD (regional parliament) as the legislative. He was even elected to be the chair of the council. His successful political leap in the 2009 elections opened a new political landscape and opportunities for him and the local SPN to develop a new character of unionism.

223 Unions in Pekalongan and Tangerang were two SPN regional branch unions which arguably took early political initiatives to participate in the General Elections. While branch of Tangerang began its move in 2009, Pekalongan had initiated in 2004.

224 Our study revealed an additional finding indicating that approximately half of our survey respondents disagreed with their own union leaders who aspired to participate in political competitions, including legislative elections or local elections (Pilkada). While this information was not included in the published data, it sheds light on the workers' reluctance, during that period, to involve their unions in politics. (Caraway, Ford and Nugroho 2015)

This initial foray into politics indicates three key points of reflection. Firstly, despite the lack of experience in political movements, the political measures represented a powerful branch-organisational dynamic beyond hierarchical control. In contrast to confusion among many branch unions due to the central organisation's inability to mobilise effectively, Pekalongan unionists moved convincingly in a direction of their choosing.[225] The SPN unionists in Pekalongan capitalised on the flexible central instructions by garnering full support from the local Golkar party, instead of the PKS, for Bowo as a legislative candidate. Thanks to the local Golkar's appeal to fragmented Muslim constituents resulted from the collapse base of local traditional Islamic party, PPP, Bowo secured significant votes in his campaign (see also chapter 5).[226] While Bowo's victory resulted from individuals' coalition rather than fully institutional collaboration of Golkar and SPN, it instilled confidence in unionists to pursue continued collaboration with the political party. [227]

Secondly, the politicisation of the movement led to the concentration of political capital and union power in the hands of a few elite union leaders. Bowo's position in the highest regional political institution provided avenues for direct communication with local authorities, politicians, community figures, and consequently also bestowed symbolic power on elite union leaders in front of local political and economic elites. This concentration of power became a significant political capital, increasing the leverage of the union. The local employers in certain companies recognised that Bowo transcended the role of an ordinary union leader. He indeed actively influenced the mayor to make pro-worker decisions in disputes, encouraged local labour officials to fairly resolve conflicts, and facilitated negotiations for pro-worker local regulations. This symbolic power, however, was not necessarily inherent but rather also constructed by the unionists collectively through claims and the articulation

225 A formerly SPN leader of Kota Tangerang (1 May 2015), admitted the difficulties of coordinating the union's legislative candidates due to the lack of communications among them and the lack of agreements about shared strategies. The former chair of SPN's central organisation, Wirahyoso (28 July 2011), also acknowledged that there was a widespread disappointment from union branches about how central organisation coordinated the cooperation between union and the political party (PKS).

226 In Pekalongan, NU and Muhammadyah each have a substantial traditional Muslim base. This historically served as a political strength for PPP party, particularly during the Suharto regime, providing competition against Golkar's dominance in non-democratic general elections. However, in the reformasi era, this Muslim base has fragmented into various smaller Islamic-based political parties, including PKS.

227 The was no official collaboration between the local Golkar Party and SPN for winning Bowo to be the legislative candidate. It was simply the collaboration of individuals claiming to have the support of the working class.

of symbols representing the relationship between Bowo and other leaders. For instance, at a government meeting, Budhy and his union colleagues invoked Bowo's name as the chairman of the DPRD to press the local manpower officer (Disnaker) to facilitate broader access to public information as mandated by national regulations. These actions, along with symbolic representations, constituted significant political capital that enhanced the union's leverage, at least during this phase.

Lastly, the concentration of political capital in elite circles resulted in the reproduction of patronage within the union. The introduction of political activism created a new pattern of internal power relations, establishing a strong form of patronage within the movement. Bowo, as the most senior unionist, founder, and final decision-maker, concentrated power within the elite circle, creating a hierarchical structure that contrasted with the majority of members at the grassroots level. Although some middle-level leaders provided an open space for dialogues with members in rank and file, this unequal distribution of power sometimes caused unrest within the union.

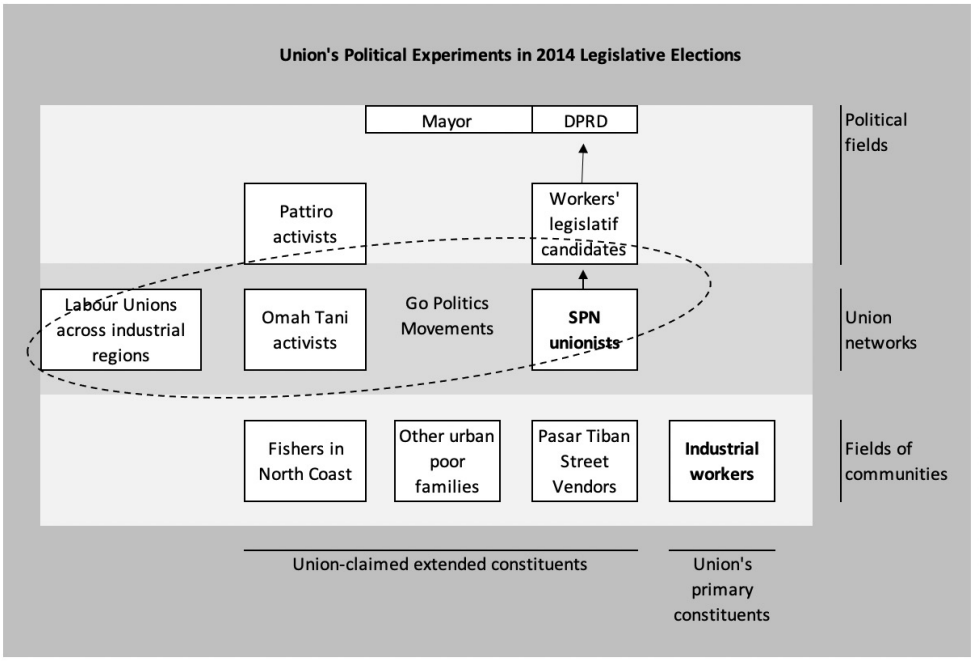
6.4.2. Securing the movement

While the initial stage marked a significant onset of union politicization in Pekalongan, the subsequent phase represented the union's actual political character. During this new phase, unionists undertook an organisational transformation to reduce their strong dependence on existing local political elites. Political experiences were shared among all union members at the grassroots level, fostering independence among constituents as political subjects. This phase was crucial not only for internal shifts but also due to changes in the political context. The local political elite gained increasing strength, leading to escalated conflicts between SPN unionists and the political elite, fuelled by a barrage of industrial disputes. These conflicts ultimately reversed the political relationship between the union and local political forces. Taking the 2014 legislative elections as an experimental milestone, this phase marked the beginning of establishing a genuine collective political character to secure their existence amidst local political changes and the national shift in labour movements.

The accumulation of industrial conflicts between 2010 and 2014 significantly affected the relationships between local SPN unionists and Golkar elites in Pekalongan. The union's demands for the intervention of local political elites in settling industrial conflicts eventually disrupted the elites' power. Syawie, initially a populist, transformed into what Sidel categorises as a 'local strongman'

(Sidel 2005).[228] Syawie secured and consolidated his power, particularly during his second term (2010-2015), by controlling the government bureaucracy, the majority of local parliamentarians, gaining support from extensive business networks, aligning interests with national elites, and mobilising larger grassroots groups for his own interests (Savirani 2015). As Syawie's power expanded, the activism of SPN, initially supported by him, increasingly faced obstacles within Syawie's networks. Unionists were aware of these challenges during recent struggles for pro-worker local labour regulations, demands for higher minimum wages, and the settlement of industrial disputes.

Figure 6.2



228 In his critique of Migdal, who originally coined the concept of 'local strongmen,' Sidel redefines it in the context of Southeast Asia, specifically citing examples from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. According to Sidel, 'local strongmen' are individuals who exert powerful control over local resources by capturing local state power, encompassing both local bureaucracy and parliaments. They also leverage local business networks to amplify their overall influence and, at times, possess the capacity to mobilise massive grassroots forces using primordial identities or underground connections. Sidel argues that the emergence of 'local strongmen' is an unintended consequence of Indonesia's decentralisation and democratization (Sidel 2005, 67).

The peak of tensions occurred during the industrial conflict at Aro Hospital, which was triggered by the dismissal of two new SPN leaders.[229] Heavy pressure from thousands of SPN members and other supporters, expressed through street protests, unfolded over several days. This protest disrupted the close connection between the hospital's top management and the mayor. In response to the protest, political pressures within Golkar intensified. Bowo, representing both the union and the party, was forced by party elites to confront his own union, which was ironically fighting for the fate of its members. The intense political pressure resulted in workers' disappointment due to the failure of the union to meet their demands, as it prioritised securing Bowo's position in Golkar for the union's long-term political interests.

This incident was just the tip of the iceberg in the growing tensions between local political elites and the SPN. The political nuances of the industrial conflicts highlighted how Bowo's political position became increasingly vulnerable, coinciding with the time when unionists were more dependent on formal political resources for bargaining power. This encouraged unionists to reconsider their position by seeking an alternative political path to reduce reliance on ruling elites.

The restlessness among unionists aligned with the national political revival of labour movements, led by major unions seeking to rectify their failures in the 2009 elections (see chapter 2 and 4). Major unions, particularly the Metalworkers Union (FSPMI) with support from NGO activists, initiated the Go-politics project (see Chapter 2), aiming to establish a working-class political force for electoral success by using unions as a major political machine, avoiding traditional Indonesian political practices such as party control and vote-buying (Savirani 2015). The 2014 legislative election became the target of this ambitious political experiment.

As the only union in Central Java with ties to the networks of Omah Tani, where Metalworkers Unionists and other activists learned about political movement education, SPN unionists were drawn to this political idea.[230] Joining the project led them to establish a new strategy involving changes in the characteristics of constituents, political-parties collaboration, political resources, technical

229 The detailed description of this case will be presented in the next section of this chapter.

230 It is noteworthy that, at the moment, the SPN central-organisation's decision not to engage in institutional political cooperation was still valid. However, there was no strong sanction from the central organisation to any violation on this decision.

strategies for constituent mobilisation, and the perspectives on the nature of electoral politics in the labour movement.

Change of political vehicle

The characteristic of constituents slightly changed in this new form of SPN's political activism. While the local industrial working class remained the core constituency, a significant decline in union membership, from 8000 members in the early 2000s to 3000 currently, made it insufficient as a political base. Hence, workers' families and neighbourhoods became the most strategic second layer. Additionally, community groups long advocated by SPN unionists through social advocacy activism in collaboration with Pattiro were considered another potential layer. The unionists expected that relationships built through these collaborations could be converted into political capital, targeting mainly industrial and fishing communities on the north coast, and working-class enclaves in the east and south.



Photo 22: A political training workshop held at the union branch office in Pekalongan, attended by SPN unionists from several companies. The workshop aimed to support the union candidate in the 2014 Legislative Elections.

Another inevitable change was the political parties they needed to collaborate with. It became a critical issue as the local Golkar Party decided to send Bowo to compete in the legislative elections at the provincial level of Central Java, instead of in Pekalongan level. Most local SPN leaders viewed this move with scepticism, anticipating it as Golkar's hidden agenda to exclude Bowo from the Pekalongan elite circle and thus tame union interests. Restlessness spread among the unionists at the branch level as the union's leverage gained from Bowo's political patronage was in a critical situation. In the face of dozens of ordinary union members from a local textile factory, who attended a union political training, one of the branch union leaders admitted frankly, "This really scares us. We, the branch unionists, would be vulnerable because no one protects us, no one backs us, to deal with government and security forces. We're dead! So, we need someone else to replace Pak Bowo's position as our representative."

In response to Bowo's situation, after weeks of internal dialogues, the union elites chose Dammy, the union secretary who had replaced Budhy, as a legislative candidate for the 2014 Elections. The Democrat Party was chosen as their vehicle. The rationale for choosing this party was its status as a small local party, assumed to be easier to negotiate with, evident by the party's willingness not to charge any collaboration fees, which could otherwise burden the union.[231] While Bowo continued with Golkar at the provincial level, another SPN unionist decided to compete in Pekalongan legislative elections targeting southern districts with the same party. However, like Bowo, he was not officially endorsed by SPN for the Pekalongan council for union's limited resources for his candidacy.

Political resources

The most critical issue for SPN's political actions in the 2014 elections was their access to resources. Changes in fundamental strategy reduced the union's dependence on party's resources, but problems of financial resources were the greatest worry. While achieving financial independence from party resources had the potential to generate workers' independent political consciousness, unionist faced significant challenges due to its limited financial capacity compared to larger unions participating in the Go-Politics network, particularly the Metalworkers Union. The Metalworkers Union, supported by tens of thousands of local members and external financial assistance, had a greater financial capacity,

231 In Indonesian context, it has been a common tendency that political parties require the legislative candidates to contribute a large amount of money in order to fund the campaign costs.

collecting dues at 1% of the local minimum wage from its members mostly employed in large, modern, globalised manufacturing industries.[232]

In contrast, SPN of Pekalongan suffered from extremely limited financial capacity, collecting dues at only 0.5% of the local minimum wage from around three thousand members mostly employed in medium-scale industries. Dammy, worried about the union's financial ability, estimated they would need a budget of more than 50 million Rupiah (approximately 3,100 Euros) for campaign props, equipment, organising teams, etc. Unable to collect sufficient funds as the campaign days approached, Dammy decided to retire from his job to use the severance payment for campaign financial support.

Another scarce resource was the institutional network support candidates could count on. Pekalongan unionists were isolated as a 'single fighter' within their own environment due to the national congress of SPN deciding to keep political distance from any institutional coalition with political parties. Hence, they had to rely mostly on their own networks, Bowo, Pattiro activists, and Omah Tani activists, for learning political strategies. By contrasts, the Metalworkers Union's political agenda was accelerated by strong support, not only from Omah Tani, but also the its central organisation, including several labour NGOs, academicians, and national politicians.

Limited resources were also influenced by changes in leadership style within the union itself. Since Dammy replaced Budhy in daily organisational operations, interactions with external networks changed significantly. Unlike Budhy, Dammy had a limited personal network, and the only external network they maintained was their relationship with Omah Tani in Batang. Activists and others with whom Budhy had established productive relationships over the years were less involved in this SPN's political project. Interactions with local journalists became rare, and communication with various local groups of activists also declined.

Parliament seats or political learning?

The limited resources sparked heated debates among unionists about how to perceive 'Go-politics' and proceed with their political agenda. Two main stances emerged: one favouring a parliamentary-oriented approach, and the other

232 Metalworkers Union (FSPMI) collected financial supports mostly from regular membership dues and external sources such as supports from donor institutions, etc (Tjandra 2016, 122). Most of its members came from large globalized industrial companies, mostly in metal, electronic, automotive sectors, which provided better wages, enabling them to collect significant amounts of due .

emphasising union-centric-politics. While only a few adopted the parliamentary-oriented view, they had significant influence. They considered the council seat highly valuable and non-negotiable, insisting that limited resources should not confine attempts to win the elections. On the other hand, the union's-politics-oriented stance prioritised political education based on the union's actual political capacity, emphasising the importance of organising genuine constituent mobilisation and refusing vote-buying practices.

Internal tensions surfaced within the union as some members advocated for a pragmatic approach, emphasising the importance of prioritising the acquisition of a parliamentary seats as the primary means to safeguard the unionists' political interests. These pragmatic unionists, influenced by common traditional practices in Indonesia's elections and elite perspectives, tended to distinguish the post-electoral period from the electoral moment. They viewed the relationship between elected representatives and constituents as diminishing after winning seats due to the prevalent practice of vote-buying.

> Honestly, most of DPRD members no longer maintain a connection with constituents [after securing the parliamentary seats], because [the votes] had been 'sold'. They cease to represent anyone. The logic of such [vote] buying has made the relationship between voters and representatives end [after the elections].[233]

This perception, hence, separates the "post-electoral" context from the electoral moment, framing the latter as a political arena where candidates collect tickets only to secure parliamentary seats. In this view, campaign promises become meaningless, and campaign sessions are seen as transactional rather than oriented towards fostering lasting connections with constituents.

This was confirmed during several campaign sessions I attended where this approach was applied briefly. Instead of presenting a program aligned with constituents' interests, the union's legislative candidate focused on sharing his personal information, followed by a quick technical explanation of how the constituents should vote for him at the ballot box. On occasion, he stood in front of people sitting on the floor, creating an impression of hurried interaction. After his concise explanation, a member of his campaign team distributed souvenirs to each participant. The candidate defended that this wouldn't be legally considered

233 Interview with one of the SPN leaders, 14 October 2010; reconfirmed his opinion at another interview, 23 January 2014.

as vote-buying practices since there was no written suggestion to vote for him on the souvenirs. Similarly, he distributed 50 thousand rupiah within a blank (unwritten) envelope to several participants at a campaign meeting, categorising it as a transportation fee.

The application of such a method impacted other union legislative candidates who began considering it as more effective in securing votes. However, this attitude led to tensions within the majority of unionists. Rumours about these tensions spread beyond the union office, drawing reactions from local activists, including those from Omah Tani. Some local activists attempted to convince the SPN unionists to adhere to the original political track agreed upon by the Go-Politics network. Many fellow activists, however, chose to remain silent, despite their disagreement with such pragmatic tactics.

On the other hand, unionists who held the union's-politics-oriented stance acknowledged the difficulties of winning the council seat due to the union's limited resources and the political incapacity of the union's constituents. Moreover, they recognised the difficulties posed by vote-buying practices from political rivals and the absence of a strong working-class political identity. Despite the workers' militance in industrial relations, which to some extent strengthened the working-class identity, the unionists believed that transforming this militancy into a formidable political force required significantly greater resources.

The prevalence of vote-buying practices in elections heightened suspicion among grassroots union members about the personal motives behind the union's political agendas. In an informal dialogue at the SPN office's backyard, an ordinary union member expressed concerns about the lack of understanding among members regarding the political meaning of the labour movement. The member bluntly reminded the leaders that suspicions were fuelled not only by this lack of understanding but also by their observation of how decisions on labour disputes were taken by a handful of union elites in exclusive dialogues with political party leaders and government officials. The member cited labour dispute cases in ARO Hospital, the unfinished case of Sri Ratu, and some other cases in textile factories, which raised doubts about the genuineness of the union's struggles in the political field. The apolitical attitude, lack of enthusiasm, insufficient political comprehension, and the absence of political identities among union members were identified as essential reasons for some union leaders' scepticism about winning the legislative elections.

The scepticism among the majority of unionists marked a shift in political attitude, with winning the legislative elections no longer seen as the primary target. Instead, they began to emphasise the significance of political education for the union's constituents over victory itself. The elections were viewed as an opportunity to assess the extent of the political power held at the base level and to gauge community support for the union's struggle. Despite acknowledging the benefits of Bowo's political patronage, many unionists with a unions'-politics-oriented stance began to realise that the power they enjoyed in previous years was not genuine union power but a political dependence that became detrimental to the union when it conflicted with defending members and elite political interests.

Cultivating political knowledge at grass root level

In such circumstances, internal efforts became the mainstay to strengthen the base for their political goals. They regularly organised enterprise-based meetings for political education in various locations, including the SPN branch office, where the campaign team gathered union representatives from each enterprise. During these meetings, union representatives from the enterprise level typically took positions in the centre of the meeting room, while ordinary members gathered around the edges or corners, sitting quietly or occasionally engaging in conversation.

Despite the usefulness of large meetings for introducing members to union political goals, informal gatherings in small groups held in turns at unionists' houses were more effective for exchanging political knowledge and particularly for consolidating political strategy. Some mid-layer unionists took initiatives to conduct these meetings to confirm the unionists' commitment to mobilisation based on actual union political capacity. These meetings also aimed to dispel worries and suspicions that spread among members about rumours regarding the union's political agenda. Mid-layer unionists paid serious attention to this situation, especially following the increasing number of cases of industrial disputes that erupted along with the union's political activities.

Despite the limitations in maintaining the broad networks of the local SPN, mid-layer unionists played a significant role in preserving the union's political moves. They allowed fierce debates to take place within the elite circle of the local union at the branch office. In informal settings, these mid-layer leaders sought to exert their influence over others outside the formal union structure. This backstage influence was crucial in maintaining their strategy. Meanwhile, the formal forum of political training became a front stage for the alignment

between a few leaders' strong political passion and the mid-layer unionists who wanted to retain the union's political agenda.

6.4.3. Contested Constituencies

The working class is often viewed as a potential source of votes in elections, with their votes sought after for either defending their interests or contributing to the political success of candidates aiming for parliamentary positions. However, in political reality, the distinction between these two motives is not always clear-cut. During campaigns, various claims and framings are presented in the name of workers, contested by political actors for their own political goals, often without the full awareness of constituents in the grassroots. Political elites may exploit such campaigns for their personal interests. Similarly, when union leaders participate in legislative elections, it becomes a complex task to differentiate between hegemonic elitist rhetoric and representation that genuinely aligns with the interests of constituents. The worker constituents can only evaluate this distinction when their leaders are faced with dilemmatic labour disputes during the campaign period.

Contested by Others

Some cases were observed revealing how workers' votes were contested by other legislative candidates who were interested in political collaboration with the SPN unionists. During interactions between unionists and political candidates, a battleground emerged between manifest and hidden interests. Language, rhetoric, social status, and attributes became signifiers of how antagonistic actual interests were framed to encourage harmonious alignments of interests. This dynamic resembled Goffman's dramaturgy of front stage and back stage (Merelman 1969; Goffman 1959), unfolding within an antagonistic class structure – the context that conventional interactionist scholars completely overlook (Puddephatt 2013, 61).

Poppy Dharsono, a former celebrity, came to SPN of Pekalongan for the support of the local working class. She was a well-known politician from Jakarta who was a former top model in the 1980-90s, a fashion designer, an owner and a leader of a number of companies, including the garment and textile industry. She was an incumbent of the Regional Representative Council who represented the Province of Central Java at the national level.

When a prominent politician, Poppy Dharsono, sought support from the local working class, tensions arose. Despite her upper-class image and businesswoman

status, she attempted to align business and workers against the government. However, her narratives revealed contradictions as she framed workers' issues under business logics. While using jargon like 'fight Neoliberalism (lawan Neoliberalisme)', 'struggle for people (berjuang demi rakyat)', 'defending workers' rights (membela buruh)' to attract unionists, she argued that poor labour condition was the consequence of how business interest of the 'powerless' employers was harmed by inadequate socio-economic government policies. By framing harmonious industrial relations as an ideal business climate, she expected a joint political front against the ruling government to defend the business interest in order to secure the workers socio-economic well-being.

Poppy's campaign immediately alerted some unionists to the unitarist approach of New Order's industrial relations system which they had abandoned, triggering discomfort among unionists who had attempted to dismantle the legacy of the New Order's labour regime. The unionists became increasingly unenthusiastic when Poppy's campaign team treated them merely as campaign operators rather than independent political subjects.

A similar situation unfolded with another politician from Gerindra party, who aimed to win elections in Pekalongan City. Despite claiming knowledge on labour problems, her campaign rhetoric indicated otherwise. The negotiations focused more on concrete tactics of mobilising votes than addressing critical labour issues. Unionists exhibited militancy through orations and video presentations of their demonstrations, while politicians concentrated on campaign tactics.

Despite the obvious attempts of these politicians to capture workers' votes through rhetoric campaigns, it did not necessarily sway the workers' political preferences. In campaigns in front of the SPN constituents – both union members and the communities they have advocated for – the unionists also did not take any systematic and significant measures to encourage the members to vote for Poppy and the other parties' candidates. There was no discourse on these politicians except for the circulation of posters without any illustration about the figures and their relevance to the workers. The unionists alone were preoccupied with the complicated issues of the campaigns for their own legislative candidates, as illustrated earlier. Like any other politicians, the unionists themselves could not even assure the support of the union's core constituents for their candidates without remarkable efforts.

Unionists' concerns about the lack of support arise not from the rhetoric battles in political campaigns, but from the widespread practice of vote buying

in Indonesian elections. This practice has encouraged less popular candidates to rely on this approach to attract more voters. In such 'voting markets', no candidates can assure their success since they may not be able to control the decision that voters make in the ballot box (Aspinall and Berenschot 2019, 115). Voters have their discretion to deliver their votes based on the highest 'payouts' of several competing candidates, or for non-economic reasons such as personal ties, better knowledge of the candidate, or identity ties (Aspinall and Berenschot 2019, 116-117). This left the union campaign team in a vulnerable position, even when it came to securing the support of their own constituents.

Internal mobilisation amidst shadowing doubts

Mobilising workers' votes for union candidates is a challenging endeavour fraught with power dynamics and inevitable tensions. The process of transforming an apolitical base into a political force often results in unionists' dominant roles over their members. In Pekalongan, the challenge became particularly apparent when unionists defined organisational political goals as individual political goals for the members. For most rank-and-file members, casting votes for their union leaders in legislative elections, based on organisational instructions, remained an uncommon practice. Political choices were typically individual decisions or influenced by the family's political orientation. Members primarily viewed unionists as simply responsible for advocating for their socio-economic interests, specifically focusing on wages, job security, and access to public health services.

Union's legislative candidates, like Dammy and others, were often perceived by many union members as abstract figures, with their positions at the branch level being too distant from members' everyday lives. Leaders known to the members were usually those encountered on a daily basis at the workplace, such as line leaders negotiating with foremen to defend rights or shop floor union representatives vocally fighting for wages and holiday benefits. Even if some members were familiar with Dammy's role in negotiations with the DPRD and the government officials, they did not necessarily perceive this as political leadership. Electoral politics was considered a different arena from the daily concrete problems of labour, even if it played out in parliamentary chambers or the mayor's office. Generating workers' understanding about the roles of union leaders in this political arena required additional effort, which was integrated with political education initiatives.



Photo 23: Union's political training in North Pekalongan was held concurrently with the *Arisan* Meeting in order to attract more union members to participate.

Dammy's campaign heavily relied on image branding and political education initiatives. The campaign team actively travelled to villages, inviting workers to meet Dammy face to face. They utilised community traditions to create effective ways of introducing and shaping Dammy's image. For instance, in the north coast, political education took place during women's social gatherings) in villages organised by BSI factory unionists, concluding with a lottery for arisan money (see Photo 23). The rhetoric drew on everyday language, a mix of Indonesian and Pekalongan Javanese, to ensure simplicity and accessibility. The campaign team showed a video highlighting Dammy's participation in various street demonstrations, aiming to revive memories of his leadership and services.

A recurring narrative in SPN's political education was the demand for members to 'return the favour' to the union. This narrative aimed to maintain members' loyalty to the organisation and establish counter-narratives that delegitimised unacceptable conduct, specifically accepting vote-buying from other politicians, deemed a 'betrayal to the union.' Analogies of paternalistic relations were occasionally used to reinforce these messages. In one instance, a male union branch leader addressed predominantly female and younger members, stating that helping the union, akin to helping one's family,

> Let me take an example: One day, you find out that your parents are going to have a party. What would you do? You will help them, won't you? You

> wouldn't help somebody else simply for a money, would you? Why should you help others who will not fight for you? It would be better if we could help our families who have raised us since childhood, who have taken care of and educated us, and from whom we got everything they strove for (20 March 2014)

The battle against the pervasive practice of vote buying, which poses a threat to constituent loyalty, was further underscored by the affirmation of class identity. This contrasted the portrayal of movement leaders as opposed to the untrustworthy politicians associated with the bourgeoisie. As he continued his speech,

> Pak Bowo [the SPN branch leader] worked as weaving machine operator, just like us! He climbed the career ladder from below, so he understood our struggles. That's why he consistently stands by us. Dammy is also like him. He is a dedicated worker at Tritex [factory]. Now, you can compare him to other legislative candidates who won elections using their money; because they came from rich families. Their parents were wealthy employers. So, when they became the DPRD members, they lack empathy for the people's suffering. When you see their poster claiming "fight together with the people (berjuang bersama rakyat)", it's a lie! Whose people they are referring to?

The construction of class identity and organisational ties illustrates the dominance of unionists over their core constituents. However, members retained their autonomy to define the extent of that dominance. The way they valued the leaders' actual roles in the daily experiences at work, especially during the campaign season, influenced the way they evaluate the idealised image of their leaders – particularly the union's legislative candidates. This becomes the source of unease among some union members.

6.4.3. Politics or Jobs?

The SPN unionists faced increasing political fervour alongside several unresolved industrial conflicts. At the forefront was an ongoing dispute involving the dismissal of workers at Sri Ratu Company, marking the third such case since Budhy's initial layoff by the same company. The recent conflict stemmed from the company's shutdown due to unequal competition in the local retail sector, exacerbated by the entry of the globalised company Carrefour from France into Pekalongan. With declining consumer numbers, the company, having nearly two hundred employees, primarily women, resorted to closure and layoffs. Tensions rose as the severance pay offered to workers fell significantly below statutory provisions. Despite months of dispute settlement efforts and ignored

orders from the Manpower Offices of Pekalongan and Central Java province, a resolution remained elusive.

In response, union leaders sought political intervention, taking the case to the Mayor of Pekalongan. Rizal, the union leader, claimed the Mayor's support and legal representation, but workers hesitated to go to court, fearing prolonged resolution. Some workers pragmatically considered accepting any severance pay for a swift resolution, while others insisted on their demands, prompting plans for a large demonstration (see Photo 24).



Photo 24: A union leader from Sri Ratu led a meeting with fellow workers to discuss negotiation tactics with management. The meeting, held at the Pekalongan Municipality, aimed to urge the Mayor to provide political support.

The need to conduct a demonstration became a crucial intersection between the workers' interests and electoral political agendas. As the settlement process extended beyond expectations, it coincided with the legislative election campaign period, necessitating a balance between worker concerns and political considerations. The mayor actively sought to prevent workers' demonstrations, recognising the potential disruption to the prevailing political atmosphere. Bowo, in alignment, encouraged fellow unionists to temporarily halt street protests, acknowledging the potential disturbance to the strategic plans of local political elites. This presented a dilemma for union leaders and the campaign team. On

one hand, they were driven by a political agenda to secure victory for Dammy. On the other hand, the ongoing dispute at Sri Ratu demanded their attention. The dilemma reached its peak when the workers of Sri Ratu were at an impasse and, ironically, wanted to use elections as a moment for their solution.

Ten days before the end of the campaign period, Rizal came to a meeting at the union office with some of its leaders. Expressing emotionally, he conveyed that all Sri Ratu workers planned to stage a demonstration in front of the Central Governor's office in Semarang. Their demands included an immediate resolution to the dispute and a protest against the perceived inadequacy of the provincial and city government in compelling Sri Ratu's employers to comply with standard labour laws. The workers intentionally chose the day before the election for the demonstration and expressed their intent to continue until election day if there was no response from the provincial government. He expressed,

> In these elections, our goal is to raise awareness of the people in Pekalongan and Central Java regarding Ganjar's [the Governor of Central Java Province] failure to address the ongoing dispute. So, we may choose not to participate in the voting on 9 April [the election day] as our focus will be on asserting our rights and demands on that day. In essence, we intend to be Golput on that day.[234] No compromise at all! … This is about the life of 171 employees. So, everybody will go on strike! No one will stay at home or work on that day. We need to reach this goal! (24 March 2014).

The union leaders were taken aback on hearing the workers' plans. Following a moment of silence, one of the leader voiced concerns about the workers' security, pointing out that electoral regulations typically prohibit street gatherings during the pre-election days. In response, Rizal defended the workers, emphasising their frustration and resistance to any postponements:

> I've tried to speak to Dammy, but he was so busy. So, with whom I should discuss this? No one! Listen, I understood that everybody is busy with political campaigns. I understood that politics is more important and Dammy's victory is more valuable. But now, I am asking you: 'Do we listen to our conscience' when we find this problem unsettled? Whether we would like it or not, the only chance for us to bargain is only on 8 and 9 April! No compromise anymore! (24 March 2014).

234 *Golput* is literally an abbreviation of *Golongan Putih* (White Voters) that refers to those who did not vote intentionally in the General Elections for political reasons.

The unrest was not confined to the Sri Ratu workers. Another instance involved the dismissal of Gisapda factory workers due to wage-related protests and company's pressures on union.[235] Predominantly comprised of women, these workers expressed dissatisfaction with the sluggish response of union officials in advancing the settlement process. Concerns escalated, particularly when the workers' intention to organise a protest lacked convincing support from branch elites for political reasons. Similar to the Sri Ratu case, workers grew frustrated as legal decisions for the disputes would not wait for the conclusion of elections.

The workers' discontent posed a dilemma for the union's campaign teams. The planned demonstration on election days delivered a serious moral blow. Traditionally, branch leaders actively participated in demonstrations and strikes across various companies as part of collective actions. Organising actions, however, on election days presented a substantial dilemma, forcing them to make a choice between elections or protests, politics or jobs. While technical difficulties impeded the planned action due to security concerns, the frustrations and perplexities among the workers illustrate the vulnerable nature of the union's political agenda in the eyes of its own members. The clash between electoral priorities and the workers' urge for collective action highlighted the complex balancing act faced by the union's campaign teams during this period.

6.4.4. Limits and Challenges

The conclusion of the 2014 legislative elections marked the culmination of the workers' political struggle in Pekalongan, resulting in failure as none of the candidates, including Bowo, secured a parliamentary seat. Bowo, once marginalized by local political elites, lost his political positions held since 2004. Another SPN candidate in South Pekalongan also faced disappointment, and Dammy in North Pekalongan received only 560 votes out of the targeted 2,500. Unionists involved in these political experiments expressed frustration finding the results.

Despite this setback, unionists aimed to derive constructive insights from the results, acknowledging the genuine level of political support among the union's core constituents. While the amassed votes surpassed the existing number of SPN members within the electoral district, revealing substantial backing from

235 Workers protested for the dismissal of fifty workers who complained about extremely lower wages, receiving only nearly a half of local minimum wage (Interview with Gisabda workers, 21 March 2014)

the union membership, it highlighted a lack of support from workers' families and neighbours.

The inclusion of workers' family members and engaged neighbours as strategic constituents in union politics was overlooked in unionists' political campaigns. Major political mobilisation and educational efforts primarily centred on union membership, with community campaigns being less intensive.[236] The disconnected narratives between the lives of union members and non-unionised individuals engaged in community advocacy activism, coupled with a lack of class-focused discourses, raised concerns among unionist about their own political engagement.

The difficulties in constructing narratives and discourses that align with integrated interests led to the absence of a robust shared politicised identity essential for effective electoral engagement. Although the trend of party-related identity in Indonesia has been weakening, constructing a strong politicised identity remained crucial for the working class and allied communities in countering dominant political forces (Caraway and Ford 2014, 152). This was evident in the success of the Metalworkers Union in Bekasi, which garnered significant working-class votes by establishing a robust working-class identity during the 2014 legislative elections (Savirani 2015, 263). Similarly, experiences in Argentina demonstrated that mobilising heterogeneous constituents relied on establishing a common antagonistic identity or signifier, fostering unity among diverse groups (Gaonkar 2012). The adoption of slogans like "Vote PT [labour party]. The rest are bourgeois" in Brazilian social movements effectively unified various groups under a common banner of the people's heterogeneous interests (Seidman 1994, 224).

The absence of politicised identity and weak narrative links between the industrial working class and other community groups in Pekalongan created vulnerability to vote-buying practices that eroded Dammy's and other union legislative candidates' supports. Through tactics such as Serangan Fajar (the dawn

236 The initiative to provide political education and mobilisation of supporting communities was left to individual members at ranks and files without any systematic coordination and control from branch organisation. For instance, a union leader once suggested dozens of workers from a textile factory who lacked political knowledge to influence their families and neighbours to deliver their votes for Dammy. However, there was no further specific strategies from the campaign team to ensure the effectiveness. In practice, none of these workers are able to convey the political messages properly to their family members, let alone neighbours.

attack), rival candidates from other parties seized Dammy's potential votes.[237] Some workers' neighbours admitted that they voted for candidates who offered payments ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 Rupiah (approximately 3-6 euros). This practice significantly eroded Dammy's community support base. In such a competitive votes market, campaigns devoid of monetary or material incentives lost their appeal within the community, weakening their political values.

The practice of vote buying was compounded by widespread political distrust toward electoral politics within the local population. For community members, vote buying held little political significance except simply a transaction. They freely admitted to extracting as much payment as possible from buyers, and even willing to give their votes to buyers who offered higher payments. Yet, the payments extended beyond mere economic motives, entailing a 'moral obligation' of exchange between givers and recipients, buyers and sellers (Burhanuddin 2019, 123-125). It was hardly any reasons of real political representation in delivering votes. True political representation seemed implausible to them. It was this political distrust that brings forth doubts to the claims of political representation in Dammy's campaigns. A female worker's neighbour captured this sentiment, stating, "Huh... he would be the same as other candidates. Once he wins [the parliamentary seat], he will surely forget [his promises to the constituents]".[238]

The threat of political distrust also extended to the union's primary constituents: its members. While union leaders anticipated support for Dammy from union members, two contrasting challenges are noteworthy. Firstly, they were dealing with constituents' concerns about the balance between union political goals and the original mandate of defending workplace-based welfare. Secondly, the ongoing debates within union leadership – about the significance of electoral politics as a means to gain political power vis-à-vis a union militancy parameter – indicated a lack of an established conception of the union's political struggle. These debates also imply that the union's political agenda was still predominantly shaped by ideas circulating among elite leaders' circle. Although leaders' dominance is typical in emerging social movements as Laclau argued (see Introduction), it perpetuated the dilemma of political patronage. When the

237 The term *serangan fajar* popularly used in Indonesia to refer to the practice to distribute money after dawn on the election day to people to pay for the votes they cast for candidates (Burhanuddin 2019, 53). Although in reality this is not always literally after dawn, but it is carried out at times before the voters leave for the ballot box, in the hope of influencing the decision on their vote (Aspinall and Berenschot 2019, 107).

238 It was expressed in meeting at unionist's house in the north coast region, attended also by some of her neighbours (22 April 2014).

union needs to maintain its long-term political dependence on the figure like Bowo, it always creates the risk of compromising members' interests. It is such a patronage relationship which induces vulnerability on internal political distrust.

Summary

The evolution of workers' movements in Pekalongan portrays the gradual development of a community-based unionism and its politicisation. While not yet fully crystallised, workers and activists have embarked on a deliberate trajectory for this movement. Their aim is to dismantle the legacy of New Order corporatism and carve a path of struggle tailored to the context of time and space.

This emergence rests on two primary factors: shifts in the local and national political economy and the corresponding responses of movement agents. Transformations in Indonesia's political economy had provided an opportune moment for key local actors to voice collective interests of the working-class. However, these transformative moments carried inherent paradoxes. Democratisation, on one hand, opened a political avenue for workers to enhance their welfare and bargaining power. Yet, economic liberalisation exposed Indonesia to global competition, leaving Pekalongan's companies unable to fully meet workers' demands and avoiding to generate vulnerabilities in the workplace.

In response, unionists redefined democracy's essence at the local level, devising alternative avenues for struggle. Past experiences of movement actors, civil society networks, and local politicians played a pivotal role in shaping this alternative framework. The outcome combined workplace-based concerns with community-centric interests, creating an intersection of labour and citisenship roles. It redefines the labour movement's militancy into these dual spheres of engagement. The movement's political objectives centred on redistributive rights, achieved through public policies and electoral politics, for the benefits of both the local working-class and marginalised groups.

Unionists and activists successfully secured essential public services for diverse local community groups and resolved industrial disputes through political means. This strategic shift, however, broadened their grassroots constituents, ushering in complexity. As both groups endeavoured to expand their scope and benefits for their constituents, limitations arose, as revealed by their experiences in the 2014 General Elections. Electoral politics held a promise as a means to increase political leverage, offering representation in local parliament and influence over

public policies—crucial for grassroots groups, particularly the working class. Yet, a roadblock emerged as well: the failure to win the political competition and none of the union candidates was able to gain a seat. While local political-economic forces indeed played a substantial role in their defeat, solely attributing it to elite power and vote-buying practices overlooks intrinsic realities within the social movements.

Resistance to the the movement's engagement in politics emanated not just from external political-economic forces, but also from internal challenges in transforming their diverse social bases into a cohesive political front. While unionists and activists achieved access for various grassroots groups—advocating for public health, social security, budget allocations for the urban poor alongside wage and job security demands—the advocated groups remained disjointed in their shared interests. Efforts of each group remained compartmentalised, lacking robust interconnections. The narrative of intersecting social bases as a unifying chain was inconsistently echoed by unionists and activists. Thus, the collective foundation for these heterogeneous groups proved insufficient.

Consequently, a shared identity, an essential cultural capital for electoral politics, failed yet to materialise. Therefore, practices like vote buying readily eroded social ties cultivated during public service advocacies. This also explains why union candidates' narratives, focused on union struggles, that were delivered during the political campaign resonated less with other community groups. While the 'workers are citizens' narrative had gradually redefined the union members' perspective of themselves, its chain of equivalence to other community groups remains nebulous, leaving an emptiness in understanding and solidarity.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the strategies of Indonesian trade unions based in two areas of Central Java, and how these strategies were shaped by the interplay between local dynamics, national and global challenges and the roles of actors in labour movements. These two areas, Semarang and Pekalongan have been chosen because they represent two different modes of organisational strategies, namely one focusing more on community-based organisation, and other, concentrating more on the workplace.

Over the past two decades, Indonesia's labour movement has undergone significant transformation following the Reformation era. The collapse of Suharto's repressive New Order labour regime in 1998 paved the way to the emergence of democratic labour organisations. However, this resurgence did not lead to organisational forms that could immediately address the strategic needs of workers' struggle. A major obstacle was the need for workers to adapt to the new labour regime that arose from Indonesia's economic reforms. The country's deeper integration into the global economy led to the liberalisation of labour policies, as indicated by the introduction of Law No. 13 of 2003 on employment (see chapter 2). This new regime promoted flexible labour markets and employment relations, which many workers perceived as a threat to working conditions and weakening trade unions' capacity to represent labour interests. Additionally, workers still have to dismantle the New-Order's legacy of state-corporatism in labour unions, which had long suppressed workers' independent activism. In response, unionists and workers mobilised various efforts to preserve their newly acquired bargaining power from the Reformation.

One critical aspect of these efforts was the exploration of viable organising strategies to cope with the vulnerable labour conditions. On the one hand, the majority of workers and unionists continue to rely on a model of workplace unionism. While there are operational variations of this approach, it generally prioritises engagement through standard labour institutions, focusing on collective bargaining at both bipartite (enterprise) level and tripartite level. On the other hand, a handful of unions adopted a more expansive organising model, extending beyond the conventional boundaries of the workplace. This approach included diverse constituencies outside the workplace. While the concept of community unionism remains relatively unpopular, it is not entirely new to the history of Indonesia's labour movement (see Chapter 2).

The questions that arise include: what drives the persistence of conventional organising strategies in workplace unionism despite changes in the labour regime? What factors drive the choice between alternative models, especially community unionism, in this context? Another crucial question is: what are the consequences of these strategic choices for the relationship between unions and the diverse groups they claim to represent? To what extent can these organising models advance the interests of their various constituencies within the current political economy, and could they, instead, maybe also generate unforeseen challenges?

This study aims to address these questions through an in-depth investigation of two unions operating under the same banner—the National Workers Union (SPN)—employing different organising strategies, in Semarang and Pekalongan, Central Java. Pekalongan presents a dynamic case of workers and unionists experimenting with community unionism. By contrast, Semarang illustrates a more typical example of workplace unionism, the dominant model in Indonesia. The comparative analysis is significant because, despite encountering similar opportunities to develop an outward-facing workplace movement, workers in Semarang remained firmly committed to traditional workplace-based organising strategies

The selection of these two regions highlights the importance of examining the labour movement in Central Java. Most literature on the contemporary Indonesian labour movement tends to focus on highly industrialised regions such as Jabodetabek (Greater Jakarta) and West Java, which have seen a significant growth in labour activism both during and after the New Order era. By contrast, studies on labour in Central Java have declined after the Dutch colonial era (see Chapter 2), especially following the collapse of the Leftist movement in Indonesia (Juliawan, 2010, p. 23). In fact, recent years have witnessed a surge in the relocation of large-scale manufacturing industries to Central Java alongside the establishment of new manufacturing industries, reshaping the existing industries with the expansion of capita. Therefore, future challenges to organising of labour in Central Java are likely to become increasingly complex.

This study is based on the assumption that the development of union strategies result from the interaction between structural factors and the role of unionists as movement agents. Economic threats and political opportunities are structural elements that significantly influence both the choice of organisational strategy and its further development. However, the relations between organisational strategy and these structural factors are never straightforward. Social movement actors play a crucial mediating role in these dynamics. This focus on the agency

of actors is a central aspect of this study, especially given that previous studies on the contemporary Indonesian labour movement has been more coloured by analyses of organisational and political economy structures (As mentioned in Chapter 1).

I argue that unionists are the essential political subjects of the labour movement, a role that holds two key dimensions. First, they serve as central actors in constructing the movement's goals and devising its strategic tools for collective struggle. As agents, they aim to interpret shifting structural conditions, such as economic threats or corporate challenges, and need to reflect on emerging political opportunities, and use these insights to formulate the necessary organisational strategies for the labour movement. However, as individuals, the way they perceive and respond to the structural conditions is also shaped by their prior experiences in engaging labour conflicts and any movements or broader past contentious politics. Thus, the formation of a particular form of unionism and its preferred strategy essentially results from the interplay of the existing structural conditions and the ways these processes are subjectively perceived by unionists themselves.

The second dimension of unionists' role as actors concerns the social consequences their leadership has on the constituencies they represent. While the dominance of unionists in directing the movement is an inevitable organisational mission, as argued by Gramsci and Laclau (see Introduction), this position also creates complex internal dynamics in their relationships with the groups they claim to advocate for. These complexities, however are often not foreseen by the unionists themselves. The complexity arises primarily from the diversity of their constituencies. Social categories and identities within these groups are shaped by factors such as capital's production structure, local cultural traditions, regional economic structures, and political structure.

Within this context, the main ethnographic chapters of this book (particularly Chapters 4 and 6) examine the challenges unionists face in defining the role of unions and addressing the complex realities of their members in each region: Semarang and Pekalongan. Union leaders struggle to develop collective strategies due to the diverse backgrounds of their members. The core issue is balancing the need to represent constituents as a unified group with the reality of their differing identities, which are influenced by socio-economic and political factors.

In Semarang, unionists identified "workers of companies" as their primary base, but they should also contend with the diverse realities of these workers, shaped by corporate production structure and local socio-cultural traditions such as

the categorisation of space, employment status, and gender roles. Whereas, in Pekalongan, unionists expanded their movement to include broader community groups beyond the workplace. They dealt with the categorisation of constituents shaped by various socio-political factors such as political affiliations, religious associations, and occupational differences.

Threats and Opportunities: the making of two types of unionism

Scholars have attributed the resurgence of labour movements during the Indonesia's Reformation era (early 2000s) to economic changes and political opportunity resulting from democratic transitions (Törnquist 2022; Tjandra 2016; Lane 2019; Nyman 2006), a view with which I also agree. However, these opportunities only serve as a broad framework for such a resurgence. While they provide fundamental conditions for the revival of labour movements, they do not explain why a particular movement develops a distinct organisational character or adopts specific strategies. Only a few scholars examined the relations between these structural factors and the possibilities for shaping diverse forms of unionism (Caraway and Ford 202). Besides, it is also crucial to ethnographically study how unionists, in everyday social processes, actively shape their organisational choices as we can conclude from this study of different local manifestations of the SPN in Semarang and Pekalongan.

In Semarang, the dominance of companies' globalised production chain shaped the preference of local workers and unionists to focus on workplace-based unionism. Large corporations leverage their ability to subdue militancy and limit collective resistance through divisive work structures and hegemonic employment relations. Consequently, the companies can perpetuate the traditions of New Order labour corporatism, encouraging workers to concentrate on the workplace only. Moreover, this situation is strengthened by patronage relationships with the old senior leadership of the Union, which consistently avoids conflict and prioritises obedience to corporations, similarly perpetuating past labour traditions. Unfortunately, the union leadership lacks the support of the younger generation of unionists, who possess extensive experience in movements across various factories, let alone those involved in other social movements.

The activism of unionists in Semarang has grown primarily within the factory setting, without any significant exposure to broader movements beyond the work place. Their interactions with various local civil society organisations, both during the New Order era and into the early Indonesia's Reformation, were limited. The workplace has become an *isolated space* for workers' struggles, which is always separated from other categories of labour outside of the factory

walls, including home-based female workers. Despite attempts by a handful of unionists in Semarang to engage in some community-based experiments that were also endorsed by external agencies, this does not change the central focus of their struggle on exclusively workplace-based activism. Although the programs of community-based activism, including union participation in electoral politics, was similarly introduced to unions in this region, they lacked broad social support among local workers and community groups.

In addition to the strong influence of corporations in maintaining traditional unionism, the available political opportunities that support alternative unionism models were limited, though not entirely absent. Despite the shift in dominant political power in the early Reformation period, from the Golkar party to the rival political party PDI-P, there was no clear strategic pathway for local labour organisations to significantly engage in the local political arena. Local worker leaders lacked substantial and institutionalised social and political connections with local political elites. Similarly, the relations between the unions and local movement groups were highly restricted to a few elite circles of regional branch union leaders. This situation hampered the development of political and social discourses relevant to the interests of the working class and the establishment of broader movement coalitions.

The case of Pekalongan provide a different picture. Pekalongan's economy is characterised by small-scale industries that primarily rely on limited domestic market niches. Unlike Semarang, where industries are integrated with global capital, Pekalongan's industrial sector is less directly connected to the global production structure. Nevertheless, local companies often struggle to withstand economic fluctuations, which limits their capacity to grow and hampers their ability to meet workers' demands for improved well-being. Consequently, these challenges influence how unionists perceive the need for alternative strategies.

At the same time, in Pekalongan, the opportunity to initiate alternative strategies exist. The opportunity in this case became apparent through the changing landscape of political parties, the decentralisation of Indonesian politics that both have provided chances to unionists to join local government decision-making processes, and also explain the emergence of new political allies and movement coalitions. This provided local unionists with a path for meeting their needs. The fragmentation of local Islamic political parties, for example, affected by the split of a dominant Islamic political party at national level thus benefited the local nationalist party (Golkar). It allowed this party to seize grass roots support by turning to populist politics (see chapter 5 and 6). This political shift also enabled local unionists, particularly those from the SPN, to experiment with

some political initiatives and alternative forms of community-based activism, thus seizing new resources they deemed relevant for the interests of union's constituents.

It is crucial to comprehend the functioning of social processes underpinning these structural elements at the local level. Firstly, the broader social networks and the perspectives of union members regarding the significance of these opportunities play a pivotal role in shaping their responses. These factors may ultimately influence the form and direction of the labour movement. In Pekalongan, many local unionists have strong connections with local politicians, and with various activists rooted in local identities and/or affiliated religious groups such as the local Nahdlatul Ulama, which become the centre of such social networks. These unionists also established significant relationships with activists from other regions, who are encouraged by similar interest in scaling up their labour movements. These broad social webs facilitate the exchange of information and discourses that provided a novel understanding on the importance of participations in in electoral politics, local policymaking process, and political support for the interests of workers and other related constituents.

Secondly, the individuals and groups within local networks also play a significant role in providing a wider infrastructure in which various forms of community-based activism could blossom. A diverse network of local activists had thus served as a bridge connecting unionists with national and international institutional agents which in their turn promoted discourses of citizens' rights at the grassroots level, while these also offered technical and financial support for public participation in local politics. This has brought the unionists engaged with various communities beyond the direct union membership through welfare programmatic activism. This also coincides with the emergence of discourses promoted by inter-regional labour networks seeking new movement models.

Thirdly, the way local unionists and other activists respond to such existing opportunities is influenced by individuals' past experiences in the world of activism and across different regimes. Some young reformist-unionists in Pekalongan were engaged in student organisational activism during the authoritarian New Order era. This experience had given them valuable experiences in contentions politics, and has helped them to shape movements, and connected them with various local activists who had shared similar experiences. It is this experience that leads local unionists, along with other local like-minded individuals, to form strategic coalitions intersecting with networks from various movement organisations, including workers' unions, labour NGOs, religious organisations, and student organisations.

Thus, the functioning of the structural elements of the political economy and the responses of unionists reveal distinct dynamics in Pekalongan and Semarang. In Pekalongan, the development of community-based unionism reflects a 'push-and-pull' interaction between these structural elements, influenced by the roles of unionists. Conversely, in Semarang, the dynamics of workers and unions demonstrate that these elements have reinforced one another, sustaining a traditional model of workplace-based unionism. In Pekalongan, economic pressures have prompted unionists to explore alternative forms of struggle, facilitated by the political opportunities created by local democratisation. In contrast, workers in Semarang have experienced corporate pressures, which, coupled with limited alternative political spaces, have led to a focus on workplace-based activism. Furthermore, the perception of opportunities by unionists in Semarang has been reinforced by their established traditions of unionism, which maintained workplace-based activism.

Workplace and Precarious Representation

Despite the different strategies of unions in Semarang and Pekalongan, it is important to recognise that in both regions unions equally position the workplace as the most crucial arena of struggle. The key difference between them lies in whether the workplace is the sole and exclusive focal point and the resulting implications for the relationship between unionists and their constituents.

In Pekalongan, the limited capacity of domestic capital, coupled with the relentless pressures of both domestic and global markets, led to a primary focus of the unionists on the survival of workers in their current jobs. Ongoing conflicts predominantly revolved around existential struggles. These struggles led to the question whether workers could endure working under existing conditions and whether companies could sustain their economic viability. This precarious situation served as motivation for unionists to seek external political support to address the threats of job loss and to meet their living needs beyond the workplace. Unionists used political channels by gaining supports from local political elites to strengthen their position in front of the corporate employers. But while effective for a while, this reliance on politics also increasingly rendered them vulnerable to the unintended consequences of such ties especially when defending their members' interests. I will return to this in the next section.

In Semarang, wage-related negotiations dominated the discourse as unionists and workers viewed wages as the primary battleground for their struggle. However, this focus did not extend giving equal attention to another crucial aspect: how companies maximise their capital accumulation by controlling labour processes

both in the factory and at home. Semarang's industrial economy, characterised by large capital forces within a global production structure, employs various strategies for maximum labour control. Some corporations attempt to present a benevolent image through hegemonic strategies, concealing their capacity to extract surplus value from workers – predominantly local women – without unionists and workers realising it. However, the dominant practices of most companies in this region include explicit subjugation strategies by dividing workers into mutually exclusive categories and the combination of hegemonic and adversarial managerial controls which make unions difficult to reach diverse categories of labour.

The most basic form of labour control is embedded in the design of work structures intricately woven into the labour process, as notably indicated by the extensive use of female informal labour employed at homes. This design spatially separates production sites, into community-based versus factory-based sites, primarily to curb potential disruptions and to limit costs. This process is embedded into this work structure and reproduces subcategories of home-based workers with different employment relationships, and fostering extensive precariousness while limiting the development of collective consciousness. The structure also enables companies and families to share a control mechanism, with family members acting as agents reinforcing submission to the companies. Despite attempts by leaders of female home-based workers to mobilise resistance, they found difficulties in organising and gaining support from fellow home-based workers. These challenges arose from gender-biased family obligations and concerns about job insecurity.

Through such separation of labour, this workforce not only became more fragmented, but also was excluded from formal union representation. Unionists at various organisational levels found themselves being caught in participating in this 'exclusionary production politics', with their primary focus only on their own members that were employed in the factory, rather than those who were at home. As a result, precarious workers, especially those working from home, were forced to find ways for defending their vulnerable interests by themselves, thus similarly highlighting that unionists' preference for workplace-based struggles does not necessarily represent all labour categories created by capital.

The attempts of excluded workers to be represented by NGO activists can be viewed as a response to them not being represented well by the local unions. However, this representation operates mainly within an informal framework outside legally recognised employment relations. The inclination of local governments to prioritise local economic growth hampered the acknowledgement

of this issue. Furthermore, overcoming this challenge was hindered by the lack of support from local political elites, requiring considerable time and changes in the opportunity structure for these activists to succeed in negotiations. Moreover, the relationship between local political elites and local activists, particularly unionists, was not as robust in Semarang as it was in Pekalongan

The Role of Community and the Absence of Unifying Social Elements

While both labour unions in Semarang and Pekalongan had similar opportunities for engaging in community-based activism, the strong focus of Semarang's unionists and workers on workplace-based interests practically hindered a development of their community-oriented initiatives. The negative perception cultivated by corporations regarding union activities outside of employment relations was seen by some unionists as a form of corporate pressure, while others viewed it as morally justified. The existing community-based programs in Semarang itself were limited in scope, only involving educational issues of workers' children. They also lacked sustainability due to the absence of a strong rationale for its development, unlike the unionists' initiatives in Pekalongan which placed it under the notion of citizenship-based struggle. Moreover, participation in electoral politics lacked adequate backing from a well-established political base, further hampered by the absence of a strong political orientation among the unionists themselves.

As argued above, unionists and workers in Pekalongan have taken a different approach from their Semarang counterparts. They had engaged in electoral political experiments, advocated for social programs targeting impoverished communities, and established broader networks with social and political movements. Their strategies aimed to expand the scope of their interests and constituencies, viewing workers as both workers and citizens as the foundational concept for this expanded activism.

Despite the benefits of communities gained from the unionists' advocacy programs and collective actions, a notable issue persists. The unionists faced difficulties in mobilising collective support from constituents, as exemplified in the 2014 general election discussed in Chapter 6. This situation raises critical questions about the solidarity among all different groups of constituents and their ability to unite as a strong collective fighting for common interests. It also prompts examination into the extent to which unionist leadership is able to represent these collective interests politically. These questions not only highlight the critical problem of the political struggles of unions but also underscore the

more fundamental issue of the capacity of unions to represent their diverse constituencies, which had previously been cultivated through various forms of activism on both labour issues and broader concerns.

The influence of local elites, turns out to be a double-edged sword and has indeed constrained unionists from taking further political steps beyond the initial gains in their political collaboration. This explanation, however, does not fully account for the problematic relationship between movement leaders and their diverse constituents felt in the aftermath of their political efforts. A critical factor is the absence of a unifying collective identity that binds these diverse constituents together – whether it is election time or not. The concept of *workers as both labour and citizen*s has indeed expanded the local industrial working class into a broader arena of struggle, increasing awareness of their equality with other communities. This, however, is not true for other groups, such as street vendors and impoverished families in coastal and industrial areas. There was no narrative or conception that unites them in the way that the industrial workers' community, whose interests are championed by unionists and other activists. Also, some union members may have felt somewhat alienated by the use of the term 'citizen' (or *warga* in Indonesian) to describe them, rather than the more traditional term 'worker' (or *pekerja* or *buruh* in Indonesian). Thus, there was no significant unifying narrative or conception that could be transformed into a collective identity.

This lack of a recognisable collective identity is also reflected in the absence of powerful symbolic figures who are capable of representing the community as a collective. Each community group viewed individual unionist leadership as only partial, with them focusing on specific interests only. Unionists and their supporting activists were seen as leaders in the areas they happen to be advocating for. Ultimately, this limitation is exacerbated by the absence of a concept and narrative for a unifying social base that integrates diverse interests as a collective need across different groups (see Chapter 6). While unionists are skilled at integrating issues beyond the workplace with workplace-based welfare concerns through the concept of *labour and citizen*s, they did not transform into the social conditions of other community groups.

Thus, while the exclusionary fragmentation of constituencies in Semarang has obscured the common interests among workers, the inclusive strategies employed by Pekalongan unionists have not been sufficient to identify a unifying basis for their constituents as a political collective. Tthe constituents of unions in both regions became diverse in distinct ways due to differing organising strategies. In Semarang, the diversity of union constituencies associated with

workplace unionism primarily arises from corporate production strategies aimed at maximising capital accumulation. By creating complex categories of labour, companies induced fragmentation that reduced union control over the entire workforce. This fragmentation had trapped unionists within these categories, leading to exclusionary representation that perpetuates precarious working conditions for the most marginalised workers. Furthermore, the failure to recognise the connections among all categories of workers within a unified production chain obscured unionists' understanding of the common ground that formed the socio-economic ties among these workers (see chapter 6).

Meanwhile, the diversity of union constituents in Pekalongan was shaped not only by capitalist strategies but also by the local urban socio-economic structure and the political landscape. Unlike in Semarang, unionists in Pekalongan have fostered inclusive relationships with various categories of constituents, both in the workplace and the community. However, the difficulties in navigating the complex structure of their constituency categories led unionists to engage with each group separately, hindering their ability to unify these groups into a cohesive political force that was expected to be a strategic way of representation.

The Role of Unionists and The Organisational Challenges

Although the unions in both regions are affiliated with the same parent organisation, the SPN, their differences highlight the crucial interplay between agency and structural factors. Locality indeed plays a significant role, but this is not merely reflected in variations in the forms of the industrial economy, its historical development, political opportunities, or workforce composition. Equally important is how these factors influence and are responded by unionists, workers and their informal leaders. This perspective aligns with other studies that examine the dynamic relationship between movement actors, both in the workplace and in the community, and the surrounding socio-economic and political structures in Indonesia (Silvey 2003; Elmhirst 2004). These studies illustrate how the interpretive capacities and actions of individuals within the movement are mutually influenced by structural conditions.

Beyond the impact of such local factors, the agency of actors can also be understood through the capacity formed over time, particularly through the relationship between an individual's biography and habitus (see Introduction). For example, why did union leaders in Semarang find difficulties in building political mobilisation or expanding the space for broader social movements, even though local opportunities, although limited, existed? The biographical experiences of key actors, particularly their attachment to the tradition of union

corporatism, helps explain the choice for a certain leadership model in this area. In contrast, the backgrounds of union leaders in Pekalongan offer a different perspective. Many of these unionists and activists had more diverse activist biographies, having been involved in previous acts of political resistance against the state. This history enabled them to develop broader networks and implement distinct organising strategies tailored to the specific structural conditions in their locality.

However, I do not imply that organisations maintaining the workplace-based struggle model always preserve the New Order labour tradition. In many industrial areas, workers' organisations continue to emphasise the workplace-based struggle model and gain considerable strength and bargaining power against capital and political forces (Mufakhir 2014; Puraka et al 2008). The Semarang case, however, demonstrates an interplay of locality and temporal factors. Their commitment to a workplace unionism model is a result of these interactions. Consequently, this choice has led to their adoption of exclusionary and precarious forms of representation.

On the other hand, I do not claim that unions based on alternative movement models, as seen in the Pekalongan case, always uphold more progressive agendas. While the unionists' success in dismantling the entrenched legacy of New Order corporatism offers valuable lessons for unionism, there are also vulnerabilities. The movement's continuous reliance on particular union leaders introduces risks. Without leadership circulation, such a reliance may threat union internal democracy. Although the institutionalisation of movement certainly requires longer process, it also need a balanced control between the union leadership and the members (Ford 2012, 190).

Heterogeneous Constituents and The Future of Labour Movement in Indonesia

The case of Pekalongan underscores that a structural condition, combined with the subjective processes of unionists making decisions about strategic and constituent choices, cannot help them autonomously address the interests of diverse constituencies. The heterogeneity of these constituencies is a product of their social and political environment. Hence, unionists require a foundation that links these diverse interests, identities, and leadership among them. Fundamentally, a similar situation occurs in the Semarang case. If the constituents in Pekalongan might need a unifying foundation built on their common needs as urban marginals, then the unity of constituents in Semarang

may be tied to their needs as fellow workers in the same production chains, irrespective of their employment status and the location this work takes place.

Discussions of this nature hold particular significance for the development of the labour movements in Indonesia, given that several major unions are increasingly focusing on future political agendas. Simultaneously, a thorough understanding of the actual constituents remains equally crucial for workplace-based struggles.

Workplace unionism stands as the predominant form of unionism in Indonesia. The legacy of organised union culture from the New Order era and the influential paradigm constructed by international organisations contributes to this hegemonic form of unionism. However, a significant concern, as observed in the experience of similar organisations in Semarang, is the complex reality of labour categories shaped by the capitalists' politics of production. This difficulty creates barriers between formal workers and other categories of precarious labour, compounded by intersectional factors like gender. Another substantial issue is the reluctance of workplace unionism to foster a broader political movement, exacerbated by the votes of the working class being contested by dominant political forces.

Community-oriented unionism, on the other hand, has not gained yet widespread traction within the Indonesian labour movement. Large-scale initiatives, such as the social security advocacy movement at the national level in the early 2000s, which had been successfully a platform for coalitions of unions and diverse social movements, did evolved into broader social movements (see also Chapter 2). Meanwhile, some community-based organisations have begun to emerge, particularly within the gig economy sector, which has recently seen a substantial growth in its informal workforce. However, these organisations tend to develop on a small scale, remain non-formal, and lack consolidation (Yasih 2023).

A more serious concern that may stand in the way of community-oriented unionism arises from regulatory changes due to the introduction of the Job Creation Law in 2020. This law has the potential to increase precarious work and undermine workplace-based union models that tend to rely on permanent workers, as seen in the Semarang case. These changes call for new approaches to union organising. However, compared to the successful experiences of community unionism or social movement unionism in countries like the Philippines (Scipes 2018), India (Törnquist 2022; Agarwala 2013), and Brazil and South Africa (Seidman 1974), Caraway and Ford (2020) remain sceptical about the feasibility of such models in Indonesia. Their scepticism stems from the weak political ties between unions and political parties, as well as the limited

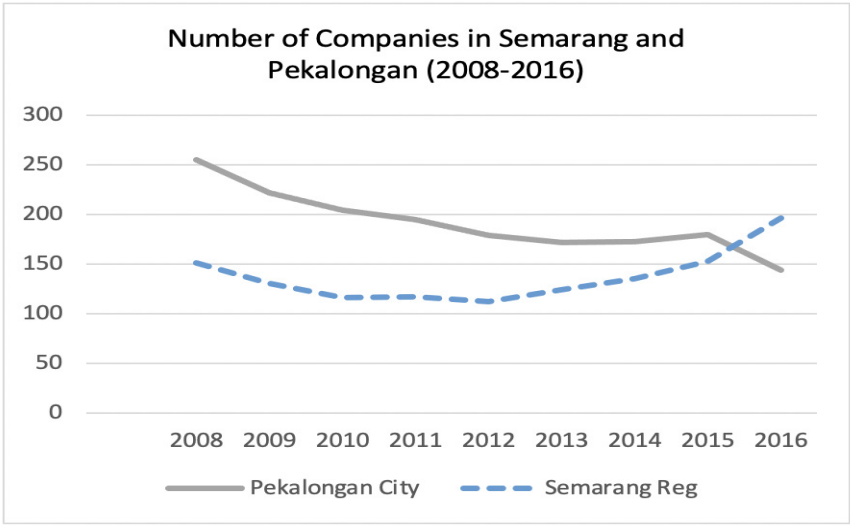
opportunity to strengthen more the unions' bargaining position within the workplace due to increasingly capital's pressures in eroding the union activism. The cases of Semarang and Pekalongan largely support this argument. As a result, Caraway and Ford (2020, 184) suggest that the formation of *union networks coalescing into broader social movements* may offer more viable possibilities for unionism in Indonesia.

Regardless of the ongoing debates about the possible expansions of the labour movement, the representation of a diverse working class and broader constituencies remains crucial in organising such future movement. Such challenges are also clearly seen in the political arena, particularly with the formation of an independent Labour Party in Indonesia in 2021. This party represents a highly diverse working-class constituency, encompassing both formal workers and informal workers. Uniting the interests of these constituents poses a significant challenge, not only for the party but also for unions themselves, as they must navigate and acknowledge the class diversity within their own ranks.

This study ultimately underscores the persistent challenge of representation within the labour movement. Leaders often struggle to align their strategic visions with the diverse characteristics of their constituents, and the roots of these challenges differ depending on the type of union. Workplace-oriented unions must contend with divisive political and production strategies, while community-oriented unions face the difficulty of uniting diverse groups around shared social needs. Despite the structural complexities and scepticism surrounding the viability of community unions, workplace-based unionism must prepare for strategic shifts in response to the threats posed by new labour regimes and evolving work environments. Another pressing challenge is identifying intersectional issues that can unite diverse worker groups, which could serve as a critical agenda for future research.

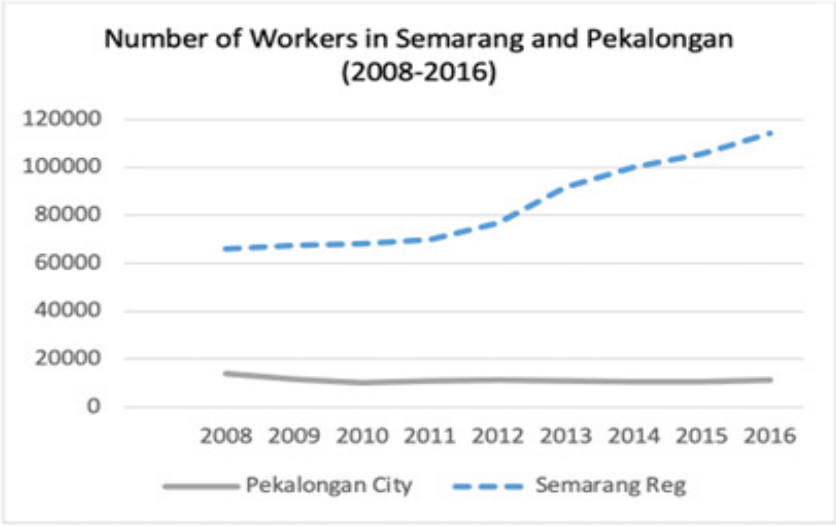
Appendix

Figure A.1



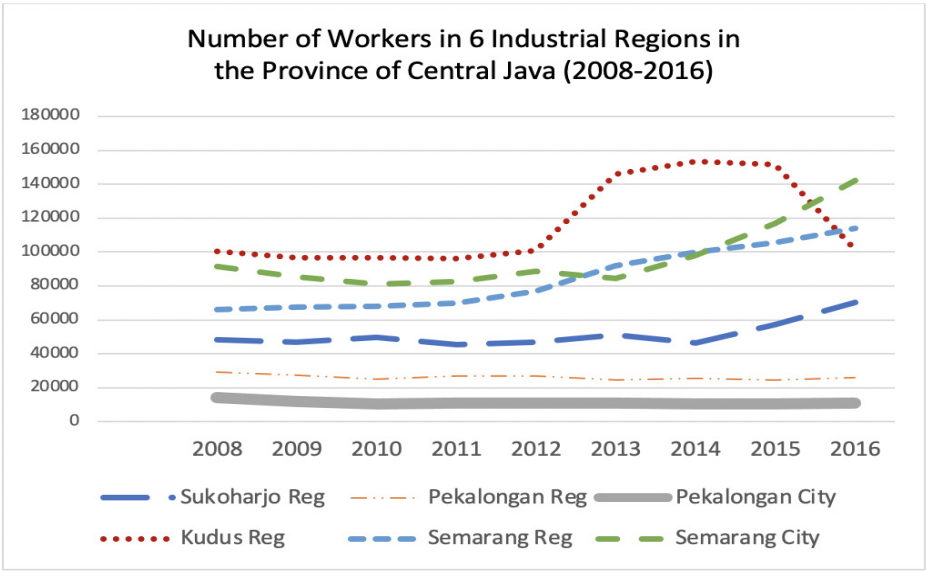
Source: Adapted from Jawa Tengah dalam Angka, from 2010 to 2018. Original data retrieved from BPS (Badan Pusat Statistik). https://jateng.bps.go.id/publication/2010/12/09/00d5d8d5fcdf83b0adedc9cd/jawa-tengah-dalam-angka-2010.html

Figure A.2



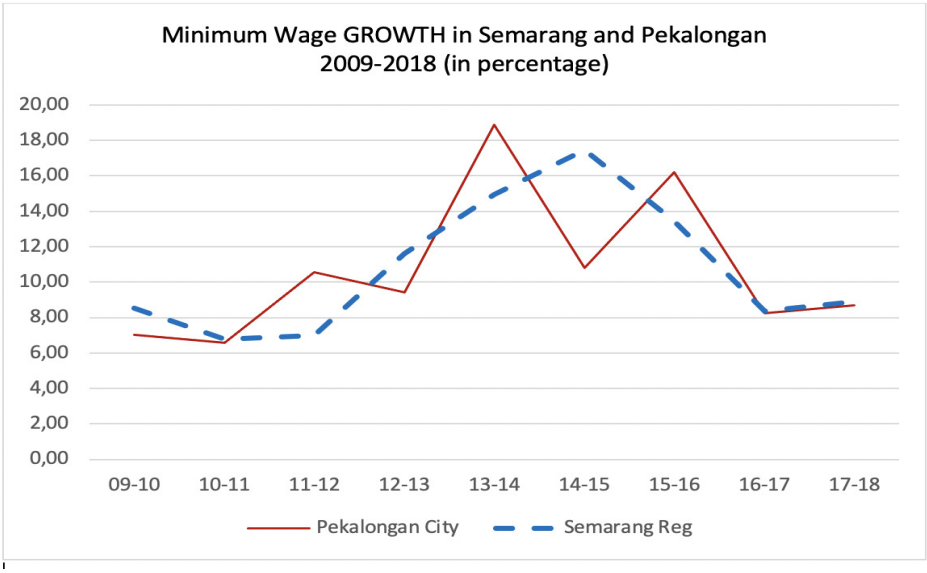
Source: Adapted from Jawa Tengah dalam Angka, from 2010 to 2018. Original data retrieved from BPS (Badan Pusat Statistik). https://jateng.bps.go.id/publication/2010/12/09/00d5d8d5fcdf83b0adedc9cd/jawa-tengah-dalam-angka-2010.html

Figure A.3



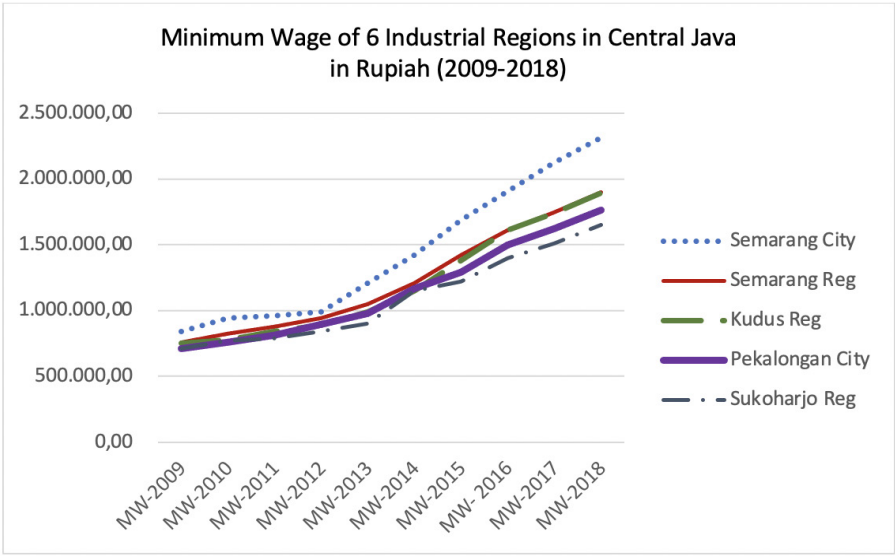
Source: Adapted from Jawa Tengah dalam Angka, from 2010 to 2018. Original data retrieved from BPS (Badan Pusat Statistik). https://jateng.bps.go.id/publication/2010/12/09/00d5d8d5fcdf83b0adedc9cd/jawa-tengah-dalam-angka-2010.html

Figure A.4



Source: Adapted from Jawa Tengah dalam Angka, from 2010 to 2019. Original data retrieved from BPS (Badan Pusat Statistik). https://jateng.bps.go.id/publication/2010/12/09/00d5d8d5fcdf83b0adedc9cd/jawa-tengah-dalam-angka-2010.html

Figure A.5



Source: Adapted from Jawa Tengah dalam Angka, from 2010 to 2019. Original data retrieved from BPS (Badan Pusat Statistik). https://jateng.bps.go.id/publication/2010/12/09/00d5d8d5fcdf83b0adedc9cd/jawa-tengah-dalam-angka-2010.html

Summary

Since the collapse of the Indonesia's authoritarian New Order, workers in this country have been seeking effective ways to organise and express their interests in dealing with a new labour regime amidst the economic and political transition. While traditional workplace-based unionism remains the dominant model, community unionism has started to gain some local attention. Workplace unionism primarily involves unions using collective bargaining in employment relations to protect workers' traditional interests. In contrast, community unionism focuses on unions collaborating with communities and community organisations to address issues relevant to either or both groups.

This dissertation examines the rise of both types of unionism and their effects on the representation relations between unionists and the constituents in two industrial regions in the Province of Central Java: Semarang and Pekalongan. Both are the regions where union activism has been rising significantly in this province especially since the early of Reformation era. The specific questions I explore are: how do the workers in each region develop strategies that led to different kind of unionism despite some similar underlying conditions? To what extent do the chosen strategies adequately serve the interests of each constituent they mobilised under the existing social, cultural and economic-political contexts?

Unions in both regions essentially maintained traditional workplace-based struggles, and had relatively equal opportunity to develop other activism beyond workplace such as community advocacy and participation in electoral politics. Both unions also similarly affiliated to the same parent organisation: the National Workers Union (SPN). However, these two unions differed significantly in several important ways. The first one is in the scale of resources mobilised by unionists in each sphere, the workplace and the community. The second one is in the way they introduce and reinforce different values to their respective constituencies.

Workers in Semarang, a major industrial hub in Central Java with a globalised economy supported by abundant workforce from nearby rural areas, focus predominantly on workplace-based organisations. In contrast, workers in Pekalongan, with its smaller-scale industrial economy but dynamic local political structure, embraced community-based activism. While unionists in Semarang occasionally experimented with community advocacy programs, their primary focus remains on workplace resources for member welfare. Collective action and building alliances among local unions for increased leverage in minimum wage negotiations were more prominent than engagement in electoral politics and

advocacy for low-cost education for workers' children. By contrast, unionists in Pekalongan adopted a more balanced approach, addressing both workplace welfare struggles and social advocacy programs, as well as political initiatives. Political channels were even often a key tool for resolving industrial disputes, and electoral politics became an important avenue for unions to engage with their broader constituencies.

I argue that the development of each union model results from the interplay between some structural factors and the way unionists, as the agency, respond to these factors. Political opportunities and economic threats—more specifically related to industrial activities, have been the major structural elements. While, the unionists' perception of opportunities, shaped by their experience in past social movements, and the available strategic networks determine the way the unionists, as the active actors, respond the structural factors.

The dynamics of the structural elements of the political economy and the way unionists respond to them can vary significantly. In Pekalongan, these elements interact through push-and-pull factors, fostering the development of community-based unionism. In contrast, in Semarang, the structural elements tend to reinforce each other, sustaining the traditional model of workplace-based unionism.

In social movement theory, threats serve as a catalyst for the emergence of movements. The development of a union organising model is largely driven by how much economic conditions threaten labour relations and how workers, particularly unionists, perceive these threats. Changes in Indonesia's labour regime, especially the shift toward increased labour flexibility, have been widely recognised by workers across the country as a significant threat. However, workers' responses to this situation vary across different regions.

Workers and union leaders in Semarang did not view these threats as central issues. Improving the minimum wage remained the union's primary and normative mission, even with the widespread use of flexible labour, such as short-term contract labour and home-based workers, in the region. The cultural legacy of the corporatist unionism, established during the New Order authoritarian era, continued to strongly influence the values of the union's leadership, particularly regarding the significance of union's economic role. This legacy had shaped the orientation of unionists and workers towards maintaining the conventional workplace-based union model. This orientation was also reinforced by the hegemonic production politics of corporations, which limited the union's focus to wages and workplace economic welfare.

Union leaders in Pekalongan faced a very different situation. Job insecurity and poor working conditions were the main drivers of unrest, largely stemming from local companies' limited capacity to compete in regional economic markets and their small economies of scale, which restricted their capacity to meet workers' ongoing demands for improved conditions. This reality led labour leaders to recognise how little leverage they had to push workplace changes through traditional union actions. At this juncture, the political and economic context created momentum for change. Economic pressures pushed unionists to explore alternative strategies, while political shifts presented new opportunities for action.

Local democratisation has been a key political factor in the development of unions in response to economic threats. The democratisation of the early 2000s was characterised by a strong push for local political participation in both elections and public policy-making. In Pekalongan, this opportunity attracted unionists who saw it as an alternative arena for gaining socio-economic and political support. By aligning with the Golkar party—keen to regain favour through the populist leadership of local elites—and capitalising on the changing political landscape that weakened the dominance of Islam-based parties, the unions in Pekalongan were able to cultivate new activism and strengthen their bargaining power.

In contrast, union leaders in Semarang did not pursue similar opportunities for union development. The union's leadership remained rooted in the conventional model I previously described. Furthermore, political changes in Semarang led to opportunities that were tightly controlled by political parties. Although the PDIP (Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle) has been the dominant force in Semarang—and Central Java more broadly—since the beginning of reformasi, the party showed little interest in building structured alliances with existing workers' organisations. Similarly, despite receiving structural support from international labour institutions for community advocacy programs, the local union's involvement in local policy-making was limited.

I argue that worker leaders and unionists play a crucial role in interpreting the local structural conditions that shape the choice of organisational models. Their actions must be understood in the historical context of their agency and how they mobilise available resources. On one hand, their direct involvement in daily workplace conflicts has been essential in fostering a deep awareness of workers' social position relative to employers and capital. Similarly, their decision to organise resistance through institutional and organisational strategies is influenced by their organised conflict experiences within the workplace.

However, the choice of a specific organisational model and strategy is also influenced by past experiences in diverse social movements. In Pekalongan, some union leaders brought a unique perspective due to their background in leftist student organisations opposing the New Order regime and their activism within Islamic organisations. This contrasts with the unionists in Semarang, who had experiences primarily within factory environments. While the Semarang leaders viewed their factory-based resistance as the sole ideal model for union activism, some Pekalongan leaders opted to expand their union work into the community, referring to their diverse experiences.

Equally important is the role of the networks each leader has built. Their biographical backgrounds have provided them with different forms of social capital. While most leaders in Semarang focused on building networks among local unionists from various unions and limited their interactions with religious NGO activists, unionists in Pekalongan developed much broader connections. They engaged extensively with colleagues from local religious organisations, local grassroots activists, cross-regional labour activists, and local politicians. These diverse networks enabled circulation of ideas, which in turn shaped their ability to interpret economic opportunities and threats, influencing the model of unionism they pursue.

As unions's constituents in Semarang and Pekalongan became diverse, the strategies that evolved along with the development of each type of union significantly impacted on how the unionist established interactions with the diverse groups of constituents they mobilised and advocated for. These dynamics are primarily seen in several ways: 1) the way unionists perceive the diversity of their constituents, 2) the way unionists in each type of union build collective ties as a strategic instrument in defending the interests of their constituents, 3) forms of representation gaps that emerge between them, especially in particular arenas where the heterogeneity of their constituents is prone to competitions and conflicts.

Unionists in Pekalongan and Semarang faced different challenges due to their heterogeneous constituencies. In Semarang, the diversity of union constituencies was primarily shaped by corporations' production strategies aimed at maximising profits (capital accumulation). Corporations categorised the labour force based on migration status, locality, gender, age, and employment status. By contrast, Pekalongan's union constituents included not only workers but also fisherfolk from the north coastal areas, urban street vendors, other impoverished groups, and those with religious organisational affiliations. These categorisations reflect

the local urban socio-economic structure, even sometimes the structure of political base.

The way unionists interpret these labour categorisations significantly influences their strategies for unionism, while also exposing their vulnerabilities in building effective relationships. In Semarang, unionists at all organisational levels developed strategies that led to, what can be described as, precarious representation. These strategies were shaped by corporate labour categorisations, reinforced by exclusionary and divisive labour narratives. For example, hegemonic narratives surrounding the concept of 'partners (*mitra)*' perpetuated the separation and exclusion of homeworkers from permanent factory workers. This exclusion was often viewed by both workers and unionists as an objective reality rather than a politically constructed production relation. By maintaining this division, corporations retained control over segments of the labour force, limiting the unions' ability to unite all worker categories into a collective force. As a result, homeworkers were left to advocate for their own interests, but with fewer resources.

In Pekalongan, unionists similarly viewed their constituents in a compartmentalised manner. Despite their active attempts to engage with these groups, they were often treated as relatively independent entities, connected only through limited programmatic advocacy focused on specific issues such as health and civil registration. There was only limited intersection among these urban community groups, including industrial workers, which enabled their ability to interact and build mutual support for common interests. This lack of cohesion prevented the formation of a unified community that could collectively advocate for shared goals. The impact of this disunity was evident in the unionists' failure to win the legislative seats in 2019 elections, as they garnered little support from ironically their broader and diverse constituents, including their own traditional base: the industrial workers.

The compartmentalisation of these groups rendered them vulnerable in the arenas where their diversity became a contested resource or is strategically exploited by others to obstruct and control the union's goals. Two critical arenas where this dynamic played out are production relations and electoral politics. As previously discussed, corporates systematically created labour categories to maximise profits. In many cases, this segregation has become a battleground for unions to reclaim collective power and advocate for precious workers. However, such contestation was not pronounced in Semarang, largely due to internal constraints within the union and its leadership.

Meanwhile, the intense competition of political contestation in Pekalongan is evident, where unionists saw the electoral arena as a strategic gamble to maintain their bargaining power. This competition not only involved rivalry between unionists and local political elites vying for the support of potential union constituencies, but it also triggered tensions among political candidates within the union itself, due to differing interpretations of the political significance of their constituents.

This study ultimately highlights the importance of focusing on the role of actors, specifically unionists, an element that has been largely overlooked in many labour studies in Indonesia. By examining unionists, it becomes possible to better understand the relationship between local political-economic structures, movement history, individual biographies, and the networks that shape their actions. This explains why two unions affiliated with the same parent organisation can exhibit different characteristics. The findings suggest that organisational reform is driven by actors who can dismantle the traditional legacies of past authoritarian labour regimes, although their ability to do so ultimately depends on the opportunities available to them. Their effectiveness can be seen in their ability to craft a narrative that links their class conditions, available opportunities, and defined goals, while also mobilising resources for collective action. In this regard, Semarang had fewer unionists with such a capacity to navigate meaningful internal organisational reforms compared to their counterparts in Pekalongan.

The choice of unionism strategy for its representational function also underscores the importance of actors' capacity to recognise the diversity of their organised bases and the social foundations that shape this diversity. In Semarang, heterogeneity was shaped by the corporates' strategies of production and labour control. Union leaders' inability to recognise the connection between production organisation and the working class's diverse structure led to a significant representation gap between the unions and workers. In Pekalongan, the urban social structure formed the social foundation of the labour movement model they adopted. However, union leaders' difficulty in recognising the substantial needs across different communities resulted in a movement that remains fragmented, with constituent groups disconnected from one another. The findings underscore the persistent challenge of representation within organised labour, especially in the diverse landscape of the labour movement. Leaders often fall short of fully realising the alignment between the actual characteristics of constituents and the strategic conceptualisation they claim

This study finally demonstrates that the interplay between structural factors and the ability of actors to interpret these structural elements is crucial in explaining

why many other regions, at that time, did not develop alternative organising models in response to changes in labour regimes. Moreover, the challenges unionists faced in understanding the diverse categorisations imposed by socio-economic and political forces significantly impacted their ability to mobilise the constituencies they aimed to represent. This situation highlights the need to identify and unify fundamental bonds to effectively advocate for diverse constituencies. While the recent emergence of the Labour Party represents a promising political development in the labour movement, failure to assess the complexity of its diverse constituency could replicate the vulnerabilities experienced by workers in these two regions, posing social and political risks for the labour movements.

Samenvatting

Sinds de val van het autoritaire Nieuwe Orde-regime in Indonesië zoeken arbeiders naar efficiënte manieren om zich te kunnen organiseren om zo hun belangen te verdedigen ten aanzien van een nieuw arbeidsregime. Dit gebeurt te midden van een economische en politieke overgangsperiode. Vakbonden die zich traditioneel op de werkvloer richten blijven daarbij het dominante model. Echter, vakbonden die zich op bredere belangen van de omringende gemeenschap richten beginnen ook lokale aandacht te krijgen. Vakbondswerk op de werkvloer draait vooral om collectieve onderhandelingen om de belangen van werknemers te beschermen. Daarentegen werken 'gemeenschapsvakbonden' samen met gemeenschappen en maatschappelijke organisaties om relevante kwesties voor beide groepen aan te pakken.

Deze dissertatie onderzoekt de opkomst van beide vormen van vakbondswerk in twee industriële regio's in Midden-Java: Semarang en Pekalongan. Het kijkt naar de effecten van deze vormen op de relatie tussen vakbondsleden en hun achterban. Beide regio's zagen vooral sinds het begin van de *Reformasi* in 1998 een sterke groei van vakbondsactivisme. De vragen die ik daarbij centraal stel zijn: hoe ontwikkelen arbeiders in beide regio's verschillende vormen van vakbondswerk ondanks soms vergelijkbare omstandigheden? En in hoeverre dienen deze strategieën de belangen van de gemobiliseerde achterban binnen de lokale sociaal-culturele en politieke context?

Vakbonden in beide regio's hielden vast aan traditionele vakbondsstrijd op de werkplek. Ze hadden ook de mogelijkheid om ander activisme te ontwikkelen, zoals gemeenschapsbelangenbehartiging en politieke deelname. Beide vakbonden waren aangesloten bij de Nationale Arbeidersunie (SPN). Toch verschilden ze in enkele belangrijke opzichten. Ten eerste in hoeveel middelen vakbondsleden inzetten op respectievelijk de werkplek en in de gemeenschap. Ten tweede in hoe zij verschillende waarden introduceerden en versterkten binnen hun achterban.

Arbeiders in Semarang, een belangrijk industrieel centrum in Midden-Java, richten zich vooral op werkplek-gebaseerde organisaties. In Pekalongan, met een kleinschaliger industriële economie maar een dynamische lokale politiek, kozen arbeiders juist voor gemeenschapsactivisme. Vakbonden in Semarang probeerden soms programma's voor gemeenschapsbelangenbehartiging, maar hun hoofdfocus bleef het verbeteren van de arbeidsomstandigheden. Collectieve

actie en allianties voor betere loononderhandelingen waren hier belangrijker dan politieke betrokkenheid. In Pekalongan daarentegen werden zowel werkplek gerelateerde welzijnsstrijd als sociale belangenbehartiging en politieke initiatieven gecombineerd. Politieke wegen waren vaak een belangrijk middel om industriële geschillen op te lossen.

Ik stel dat elk vakbondsmodel ontstaat door de wisselwerking tussen structurele factoren en de manier waarop vakbondsleden hierop reageren. Politieke kansen en economische bedreigingen, vooral gerelateerd aan industriële activiteiten, zijn de belangrijkste structurele elementen. De manier waarop vakbondsleden deze kansen zien, wordt bepaald door hun ervaring met sociale bewegingen en strategische netwerken. Dit beïnvloedt hoe zij reageren op de structurele factoren.

De dynamiek van politieke en economische factoren en de manier waarop vakbondsleden daarop reageren, kan sterk variëren. In Pekalongan werken deze factoren als push- en pull-elementen die gemeenschaps-gebaseerde vakbonden stimuleren. In Semarang versterken deze elementen elkaar juist, wat het traditionele model van vakbondswerk op de werkplek in stand houdt.

Volgens theorievorming op het vlak van Sociale Bewegingen, werken bedreigingen als een katalysator voor het ontstaan van deze bewegingen. Het model van vakbondsorganisatie wordt grotendeels bepaald door hoe economische omstandigheden de arbeidsrelaties bedreigen en hoe vakbondsleden deze bedreigingen zien. De verschuiving in het arbeidsregime in Indonesië, met name nadruk op flexibiliteit van arbeid, wordt door veel werknemers als een grote bedreiging gezien. Maar de reacties hierop verschillen per regio.

Werknemers en vakbondsleiders in Semarang zagen deze bedreigingen niet als centraal probleem. Het verbeteren van het minimumloon bleef hun belangrijkste missie, zelfs met de toename van flexibel werk, zoals tijdelijke contracten en thuiswerkers. De culturele erfenis van de corporatistische vakbondsbenadering uit de Nieuwe Orde-tijd beïnvloedde sterk de waarden van vakbondsleiders. Dit bepaalde hun focus op traditionele vakbondsactiviteiten op de werkplek. Deze focus werd ook versterkt door de productiestrategieën van bedrijven, die de nadruk legden op lonen en economisch welzijn op de werkplek.

Vakbondsleiders in Pekalongan stonden voor een andere situatie. Onzekerheid over werk en slechte werkomstandigheden zorgden voor onrust. Dit kwam

door de beperkte mogelijkheden van lokale bedrijven om te concurreren in de regionale markten. De geringe economische schaal beperkte hun mogelijkheden om te voldoen aan de eisen van werknemers. Dit leidde ertoe dat vakbondsleiders zich realiseerden dat traditionele vakbondsacties niet genoeg waren om veranderingen af te dwingen. De politieke en economische context bood op dat moment ruimte voor verandering. Economische druk dwong vakbonden om alternatieve strategieën te onderzoeken, terwijl politieke verschuivingen nieuwe mogelijkheden boden.

De democratisering van de vroege jaren 2000 was een belangrijke politieke factor voor vakbonden om te reageren op economische bedreigingen. In Pekalongan zagen vakbondsleden hierin een alternatief om sociaaleconomische en politieke steun te krijgen. Door samen te werken met de Golkar-partij, die via populistisch leiderschap gunsten wilde herwinnen, konden vakbonden in Pekalongan hun activisme versterken. Ze maakten gebruik van de veranderende politieke situatie, die de dominantie van islamitische partijen verzwakte.

In Semarang gingen de vakbondsleiders niet dezelfde kant op. De vakbondsleiding bleef vasthouden aan het traditionele model. Politieke veranderingen in Semarang leidden tot kansen die strikt werden gecontroleerd door politieke partijen. De PDIP (Strijdende Indonesische Democratische Partij) was de dominante kracht in Semarang en breder in Midden-Java sinds het begin van de hervormingsperiode. Maar de partij toonde weinig interesse in structurele allianties met bestaande werknemersorganisaties. Ook al kregen lokale vakbonden steun van internationale arbeidsorganisaties voor gemeenschapsbelangenbehartiging, hun betrokkenheid bij lokaal beleid bleef beperkt.

Ik stel dat de rol van vakbondsleiders en leden cruciaal is bij het interpreteren van lokale structurele omstandigheden die de keuze voor een organisatiemodel bepalen. Hun acties moeten worden begrepen in de historische context van hun werkomstandigheden en hoe ze beschikbare middelen mobiliseren. Hun directe betrokkenheid bij dagelijkse werkplekkenconflicten heeft bijgedragen aan een diep besef van de sociale positie van arbeiders ten opzichte van werkgevers en kapitaal. Hun keuze om verzet te organiseren via institutionele strategieën wordt beïnvloed door hun ervaring met georganiseerde conflicten op de werkplek.

De keuze voor een specifiek organisatiemodel en resulterende strategie wordt ook beïnvloed door eerdere ervaringen vanuit diverse sociale bewegingen. In Pekalongan brachten sommige vakbondsleiders een unieke kijk mee door hun

deelname en achtergrond in linkse studentenorganisaties die zich hadden verzet tegen het Nieuwe Orde-regime en hun activisme binnen islamitische organisaties. Dit verschilde van de vakbondsleiders in Semarang, die vooral ervaring hadden binnen fabrieksomgevingen. Terwijl de leiders in Semarang hun fabriek-gebaseerde verzet zagen als het enige ideale model voor vakbondsactivisme, kozen sommige leiders in Pekalongan ervoor om hun vakbondswerk uit te breiden naar de gemeenschap, geïnspireerd door hun diverse ervaringen.

Net zo belangrijk zijn de netwerken die elke leider heeft opgebouwd. Hun biografische achtergronden gaven hen verschillende vormen van sociaal kapitaal. Terwijl de meeste leiders in Semarang zich richtten op het opbouwen van netwerken onder lokale vakbondsleden van verschillende vakbonden en hun interactie met religieuze NGO-activisten beperkten, ontwikkelden vakbondsleiders in Pekalongan veel bredere contacten. Zij werkten veel samen met collega's van de religieuze organisatie Nahdlatul Ulama, lokale grassroots-activisten, vakbondsactivisten uit andere regio's en lokale politici. Deze diverse netwerken maakten de uitwisseling van ideeën mogelijk, wat hen hielp om economische kansen en bedreigingen beter te begrijpen. Dit beïnvloedde vervolgens het model van vakbondswerk dat ze volgden.

Naarmate de achterban van vakbonden in Semarang en Pekalongan diverser werd, hadden de ontwikkelde strategieën een grote invloed op hoe vakbondsleiders met de verschillende groepen in hun achterban omgingen. Deze dynamiek is te zien in: 1) hoe vakbondsleiders de diversiteit van hun achterban zien, 2) hoe vakbondsleiders in elk type vakbond collectieve banden smeden als strategisch middel om de belangen van hun achterban te verdedigen, en 3) welke vormen van representatiekloven ontstaan, vooral in situaties waar de diversiteit van hun achterban leidt tot concurrentie en conflicten.

Vakbondsleiders in Pekalongan en Semarang stonden voor verschillende uitdagingen door hun diverse achterban. In Semarang werd de diversiteit van de vakbondsachterban vooral gevormd door productiestrategieën die gericht waren op maximale kapitaalaccumulatie. Bedrijven categoriseerden de arbeidskrachten op basis van migratiestatus, afkomst, geslacht, leeftijd en werkstatus. In Pekalongan bestond de vakbondsachterban niet alleen uit arbeiders, maar ook uit vissers, straatverkopers, andere arme groepen en mensen met een religieuze achtergrond. Deze categorisering weerspiegelt de lokale sociaal-economische structuur en zelfs soms een verschil in machtsbasis.

De manier waarop vakbondsleiders deze categoriseringen interpreteren, speelt een cruciale rol in het bepalen van hun vakbondsstrategieën en benadrukt hun kwetsbaarheden bij het opbouwen van effectieve relaties. In Semarang stuitten vakbondsleiders op verschillende niveaus van de organisatie, inclusief hun eigen leden, op wat kan worden omschreven als precaire representatie. Ze werden geconfronteerd met zowel de categorisering die door economische strategieën waren opgelegd als de versterkende politieke waarden van productieverhoudingen. Dit vormde hun begrip van de diversiteit van hun achterban. Bijvoorbeeld, hegemonische verhalen rondom het concept "partners (mitra)" versterkten effectief de scheiding tussen thuiswerkers en vaste fabrieksarbeiders. Dit werd vaak gezien als een objectieve realiteit in plaats van een door productiepolitiek geconstrueerde relatie. Hierdoor bleef het grootkapitaal de controle houden over een segment van de arbeidskrachten, wat de mogelijkheid van vakbonden om alle arbeiders in één collectieve kracht te verenigen, vervolgens weer beperkte. Thuiswerkers moesten hierdoor met veel minder middelen voor hun eigen belangen opkomen.

In Pekalongan zagen vakbondsleiders hun achterban op een vergelijkbare, afzonderlijke manier. Ondanks hun pogingen om met deze groepen samen te werken, werden ze vaak als relatief onafhankelijke entiteiten behandeld, alleen verbonden door beperkte programmatische belangenbehartiging rond specifieke kwesties zoals gezondheid en burgerregistratie. Er was weinig verbinding tussen deze groepen, inclusief de industriële arbeiders, wat hun vermogen om samen te werken voor gemeenschappelijke belangen beperkte. Deze verdeeldheid voorkwam dat er een verenigde gemeenschap ontstond die collectief kon opkomen voor gezamenlijke doelen. Dit gebrek aan cohesie bleek uit het falen van de vakbondsleiders om zetels te winnen in de verkiezingen van 2019, omdat ze weinig steun kregen van hun bredere en diverse achterban, waaronder hun traditionele basis: de industriële arbeiders.

De opdeling van deze groepen maakte hen kwetsbaar in situaties waar hun diversiteit een betwiste bron werd, of strategisch werd gebruikt door anderen om de doelen van de vakbond te blokkeren en te controleren. Twee kritieke onderwerpen waarbij deze dynamiek zichtbaar werd, zijn de productieomstandigheden en de verkiezingspolitiek. Zoals eerder besproken, heeft het grootkapitaal de neiging systematisch arbeidscategorieën op te delen om zo kapitaalaccumulatie te maximaliseren. In veel gevallen is deze scheiding een strijdperk voor vakbonden om collectieve macht te herwinnen en op te komen voor de rechten van werknemers. In Semarang was deze strijd echter

minder uitgesproken, grotendeels door interne beperkingen binnen de vakbond en haar leiderschap.

Ondertussen was de intense concurrentie in de politieke arena in Pekalongan duidelijk, waar vakbondsleiders de verkiezingen zagen als een strategisch gokspel om zo hun onderhandelingspositie te behouden. Deze competitie omvatte niet alleen rivaliteit tussen vakbondsleiders en lokale politieke elites die streden om de steun van potentiële vakbondsleden, maar leidde ook tot spanningen onder politieke kandidaten binnen de vakbond zelf. Dit kwam door uiteenlopende interpretaties van de politieke betekenis van hun achterban.

Deze studie benadrukt zo uiteindelijk het belang van de rol van actoren, in het bijzonder vakbondsleiders, een element dat vaak over het hoofd wordt gezien in veel arbeidsstudies in Indonesië. Door vakbondsleiders te bestuderen, kunnen we beter begrijpen hoe lokale politiek-economische structuren, de geschiedenis van bewegingen, individuele biografieën en netwerken hun acties vormgeven. Dit verklaart waarom twee vakbonden die bij dezelfde koepelorganisatie zijn aangesloten, toch verschillende kenmerken kunnen vertonen. De bevindingen laten zien dat degenen die verandering kunnen bewerkstelligen, degenen zijn die de keten van dominantie, geërfd van het autoritaire regime, kunnen doorbreken. Zij maken hierbij gebruik van een aantal kansen die dit proces mogelijk maakt. Hun effectiviteit blijkt uit hun vermogen om een verhaal te formuleren dat hun klassenpositie, beschikbare kansen en gedefinieerde doelen verbindt, terwijl ze ook middelen mobiliseren voor het nemen van collectieve actie. In dit opzicht zien we in Semarang minder vakbondsleiders die in staat zijn geweest om zinvolle interne hervormingen door te voeren vergeleken met hun tegenhangers in Pekalongan.

De keuze van een strategie die zich richt op hoe ene vakbond het best haar achterban representeert benadrukt ook het belang van het vermogen van leiders om de diversiteit van hun georganiseerde basis en de sociale fundamenten die deze diversiteit vormgeven te herkennen. In Semarang dienden productieomstandigheden als het strijdperk waar de macht van het kapitaal tot een heterogene achterban leidde. Het onvermogen van vakbondsleiders om het verband te zien tussen productieorganisatie en deze diverse structuur van de arbeidersklasse leidde tot een aanzienlijke representatiekloof tussen de vakbonden en de arbeiders die zij zeggen te vertegenwoordigen. In Pekalongan vormde de stedelijke sociale structuur het fundament van de arbeidersbeweging dat zij vervolgens als model adopteerden. Het niet volledig herkennen van

de behoeften van verschillende stedelijke gemeenschappen zorgde er echter voor dat de beweging wel versnipperd bleef, met groepen die los van elkaar opereerden. De bevindingen benadrukken de blijvende uitdaging van zij die georganiseerde arbeid wensen te vertegenwoordiging, vooral in de context van de arbeidersbeweging. Leiders slagen er vaak niet in om volledig aan te sluiten bij de werkelijke kenmerken en behoeften van hun achterban en de strategische concepten die ze zeggen na te streven.

Deze studie toont aan dat de wisselwerking tussen structurele factoren en het vermogen van actoren om deze elementen te interpreteren, essentieel is om te begrijpen waarom veel andere regio's destijds geen alternatieve organisatiemodellen ontwikkelden als reactie op de beschreven veranderingen in het arbeidsregime. Bovendien hadden de uitdagingen waarmee vakbondsleiders werden geconfronteerd, zoals het duiden van de sociale categorisering die ontstaat in het spel van sociaal-economische en politieke krachten, een grote impact op hun (on)vermogen om de achterban te mobiliseren die zij graag ook wilden vertegenwoordigen. Deze situatie benadrukt de noodzaak om fundamentele verbindingen te zoeken om effectief op te komen voor diverse groepen en hen te verbinden. De recente opkomst van de Indonesische Arbeiderspartij is een veelbelovende volgende politieke ontwikkeling in de arbeidersbeweging. Als de complexiteit van haar altijd diverse achterban echter niet goed wordt begrepen, kan dit de kwetsbaarheden repliceren die arbeiders in deze twee regio's in het verleden al hebben ervaren, wat sociale en politieke risico's kan opleveren voor de arbeidersbeweging.

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Curriculum Vitae

Hari Nugroho was born in Jakarta, Indonesia, on November 22, 1964. He began his undergraduate studies in Sociology at Universitas Indonesia in 1983. Since 1997, he has been a full-time lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Universitas Indonesia. With a focus on labour studies, he pursued a master's degree at the Institute of Social Studies (now part of Erasmus University Rotterdam) in 2001, completing a thesis on strike waves in Indonesia. In 2005, he was appointed Chairperson of the Centre for Sociological Studies (LabSosio) at Universitas Indonesia. Two years later, in 2007-2015, he became a member of the executive committee of the Asia Pacific Sociological Association. From 2011 to 2015, he served as the Secretary General of the Indonesian Sociological Association, where he now holds the position of Vice Chair. In 2012, he began his doctoral studies at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University. He is also an editor for several academic publications, including Masyarakat: Jurnal Sosiologi.

Workplace and Community

Workers' Politics of Representation in Semarang and Pekalongan, Central Java

Since the fall of Indonesia's authoritarian New Order, workers have faced a paradox of political and economic changes, as seen in the emergence of a new labour regime. This book examines two forms of unionism that have developed in response to these shifts: traditional workplace-based unionism, centred on collective bargaining, and community unionism, which fosters collaboration between unions and local organisations to address broader social issues.

Focusing on union activities in Semarang and Pekalongan, two industrial regions in Central Java, the author argues that the development of these models is shaped by both local structural forces and the strategic responses of unionists as movement agents. While both forms emphasize welfare struggles and have equally ventured into community activism through social advocacy and electoral politics, they differ significantly in the scale of resources mobilised and the values they promote within their constituencies. These differences influence how unionists engage with the diverse groups they represent, as they navigate the complexities of managing a broad and varied constituent base, reflecting the consequences of each union model.