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

Nugroho, H.

# 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.