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Trends in
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THE RISE AND DECLINE OF
LABOUR MILITANCY IN BATAM

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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The Rise and Decline of Labour Militancy in Batam

By Max Lane

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Over the past two decades, trade union activity in Batam has been heavily influenced by regional demographics, employment conditions and the prevalent political scenario.
- Following the end of the New Order in 1998, the single state-authorized union was fragmented, giving rise to a number of new enterprise unions. Batam's young and diverse immigrant population, with no pre-existing loyalties to particular trade unions, made it a hotspot for industrial relations activities.
- Low and stagnant workers' wages throughout Indonesia and outbreak of social unrest resulted in the formation of three strong national-level unions: FSPMI, KSPSI and the KSBSI. By the mid-2000s, these unions were also active in Batam.
- Unsettled ethnic relations resulted in escalation of labour mobilizations from 2011 to 2013. The Garda Metal (union member formation) spearheaded a number of intense demonstrations throughout Indonesia, including Batam, during this time.
- The 2012 mobilization was particularly effective, and the union bodies were able to successfully negotiate for significantly higher minimum wages for all workers in Indonesia.
- After intervention by the Widodo government, and the signing of a harmony declaration, there has been a change in the unions' approach in demanding wages and conditions improvement. Instead of addressing employment concerns through national-level campaigns, matters are now to be resolved at the enterprise level.
- While there are no visible signs of a confrontational mobilization in the near future, a number of worker welfare issues remain unsettled.

The Rise and Decline of Labour Militancy in Batam

By Max Lane¹

INTRODUCTION

In providing an overview summary of trade union activity in Batam, this essay analyses the region's political history over the last several years. This approach is employed because there appears to have been a strong surge in national trade union reorganization activity since the end of the New Order in 1998. Explaining the evolution of that history, and how it has manifested in Batam, has determined the framework for this essay. The essay is divided as follows: The first section provides a basic outline of historical and social context, both of the trade union sector as well as of some other aspects of Batam; the following section describes the history of the emergence of industrial militancy nationally and in Batam; the third elaborates on the process that has led to a decline of that hostility, and; the conclusion sketches out the implications of this history of the rise and decline of such combat.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Batam is a unique site of development, consciously created to take advantage of its proximity to Singapore. It is therefore to some extent “artificial” in a sense that its sociology and economy have evolved as an enclave offshoot of Indonesia's economic connectivity with Southeast Asia. This is particularly reflected in its demography, both in terms

¹ Max Lane is Senior Visiting Fellow with the Indonesia Studies Programme at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore and Visiting Lecturer at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Gajah Mada University, Yogyakarta.

of originating ethnicity, as well as political demography. It should be noted that in contemporary Indonesia, ethnic and political demography overlap with each other as most political parties represented in the national parliament have specific geographic areas where their support is strongest.²

Before delving deep into the trade union situation in Batam, it is pertinent to briefly discuss its demography. The central and salient feature here is the major immigrant population, which has come into being over an approximate fifteen-year period. The original indigenous population of Batam Malays now exists alongside Javanese, Batak, Minangkabau and other Malay Sumatran immigrants, which gives the Batam population and society the character of a frontier, or new society. By 2010, across the whole province of Riau, “Malays” — presumably local Malays — formed only 30 per cent of the population. This phenomenon is even more pronounced in the town of Batam itself. In 2000, the Malay population was already below 20 per cent of the population, with Javanese being the largest group, followed by Bataks and Minangkabau people from Sumatra. The migration of workers to Batam has given the island a population growth of 8 per cent, the highest in Indonesia.

An introduction to the history of trade unions in Indonesia is useful. There have been several phases in the country’s history where unions had a very different character from what is observed today. Between 1950 and 1965, trade unions were fundamentally an extension of the organizational

² This article is based on a perusal of news media reports of trade union activity in Indonesia and Batam for the period surveyed here. I also travelled to Batam for a one-week visit in February 2017. I was able to speak with several current and former trade union activists. These interviews helped provide some general background and context, but were most important in assisting in identifying additional documentation. Most interviews were carried out in an informal discussion format. Given the short duration of the visit, the interview and discussion activity were not with a “sample” that can be considered representative. Documentary materials have been used as the main key source. This also includes some media published by trade unions themselves.

and mobilization activities of political parties. Almost every large party, irrespective of ideological outlook, had affiliated unions, or unions where they were dominant in the leadership. Moreover, union activity was integrated into party competition. After 1959, when elections were continuously postponed, party competition took the form of a competition over the scale of mobilization as a show of strength. Post 1962, this competition was used to show support for the government's orientation towards "socialism *à la* Indonesia". During this period, unions associated with the Indonesian Left, especially the Communist Party of Indonesia, grew the fastest and were the most active. The main issues were as often about wages and conditions as they were ideological.

From October 1965, when that section of the Army under the command of Major-General Suharto took control of the country, the Indonesian Left, along with associated trade unions, was subjected to severe repression, including mass arrests and executions. Activities by all trade unions, including those sympathetic to the new regime, were also suspended. In the early 1970s, under international pressure, the New Order government established a trade union federation, the All Indonesia Labour Federation (Federasi Serikat Buruh SeIndonesia — FBSI). This union, which underwent name and structural changes, was essentially an extension of the state in its efforts to control industrial unrest throughout the period until the fall of Suharto in 1998. In fact, during the last decade of the New Order, the FBSI was known as the All Indonesia Workers Union (Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia — SPSI). It carried out only the most minimal member-based activities. By the early 1990s, new initiatives began to challenge the dominance of this single state union. In most cases, the leaders of the new unions were jailed and their activities suppressed. Some of these unions revived after 1998, engaging in actual conventional union activities, such as campaigns around salaries and working conditions.

DEMOGRAPHY, PARTY POLITICS AND THE GENERAL CONTEXT FOR UNIONS

To understand the trade union situation in Batam, readers need to grasp two interrelated issues.

The *first* issue relates to *diversity in party identification*. Over the last ten years (in fact even since the 1920s), trade unions have been intimately connected with national political developments. Indonesian politics has been chiefly characterized by the ongoing evolution of a new scenario of more-or-less open electoral politics, with a proliferation of parties. Elections have taken place for local and national parliaments, as well as for various positions in the executive arms of government, such as president, governors, mayors, and regents.

Political party life has been characterized by competition between parties on the national level. With all parties enjoying bases of support in specific geographical areas, it is often the case that the locations of particular ethnic populations coincide with each other. These localized support groups have long histories, and similar patterns can be identified even in the 1955 general elections. Since 2013, almost all the large union confederations have aligned with existing political parties.

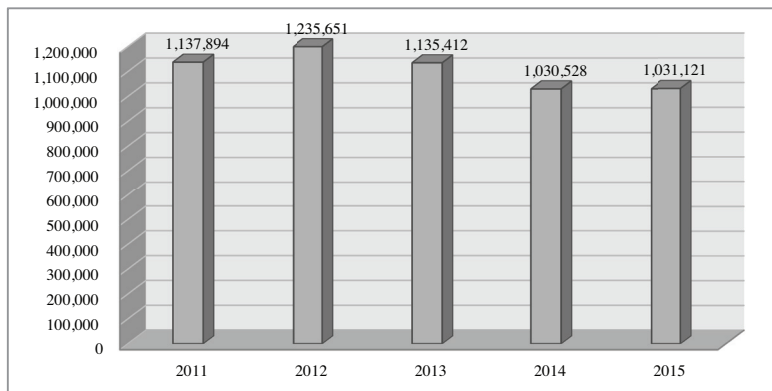
As discussed in the introductory section, Batam has a predominantly immigrant population. In what ways might the specific migrant demographics have relevance? The first fact to note is that as a result of this demography, the basis for any “natural” continuity of pre-existing traditional local support for particular political parties has been weakened. Batam has completely changed from the Malay fishing community that gave it its character in previous decades.

As of 2016, official statistics give a figure of 931,435 for the total workforce, 807,000 of which are classified as urban based.³ It is not clear what portion of this workforce is employed on a sufficiently permanent basis at workplaces with a labour force of sufficient size to be suitable for unionization.⁴

³ This appears to be a figure for the potentially employable over the age of fifteen. See Badan Pusat Statistik Propinsi Kepulauan Riau, “Penduduk 15+ angkatan kerja menurut golongan umur dan daerah tempat tinggal” at <<http://kepri.bps.go.id/linkTableDinamis/view/id/121>>.

⁴ Authority (BIDA) reported in 2008, “the total number of SMEs in Batam during the last ten years attained 9,900 unit with at least 60,000 employees”. If these figures are accurate, the average number of employees in these small to medium enterprises was only six! This would make these enterprises very

Figure 1: Population Growth up to 2015



Source: <https://www.bpmatam.go.id/eng/batamGuide/batam_figures.jsp>

Indeed, as a consequence of a majority migrant population, Batam has displayed one of the most diversified of electoral party allegiances. In the 2009 elections, usefully representative as occurring before the polarization effected by the Widodo–Subianto competition, many parties (thirty-eight) were able to stand candidates. Of these, twenty-one parties scored above 1 per cent and thirty-four parties secured over 1,000 votes. This is one of the clearest pictures of the politico-cultural diversity of party identification. On the other hand, it should also be noted that in the same elections there was essentially no significant policy

unorganizable. However, are only 60,000 people out of 900,000 employed in such SMEs? See Bambang Hendrawan, “The Small Medium Free Enterprises in the Batam Trade Zone that are Able to Acquire Debt” at <https://ac.els-cdn.com/S2212567112003231/1-s2.0-S2212567112003231-main.pdf?_tid=c62b354c-d974-11e7-8ea6-00000aacb360&acdnat=1512448302_44fa507e50a3dcedd63e60ad92793e3f4>.

differentiation between the parties. These party identifications were most likely reflections of social networks resulting out of hometown contacts or familiarity with different individuals. The largest party was Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat at 10 per cent followed by Golkar and the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia–Perjuangan (PDI-P) with 9.3 per cent each. While these were also the three leading parties nationally, no one party particularly dominated. A party that was later to become a major axis of affiliation for Indonesia's most active union confederation, Confederation of Trade Unions of Indonesia (Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Indonesia — KSPI), namely Prabowo Subianto's Gerindra was not yet active in Batam in 2009. Significantly, however, its partner from 2013, the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) scored relatively high in 2009 with 8.96 per cent. The current president of the KSPI, Said Iqbal, stood as a PKS candidate in Riau in 2009.

A *second* factor mirrors the political sociology of the section of the workforce employed in workplaces large enough to be unionized. This is the *newness of the workforce*. On Java, in the factory belt areas around Jakarta, for example, most workers are young and have been recruited into factories or other large workplaces since 2000–02 when the recovery after the 1997 financial crisis began. Many have less than ten years' experience as factory workers or as workers in any kind of large, technology-based workplace. Most come from a family background where their parents also had no, or very minimal, experience of urban formal sector employment — which also means no experience of trade union membership or activity.

This has also been the case for the vast majority of workers who came to Batam at a young age to escape unemployment in their home province. However, there does not seem to be any good data that can be used to elaborate on the kind of experience they brought with them. Discussions with informants, including workers, in Batam in 2017, indicate that very few have significant experience, except for a very small group that previously worked in shipyards on Java.

This has meant, on Batam as well as in another parts of Indonesia, that no pre-existing strong loyalties exist for particular trade unions. Trade union memberships have only been built since the 2000s and remain relatively fluid, however “solid” they may appear at any one moment.

This demographic diversity reflected the diversity of electoral results nationally, giving Batam the profile of a mini Indonesia. By 2014, the election results in Batam also reflected a national trend of reducing the number of parties represented. There were members elected from ten parties, nine of which were also the major parties represented nationally. A feature of politics in Batam, including trade union politics, is the large extent to which it reflects national developments.⁵ Perhaps one difference is that there was a slightly more even spread in the voting among the nine most important parties than in other single regions. As a matter of fact, in the presidential elections in 2014, there was a 56 per cent vote in favour of Joko Widodo, also similar to the national outcome.⁶

Batam vs. Jakarta

Although obvious differences remain, certain aspects of this demographic profile make Batam appear similar to Jakarta and the rest of Indonesia. The key similarities are, as pointed out before, the newness of the workforce, the lack of experience with unions, and the absence of entrenched union loyalties — with such loyalties also developing only recently. The demographic diversity also meant that the general “diversity” of trade unions prevalent around Indonesia also exists in Batam.

Another interesting similarity is the higher cost of living in Batam, which is similar to that in Jakarta. No doubt this is connected to the high level of imports for almost everything needed by the people on the island. In discussions with some factory workers, they also indicated that an additional financial pressure was the expectation that they could send

⁵ <<http://batam.tribunnews.com/2014/08/29/siang-ini-pelantikan-dprd-batam-inilah-daftar-lengkapnya>>. The parties represented were: PDI-P 8 members; Golkar 7 members; Gerindra 6 members; Demokrat 5 members; PAN 5 members; Hanura 4 members; Nasdem 4 members; PKS 4 members; PKB 3 members; PPP 3 members; and PKPI 1 member.

⁶ <<http://www.beritasatu.com/pemilu2014-aktualitas/197506-jokowijk-menang-5598-di-batam.html>>.

money home. This has meant that trade unions in Batam have had a basis for demanding a large increase in wages.⁷ The minimum wage in Batam remains almost on par with Jakarta. At the end of 2017, the minimum wage was increased from Rp3,241,125 to Rp3,523,427.⁸ This was the standard increase of 8.7 per cent that was announced for all of Indonesia.⁹ Jakarta, Batam and Karawang have the highest minimum wages in the country.¹⁰ In Central Java, in contrast, the minimum wage can be below Rp2 million.

At this point, it is also necessary to emphasize the key differences. Jakarta's economy and workforce operate on a totally different scale from that of Batam. Moreover, Java's day-time population stands at approximately 15 million, compared to Batam's just over 1 million. The number of large-sized manufacturing enterprises in the Jakarta factory belt area is also much greater than in Batam.

TRADE UNION POLITICS: EARLY PERIOD

After the Habibie government ended the policy of a single state-authorized union in 1998, there was a process of fragmentation of the existing single union,¹¹ as well as an evolution of dissident unions and a mushrooming

⁷ The official Poverty Line for Batam up until 2016 was Rp525,425 per head, just over Rp2 million for a family of four. This is the second highest for any *kabupaten* in the Province of the Riau Islands. Indonesian official poverty lines are drawn, based on a very minimalist assessment of needs. Source: <<http://kepri.bps.go.id/linkTableDinamis/view/id/24>>.

⁸ <<http://regional.kompas.com/read/2017/11/03/14293341/umk-batam-naik-di-tengah-lesunya-perekonomian>>.

⁹ <<https://finance.detik.com/berita-ekonomi-bisnis/3715288/ini-daftar-lengkap-upah-minimum-provinsi-2018>>.

¹⁰ Karawang has a minimum wage of Rp3.9 million. This is a result of the fact that the trade union campaign of 2010–12/13 were the most intense and effective in Karawang.

¹¹ See Rob Lambert, "Authoritarian state unionism in New Order Indonesia", Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University, 1993.

of new enterprise organizations.¹² This occurred throughout Indonesia but concentrated in areas that were attracting manufacturing investment, including Batam. Batam, under the New Order government, had already been treated as a special investment site. The demographic basis for union consolidation was further enhanced after 2001–02, when investment started to return to Indonesia after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.

This period saw elements of an unplanned demographic shift to Batam, with some outbreaks of social unrest. In 2002, for example, there was widespread ethnic unrest between the Javanese and the Bataks over various perceived grievances. There had also been earlier clashes between people from Flores and Bataks. The clashes were serious, and newspapers reported that large shopping centres in Nagoya and Sekupang Seaport were deserted. Public transportation disappeared temporarily, too. A police official explained at the time that the situation was tense as 95 per cent of the population were migrants from other parts of Indonesia and that relations between the various newcomers had not settled.¹³

Among other things, Batam has a sense of the harsh life of a frontier town comprised mostly of poor migrant labourers. For example, in May 2004, there were clashes between squatters in illegal housing and the police.¹⁴ In the same year, there were large demonstrations by union members for wage rises.¹⁵ This level of social unrest — with occasional outbursts and also worker demonstrations — appears to continue

¹² See Michele Ford, “Continuity and Change in Indonesian Labour Relations in the Habibie Interregnum”, *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 28, no. 2 (2000), p. 67. Also David Duncan, “‘Out of the Factory, Onto the Streets’: The Indonesian Metalworkers Union Federation (FSPMI) as a Case of Union Revitalisation in Indonesia”, BA Honours thesis, 2015, p. 87.

¹³ “Parts of Batam deserted after riots, killing”, *Jakarta Post*, 7 February 2002.

¹⁴ “Batam squatters battle eviction, clash with cops”, *Straits Times*, 15 May 2004; “Squatters try to hold Batam to ransom”, *Jakarta Post*, 15 May 2004.

¹⁵ “Thousands of Batam workers demand wage increase”, *Detik.com*, 4 December 2004.

throughout the period until 2010.¹⁶ Worker protest activity escalated after that, perhaps sociologically supported by the stabilization of the demographic situation.

The return growth was slow and gradual, but by 2007, there were 240,509 Indonesian citizens employed in Batam City, and 164,476 people (65 per cent of whom were female) worked in secondary industries.¹⁷ By this time, most of the trade unions operating in Indonesia were also active in Batam. This is clearly revealed by the 2009 elections. Michele Ford documents members of the following unions as having stood as candidates under the banners of various parties:

- The Federation of Indonesian Metal Workers' Unions (FSPMI — Federasi Serikat Pekerja Metal Indonesia);
- The Confederation of All Indonesian Trade Unions) (KSPSI — Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia); and
- The Confederation of Prosperous Worker Trade Unions (KSBSI — Konfederasi Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia).¹⁸

The first two came out of the fragmentation and reformation process of the New Order era state-authorized union. The third, KSBSI, evolved out a dissident union established under the New Order, and also suppressed at that time. Although a dissident union opposed to New Order authoritarianism, it was not left-wing or radical, but was more aligned with moderate social democratic unionism.¹⁹

¹⁶ There are no clear collected statistics of this but surveys of news digests indicate regular, if small-scale activity.

¹⁷ Michele Ford, "Learning by doing: Trade unions and electoral politics in Batam, Indonesia, 2004–2009", *South East Asia Research* 22, no. 3 (2014): 341–57.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 353–54.

¹⁹ For an overview on unions since the Reformasi period, see "Serikat Buruh/ Serikat Pekerja di Indonesia" at <<https://indoprogress.com/2007/08/serikat-buruhserikat-pekerja-di-indonesia/>>.

These are still the three main union formations in Batam today,²⁰ along with the FSPMI, having been the most politically active and having the greatest impact on union atmospherics, until at least 2013–14.

THE RISE OF MILITANCY: A NATIONAL TREND (2011–13)

Batam's industrial relations scene did attract attention before 2011, when there were some outbursts of worker anger, sometimes provoked by xenophobic or ethnic reactions. For instance, there had been rioting at the Dubai-owned Drydocks World Graha shipyards in 2010 when an Indian security guard allegedly insulted an Indonesian worker. Thousands of workers rioted against Indian personnel. In 2011, another shipyard riot broke out when security guards assaulted two workers. This incident did not seem to have an ethnic or racialist aspect.²¹ However, these have not been repeated after 2011.

Perhaps the most important point to note is that starting from 2011 until today, trade union activity in Batam has mirrored national trends. While Batam's economic experience over the past seven years has been different in its specifics, than, for example, the Jakarta region, trade union activity between 2010/11 and 2017 has been more or less similar. This reflects the fact that the existing national union confederations and federations seem to be highly centralized.²² It will be a central element of the conclusion of this initial survey of unionism in Batam that developments there have been, are likely to remain, dependent on

²⁰ There are no available studies that can provide more information on the sociology of the membership of these unions, nor reliable figures for their membership sizes in Batam. To obtain a serious picture of the sociology of membership extensive ethnographic work is needed on site among the workforce.

²¹ "Security guards, soldier beat workers, start Batam riot: Witness", *Straits Times*, 21 September 2011.

²² For further data on national trade union activity during this period, see Max Lane, *An Introduction to the Politics of Indonesian Labor Movement* (forthcoming).

national trends. This is especially the case now since the initial teething period of unsettled ethnic relations resulting from the rapid demographic shift, has subsided.

Escalation of labour mobilization became very evident throughout 2011. It is difficult to determine the exact reasons for this, but it seems that by around 2010, most of the larger union federations and confederations had stabilized after more than a decade of fragmentation, re-formation, and, to a certain extent at the factory base level, renewal. This stabilization was buttressed by the relative revival of manufacturing growth over the previous period. By 2010, there was a larger and more stable workforce, with at least three union confederations with substantial dues paying membership, namely, the three cited previously, the KSPI (including the FSPMI), the KSPSI and the KSBSI.

In Jakarta, and in several other cities, there were also unions that grew out of, or were connected to, the more radical dissident political currents that had emerged in opposition to the New Order in the 1980s. While the KSBSI emerged from a union that had been part of the opposition and suppressed before 1998, it was not politically radical in its orientation. However, in Batam, none of these more radical unions were or are present.²³ This is also an important factor in understanding the dynamics of union politics over the last few years.

The escalated mobilizations were visible nationally, in Jakarta and in other provinces, including Batam. These were of a different character than either the ethnic, racial or unorganized or semi-organized outbursts that had occurred in Batam in the earlier years. The national escalation was framed around two time periods. The first was May Day and the second was the November–December period which, at least up until recently, was the period when increases in the official minimum wage were determined. May Day became the day when major unions, spearheaded by the KSPI/FSPMI, would announce their campaigns for wage increases, and also for an end to day labour hire (called “outsourcing”).

²³ It is not impossible that there are individual workers who have loyalties to one of these unions outside Batam, or small groups of such workers.

In 2011, they announced that they planned a “national strike” at the end of the year to demand wage increase.

This pattern of announcing wage and other demands at large rallies in the month of May, leading to a national strike in October or November was a pattern every year from 2011 to 2013. Between May and November, many warm-up actions would be organized, including road blocks and motor-bike mobilizations by large numbers of workers. And then on set dates in either October or November, major demonstrations in the factory belt areas around Jakarta and other cities — including Batam — would take place.

Vanguard Agency

Between 2010 and 2013, the end-of-year national mobilizations were always called by an umbrella alliance of Union Confederations and Federations. The first was a coalition between the KSPSI and the KSPI. Other unions would also mobilize on the same dates, but separately. Later, after tensions between these two confederations prevented further grouping, another alliance emerged to organize these actions. This was a pact between the KSPI and various unions, most of which had emerged from the fragmentation and re-formation of the old New Order era state-sanctioned union structures.

On every occasion between 2011 and 2013, the FSPMI metal-workers union (mainly workers from assembly factories of cars, motorbikes, whitegoods and electronic goods) was the driving force of the mobilizations. FSPMI was the leading Federation in the KSPI confederation. Between 2010 and 2011, a formation known as the Garda Metal (Metal Battalion), was the spearhead of most demonstrations.²⁴

²⁴ Information on the Garda Metal is primarily obtained from following their activities via social media, including at <<http://fspmi.or.id/garda-metal>>. Their presence at mobilizations is easily identifiable because of their striking black and red uniforms and military style formations. There is also a Garda Metal Facebook Group where some information can be gleaned. I have also held discussions with former members of Garda Metal in Batam and in Jakarta.

The Garda Metal was a well-drilled formation of union members recruited to play the leading role in such mobilizations. They were, in fact, also provided with a separate black-and-red para-military style uniform. The presence of several hundreds of these disciplined Garda Metal union members at the head of a demonstration gave the workers in the mobilization increased confidence.

An interesting observation here is that many Garda Metal members received advanced education in political and economic issues. During the 2010–12 period, thousands of members of the FSPMI, and Garda Metal in particular, attended so-called “Ekopol” (Political Economy) courses. Key educators in this programme were initially drawn from the activists who had been part of the more radical wing of the opposition to the New Order. This meant that the FSPMI had an educated and trained spearhead formation that was able to provide leadership at the factory level, across all plants that were covered by it. Some Ekopol-trained unionists also became de facto leaders at the individual company level, leading more militant actions, including actions by workers from one factory offering solidarity to workers in other facilities, who were on strike or in dispute with their employer.

The role of the FSPMI, the Garda Metal and the Ekopol political education was central in enabling escalation between 2010 and 2013.

Batam

The Garda Metal was also developed in Batam. Ekopol courses were regularly taught as well, and by the same educators as in the Jakarta area.

The FSPMI was already active and well organized early in the 2000s. By 2008, the electronics federation alone had 13,515 members, of whom 10,115 were women.²⁵ The members were spread across twenty-five companies, only two of which had more than 1,000 members. Their 2009 report to members listed numerous ongoing cases of individual disputes as well as a fairly comprehensive training programme for some members,

²⁵ “Laporan Pimpinan Cabang Spee FSPMI Kota Batam”, March 2009.

especially in regard to legal aspects of industrial relations. Officials from national headquarters also made regular visits. Their list of cases indicated that they were taking many disputes to court. A list of Garda Metal members from 2011 provides the names of 298 members.²⁶ Most are listed as being part of delegations from mainly electronics firms, but some also from shipyards. Apart from visits from national officials, the Jakarta Ekopol educators also regularly visited Batam to give courses.²⁷ These included discussions on the tactics of mobilization.

This means that the FSPMI, even by 2009, had a large dues-paying membership in Batam, and a substantial Garda Metal force. Batam was thus equipped with the same vanguard structure as Jakarta. It is not surprising then that in 2011 and 2012, the worker mobilizations were large and militant. Apart from being a demographically pioneer settler society equipped with mobilization organizations such as Garda Metal, and a solid base in the FSPMI, and with other unions also present, Batam had already shown the potential for tensions to heat up considerably.

In 2011, after the Jakarta-based May Day declaration that there would be a campaign leading up to November mobilizations around wage demands and the demand to end outsourcing (day labour hire), meetings and actions took place in Batam. The most well-known ones took place in May 2011 and then climaxed in November 2011, and were very militant actions resulting in confrontations with the police.²⁸ In November, the actions received wide national media coverage with reports of workers bearing government cards as they entered the compound of the mayor.

²⁶ Garda Metal Batam, Excel Data List. I have not been able to date this list for certainty, but it is either 2011 or 2012. Discussions with former members, February 2017.

²⁷ These courses were very important in helping form core leadership groups. Discussions with former Ekopol students, Batam, February 2017.

²⁸ See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHDbPb7zjT8>> for an example of the kind of confrontations taking place in Batam during this period, even as early as 2009. FSPMI banners are very prominent.

The demonstrations were called by the KSPSI, KSPI, which includes the FSPMI and the FSBSI — the three main groups operating in Batam.

The November 2011 demonstrations took place over two days with all the major union federations demanding a new minimum wage of Rp1,760,000 (US\$200 in 2011). The employers' association proposed Rp1,260,000, while the wage council suggested Rp1,360,000.²⁹ The Mayor supported a figure closer to the wage council's proposal.³⁰ Police used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the mobilization which appeared to involve up to 10,000 workers.³¹ Batam town areas, including some government offices, were shut down for three days. These militant mobilizations, with the clashes with police, meant that Batam received extra prominence in the media.³² For example, in 2011 in Jakarta, the workers' wage demands were more or less met, and extensions of their protests did not need to go ahead.

In 2012, the same pattern of activity took place with unions announcing on May Day in Jakarta that there would be a build-up to a national mobilization in October, which would again demand substantial wage rises and an end to outsourcing. With the experience of 2011 behind them, and a further year of training and education, primarily in the FSPMI and Garda Metal, the October 2012 mobilizations were probably the largest and best organized of any between 2011 and 2013 (the 2013 mobilizations were more effective in some respects, but less so in others). In the Jakarta factory belt area, the demonstrations were

²⁹ "Mayor defies workers' higher wage demands", *Jakarta Post*, 26 November 2011; "27 arrests after Batam riot violence", *Jakarta Globe*, 25 November 2011.

³⁰ Official minimum wages are decided by local government, after hearing submissions from employers and workers, via a tripartite wages council, who also make a recommendation.

³¹ "Massive worker rally in Batam erupts into chaos, six injured", *Jakarta Post*, 24 November 2011.

³² <<https://news.detik.com/berita/1774134/demo-buruh-di-batam-berakhir-ricuh-belasan-mobil-dirusak>>; <<http://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2011/11/24/penembakan-buruh-di-batam-pelanggaran-ham>>; <<http://www.tribunnews.com/regional/2011/11/25/rusuh-di-batam-kantor-dan-pusat-perbelanjaan-tutup>>.

very large and were followed by several months of solidarity actions between unions. The Garda Metal presence was very evident in both the preceding warm-up actions, as well as during the demonstrations on 2 and 3 October 2012.

According to worker participant reports, the Batam mobilizations were also large and effective. This time, however, there were no serious clashes with the police, despite successful occupations by workers in some areas. The authorities announced that “thousands” of police and security personnel were being mobilized.³³ It is worth reproducing one report from a participant:³⁴

At 8 am, 3 October 2012, Batam city traffic was completely paralyzed. This was the fastest the workers’ movement had ever been able to close down an area in any part of the country in a national strike. This action did not face repression, as the wage action last year did when there were shootings [with rubber bullets]. The combined forces of the TNI and Polri were helpless against a wave of strikes.

By 6 am, a number of masses had located in four locations, namely Tumenggung stadium, Tanjung Uncang, Simpang Franky (Batam Centre) and Main (Batu Ampar). This movement was led by the Garda Metal Batam acting as field executor. The mass spread into groups: “sweeping” groups,³⁵ groups blocking roads

³³ <<http://batamtoday.com/home/read/20142/Polda-Kepri-Turunkan-Ribuan-Personil-Amankan-Demo-Buruh-di-Batam>>; <<http://batam.tribunnews.com/2012/10/03/aksi-buruh-blokir-jalan-sempat-ricuh-dengan-aparat>>.

³⁴ See the Indonesian version at <<http://edukasiperburuhan.blogspot.co.id/2012/10/reportase-monas-batam-suatu-awal.html>>. (The article was written by Andry Yunarko.)

³⁵ “Sweeping” is the practice of groups of union members travelling around industrial areas and urging other workers in less unionized factories to join the action. This had been practised in the Jakarta factory belt area all through 2012. It grew out of the practice of inter-factory solidarity actions. Many of the leaders of these “actions-from-below” had also received Ekopol education.

and groups occupying strategic points, managing to break the combined security forces of the TNI and Polri.

At 7:30 am, as the sweeping masses went out of the factory, the force of the apparatus focused on the masses in the Tumenggung stadium, the masses blocking the street (at the Franky intersection) and the mass groups of KSPSI and the KSBSI going to the Mayor's Office. The apparatus could not move freely because they were surrounded by a mass of workers who had just come out of the factory at 7:30 am who came from various regions. Workers came from Tanjung Uncang-Sampang, Batu Ampar, Tunas Industries, Muka Kuning and Panbil, and Cammo areas, to Tumenggung stadium. The workers' movement successfully paralyzed the city of Batam in just three hours.

Workers succeeded in urging the Mayor of Batam, Speaker of DPRD and Kadisnaker, to meet workers at the Tumenggung stadium. The Mayor of Batam, Ahmad Dahlan and his entourage, who were on the way to the action site were besieged by the masses who came from the Muka Kuning area and the masses who came from the Tanjung Uncang area. Ahmad Dahlan promised to fulfil all the demands of the workers, including wage demands of Rp2,200,000 (non-sector), Rp2,500,000 (sector 1), Rp3,200,000 (sector 2) to be discussed in the Batam City Wage Council.

For the Batam labour movement, this is a great victory. It is not easy to exert force on Batam's Mayor, Ahmad Dahlan, who is famous for being arrogant to workers. Moreover, the action process does not use the aid of command cars and sound devices, because the police/TNI officers blocked FSPMI access to rent cars and sound systems.

As indicated in the report above, the Garda Metal led the actions in the field that carried out sweepings, roadblocks and occupations of road intersections. The KSPSI and KSBSI mobilized their members at government offices. In Batam, the Garda Metal's spearhead role was even more real than in the Jakarta region, where it was their disciplined and uniformed show of force at the head of a mobilization that gave the workers confidence. The coordinator of the Batam Garda Metal,

Suprpto, was quoted as saying that a total of 25,000 workers were involved in the day's mobilization.³⁶

This report by a sympathizer captures the elated atmosphere among unions at the end of 2012. Throughout Indonesia, the unions won substantial wage increase. In Batam, the official wage rose from Rp1,320,000 to Rp2,040,000 and even higher in some sectors.³⁷ This is at least a 65 per cent rise.

DECLINE OF MILITANCY AND BEGINNING OF CO-OPTION (2013–17)

The momentum from the successful 2012 mobilizations carried through into 2013. There was another May Day call for a national action at the end of the year, when again there would be a round of discussions on raising the official minimum wage. In the Jakarta factory belt areas, there were frequent mobilizations and factory pickets throughout 2013. Sweeping actions were common, resulting in increased activity by new local organizations mobilizing people to take action — physical harassment — against picketing workers.³⁸ A worker organizing centre was also burned down. There were also an increasing number of employers presenting charges against workers to police for harassment or damaging property. While there are no comprehensive statistics on this, union activists confirm an intensification of harassment and pressure.

Despite this, the 2013 mobilizations still took place. However, the process appeared to be not as well organized and somewhat more chaotic

³⁶ <<http://news.liputan6.com/read/441756/buruh-batam-blokir-sejumlah-akses-ke-kawasan-industri>>.

³⁷ In addition to an official minimum wage for each district, there are also official minimum wages for different industry sectors.

³⁸ In fact, the escalation seemed to start after the 2012 mobilizations. See “Workers in Jababeka area attacked”, *Jakarta Globe*, 30 October 2012; “Labour coordination posts attacked by thugs, workers assaulted”, *Berita Satu*, 29 October 2012.

than in 2012. Individual reports from workers in different factories seemed to indicate uncertainty on the part of the union leaderships supporting the actions as to what scale and what kind of action they wanted.³⁹

Whatever the internal situation may have been inside the KSPSI during 2013, the wage outcome was less than desired. This contrasted greatly with the results from 2012. In Jakarta, there was a new Governor, Joko Widodo. He had agreed to the big wage increases in 2012, a situation he was faced with very soon after coming to office as Governor. In 2013, he agreed to a much lower wage increase.⁴⁰

Batam

In Batam, the 2013 mobilizations seemed to go well, although some actions failed. Media reports stated that activity was paralysed in around 1,000 foreign companies in Batam and that sweeping activities took place in twenty-six industrial areas.⁴¹ Significantly, they also reported that, as in the Jakarta area, employers also called in non-government militia groups such as Pemuda Pancasila, to provide physical security outside their factories. In Batam, the minimum wage rose from Rp2,040,000 to Rp2,422,092, going up to just over Rp2,600,000 in sector 1, which includes some of the heavier industries.⁴²

The Scenario Changes

On 8 November 2013, in Bekasi, in the centre of the Jakarta factory belt, representatives of unions (including the KSPSI/FSPMI), employers,

³⁹ It is difficult to get a fully clear picture of the situation leading up to the November 2013 actions. My impressions are based on communications with union members in the area but also the reports that have surfaced on a variety of union member Facebook groups.

⁴⁰ “Despite workers’ boycott, council proposes minimum wage”, *Jakarta Post*, 1 November 2013.

⁴¹ “Massive strike nearly cripples industries in Batam”, *Jakarta Post*, 1 November 2013.

⁴² <<http://karimunbatam.blogspot.co.id/2014/01/upah-minimum-kota-umk-ums-kota-batam-tahun-2014.html>>.

local government, the police and army signed the Bekasi Industrial Harmony Declaration. The declaration contained six points. Although they were all formulated in very general terminology, it was clear that it was a declaration against conflict and militancy. The final points emphasized the need to create a climate where enterprises could be productive and develop in a competitive environment. The emphasis was on consensus, cooperation and developing industrial relations where everyone benefited.⁴³ Much of the language was reminiscent of New Order industrial relations language. It signified a major change in the KSPSI/FSPMI's orientation.

Connected to this development, the people who had been leading the Ekopol education were excommunicated from the union and those courses stopped. An instruction was issued stating that members should not have contact with them.⁴⁴

Other changes also appeared during 2014. The KSPSI/FSPMI started to select members to stand for national and local parliament as the candidates of several different parties. There had been an orientation to gain parliamentary representation as far back as 2009. When the declaration of harmony took place, members were already selected to stand for election via these parties. In the 2014 parliamentary elections, none of the FSPMI members received a quota to be elected in their own right, although two were elected to district parliaments after receiving surplus votes from their respective parties. "Go Politics", as the union called it, was not something new. However, the presidential elections, also scheduled for 2014, did result in a new political orientation.

⁴³ <<http://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2012/11/08/17052399/Deklarasi.Harmoni.Industri.Bekasi.Didukung>>, *Kompas*, 8 November 2012.

⁴⁴ For the official ex-communication Instruction, see "Email from Said Iqbal to FSPMI Branches No.: 01835/Org/DPP FSPMI/VIII/2014 Hal: Instruksi organisasi", reproduced in David Duncan, "'Out of the Factory, Onto the Streets': The Indonesian Metalworkers Union Federation (FSPMI) as a Case of Union Revitalisation in Indonesia", BA Honours thesis, 2015, p. 87.

The 2014 elections were a contest between Joko Widodo, at that time Governor of Jakarta and nominated by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), and Prabowo Subianto, nominated by his own party Gerindra and supported by Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN) and Partai Kesejahteraan Sosial (PKS). The three major union groupings, KSPSI, KSPI and KSBSI — the three dominant on Batam — were divided on this question. KSPSI and KSBSI supported Widodo. KSPI/FSPMI, on the other hand, came out in strong support for Prabowo Subianto.

KSPI's support for Prabowo, articulated by its central leader, Said Iqbal, marked a new turn in union politics. The union, which had evolved the Garda Metal and had opted for working through various parties, now opted for a clear orientation to one political pole of attraction, Gerindra and PKS.⁴⁵ The implications of this new turn have been significant, especially given the increasingly polarized ideological contestation that has occurred in Indonesia since 2014. It has meant that the KSPI/FSPMI has supported many of the positions and tactics associated with the political pole represented by Gerindra, the PKS and their other allies. This has included actively supporting the candidacy of Anies Baswedan and Sandiogo Uno, representing Gerindra and PKS, against that of the PDI-P candidate, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), a Chinese Christian. Their support included fusing the 2016 annual minimum wage union mobilization with the “Bela Islam” mobilizations against Ahok's candidacy.⁴⁶

While KSPI member unions still have active disputes with individual employers, and carry out public campaigns in support of improvements in welfare provisions, there are two major visible changes resulting from the turns in industrial and political orientations noted above. First, the annual May–November push for major mobilizations to demand wages and conditions improvements has been de-emphasized. This was

⁴⁵ Iqbal himself had stood as a PKS candidate in the electorate of Riau in 2009.

⁴⁶ See also “Labor protesters burn Ahok-Djarot's floral tributes”, *Jakarta Post*, 1 May 2017.

especially notable in 2015 when the Widodo government moved to end the annual consideration of the minimum wage based on assessment of minimum dignified living standard costs. The new system would allow that consideration only every five years. Instead, there would be an automatic wage increase based on a formula related to economic growth and inflation. All the unions opposed this. However despite its obvious threat to future wage rises, the 2015 end-of-year mobilizations echoed much less than ever in 2014.⁴⁷ In 2016, it appeared as if they had almost disappeared, being submerged in the anti-Ahok “Bela Islam” mobilizations, with that campaign’s appeal to anti-Chinese and sectarian sentiment. Industrial campaigning became much more limited to enterprise-level disputes, and was not the subject of national campaigning.

The second change has been the integration of many KSPI/FSPMI activities into the political agenda of the Gerindra/PKS opposition to President Widodo.

These changes have been also reflected in Batam.⁴⁸ Since 2014, the same de-escalation of islandwide industrial campaigning has taken place. Protests have not disappeared but the previous dynamic of trying to make the mobilizations stronger and larger each year has vanished. The emphasis has returned to the handling of enterprise-by-enterprise disputes. Often, these are also not about wage rises, but rather delays in wage payments.⁴⁹ Among previously active workers, one hears the common refrain of disappointment at the de-escalation. On the other hand, there appears to be a consensus among all of the three union

⁴⁷ In 2014 and 2015 demonstrations did still take place. However, it was clear that framework had been deprioritized.

⁴⁸ FSPMI Batam’s ongoing activities, both campaigns around economic and welfare issues, as well as more specifically political issues are very evident from their Facebook page: <<https://www.facebook.com/FSPMI-Batam-Island-158938780871750/>>.

⁴⁹ Interviews with SBSI union official, February 2017.

groupings in Batam that disputation must be kept to a modest level in order not to scare away investors. This seems to reflect the spirit of the 2013 Bekasi Declaration of Industrial Harmony.

While neither Gerindra nor PKS appear to be increasing their activity in Batam, this does not mean that the KSPI/FSPMI has not been carrying out activities consistent with their agendas. The KSPI/FSPMI statements now regularly combine their demands around wages and welfare with political demands consistent with the Gerindra/PKS agenda. It appears that one of the largest union mobilizations in Batam — although still only described to be in the hundreds — in 2017 has been one opposing the proposal for a 20 per cent threshold of members of the current parliament as a requirement to nominate candidates for the presidency in 2019. This new provision, now passed into law, will make it more difficult for Gerindra to nominate Prabowo Subianto to stand as president. The threshold is supported by the PDI-P and most of the parties currently supporting the Widodo government. The eight-point manifesto for the protest action also indicated opposition to the Widodo government's new regulation allowing it to ban organizations opposed to non-Pancasila ideas. The first organization banned was the fundamentalist Moslem Hizbut Tahir Indonesia. Gerindra and PKS have also opposed the ban.⁵⁰ This protest, still led by the red and black uniformed Garda Metal, was in August 2017 and was part of a national KSPI mobilization.⁵¹ The other six demands in the manifesto relate to wage and welfare issues.

The analysis here emphasizes the changes in the national political campaigning of the most active union confederation, the KSPI. There appeared to be little resistance to this from trade union leaderships in Batam, although there were protests from the most militant members,

⁵⁰ It should be noted here that most human rights organizations have opposed the ban.

⁵¹ <<https://www.koranperdjoeangan.com/di-batam-meski-hujan-buruh-antusias-ikut-aksi/>>.

some of whom later left the unions or became less active.⁵² Indeed, there appears to be a consensus among all unions in Batam now that the weakening economic conditions mean that strikes and other militant activities should be reduced. Likewise, disputes involving pickets and other actions are to be kept at a minimum. Discussions with some workers and officials indicate that such disputes are primarily about late payment of wages.⁵³

CONCLUSION

Indonesia's general socio-economic conditions, with low wages compared to cost of living, and employment uncertainty, suggest that industrial disputation at the workplace will not go away. In the meantime, the new 2013–14 political orientation of the unions that had been the spearhead for three years of escalating national industrial campaigning has ended that escalation. It would also seem that efforts to improve industrial conditions for the workforce are being integrated into the politics of contestation among the existing parliamentary political parties. It seems likely to stay this way until a new forefront force emerges. Given the fluidity and newness of the Indonesian trade unions, there remains a possibility, although there are no visible signs at the moment.

The experience of trade unionism in Batam over the last decade indicates that dynamics there have reflected national patterns. This is a reflection of the organizational strength of the national union structures that have access to many more resources than what a single district could muster. There are no signs of major differences between developments in Batam and the rest of Indonesia. One partial exception is that there does not seem to be a basis for a serious or large anti-Chinese and sectarian fundamentalist politics in Batam. While this does not relate directly to

⁵² Discussions with ex-members of FPSMI and other unions in Batam, February 2017.

⁵³ Discussions with workers on factory sites and an official of the SBSI union confirmed this.

unionism, it could be a subject for further research. It does mean that, unlike in Jakarta, the KSPI/FSPMI unions have not been dragged so close to such politics as they have been in Jakarta.

Batam's own economic ups and downs can expect to affect levels of workplace industrial disputation. However, repeats of the high and militant levels of mobilization experienced during 2010–13 are unlikely except as part of a new national developments. If economic decline does worsen workplace tensions, repeats of ethnic and racialist unrest as occurred before the recent nationally led mobilizations, could possibly erupt again — depending on whether socio-economic conditions exacerbate tensions.

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