

Social Democracy in Indonesia?

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for

Bulan Revolusi Nasional

Adakah *Demokrasi Sosial* di Indonesia?

PEMATERI

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SAMBUTAN

Wawan Sobari

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Program Studi Ilmu Politik
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- Thanks for inviting me to this important and exciting discussion.

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- I shall draw on some of the findings in my retrospective book in comparative perspective that will be out in October and is entitled ‘In Search of New Social Democracy’.
 - My argument today will be that broadly defined Social Democracy in terms of *development based on social justice (and now also environmental sustainability) by democratic means* is not impossible in Indonesia, but that it has lost on three occasions
 - (i) the introduction of ‘Guided Democracy’
 - (ii) the struggle against Suharto and transition to democracy
 - (iii) the rise and decline of ‘reformist populism’, associated with the alliance for the public health reform and social contracts with leaders like Jokowi
- Hence, the struggle for Social Democracy needs to be reinvented, by recalling historical insights and current openings.

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- In order not to set any efforts aside, Social Democracy, may, as I just mentioned, best be defined broadly as *development based on social justice (and now also environmental sustainability) by democratic means*
- Such efforts have evolved during three generations:
 - (i) the northern industrialisation;
 - (ii) the southern anti-colonial and neo-colonial struggle; and
 - (iii) the global liberal democratisation from the late 70s until a few years ago.
- Moreover, one needs to read de social democratic efforts against some more specific historical characteristics.
- First the four cornerstones:
 - (i) broad interest based collectivities;
 - (ii) democratic links between state and society of equal citizens;
 - (iii) social rights and welfare programmes;
 - (iv) growth pacts between capital, labour and primary producers
- Second, one needs to also consider the five major strategies:
 - (i) to get into the state and dismantle capitalism from above;
 - (ii) to tame it with rules and regulations;

- (iii) to resist it from outside the state;
- (iv) to escape it by various social actions such as cooperatives and alternative lifestyles;
- (v) to combine the above by way of sequential transformative reforms

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- Judged against these criteria, Indonesia, like most other countries in the Global South, has of course been up against serious problems of social democratic development – given the colonial history, limited industrialisation and thus fragmentation of the labouring classes, as well as of the at times supportive middle classes.
- In spite of this, there have been impressive attempts. But as already indicated, they have lost out.
- First time was in the introduction of ‘Guided Democracy’
- The reformist communists and left nationalists who had so far been very successful in mobilising people and advancing in elections, gave up liberal democracy in favour of Sukarno’s and the army’s populist ‘Guided Democracy’.
- Within that framework, moreover, they tried to advance in the framework of two campaigns for alternative development that did not generate the expected results.
- One was an anti-imperialist campaign against foreign powers, including against the Dutch, US and the ‘neo-colonial Malaysia’, including with military means and nationalisation of foreign companies. But this did not really weaken the domestic enemies of the Left, including the army, corrupt bureaucrats and their cronies. Rather, unions, for instance were held back.
- The other campaign was for social rights and agricultural production by way of a land reform. But it was difficult to unify the rural poor because the reform would only benefit a few. And the others asked for more. So there were conflicts even among the peasants and agricultural workers. Thus, Sukarno called off the campaign, and the rural strongmen could continue to divide and rule, including by way of clientelism and communal loyalties.
- Meanwhile, to make things worse, liberals and middle class based social democrats preferred instead US backed ‘politics of order’ – i.e. that it was necessary to build an effective state and judiciary ahead of democracy. Hence, they even came out in favour of General Suharto and the witch-hunt of leftists.

- In the 70s, then, some of the liberals and west-oriented social democrats changed their mind and turned critics. But they still said that democracy was premature. So student leaders like Hariman Siregar and dissenting officers first tried riots in favour of middle class- rather than army driven ‘politics of order’. And then insightful leaders like Arief Budiman turned 180 degrees, saying it was necessary to first of all fight socialism, along with NGOs and the ‘victims of the New Order’, because democracy did not stand a chance against authoritarian international dependency.

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- The second time that efforts at social democracy lost out was in the struggle against Suharto in favour of democracy.
- From the late 1980s, is true that the pioneering PRD-activists focused less on civil society and more on “the masses” and on politics to democratise the state, since it was propelling authoritarian capitalism. But then the admirable activists tried to serve as spearheads rather than build the first pillar of Social Democracy -- broad interest based movements.
- And other pro-democrats did not do much better.
- Actually, there was never anything like a united front with a viable alternative to the liberal strategy of designing democracy with pacts among the powerful elites and CSOs.
- Nor was there – in-spite of the Asian economic crisis that hit the Indonesian people worst of all -- any ideas of alternative policies against the neo-liberal solutions.
- Hence, the scattered pro-democrats themselves lost out soon after Suharto had lost out.
- And being confined, then, to civil society- and unionism, the pro-democrats who tried to follow the recommendation from the participatory research that I was part of to ‘go politics’ did not reach much beyond lobbying, pressure politics and transactions. They never managed to build a political block based on broad common demands and reform proposals.
- In short, the efforts at Social Democracy could not be built only “from below”.

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- The third unfortunate occasion when Social Democracy derailed was in the efforts at ‘reformist populism’. This was the only successful attempts at the

first pillar of Social Democracy of broad interest movements since the late 1950s.

- There were two fundamentals:
 - (i) the urban poor- and citizen pacts with populist leaders like Jokowi, for socially responsible urban development plans, such as in Solo and Jakarta; and
 - (ii) the broad alliance between progressive politicians, unions and CSOs, including among informal labour, for the public health reform.
- But then there was
 - (i) no follow up of the welfare reforms to thus build the third social rights-pillar of Social Democracy, and
 - (ii) there was no emphasis on deepening democracy beyond elections by way of democratic organisation and institutions for partnership governance – i.e. to strengthen the second democratic pillar of Social Democracy.
- So, from 2014 there was no broad democratic alliance to resist the rise of right wing religious populism that expanded in their fight against Ahok in Jakarta. So by implication, Jokowi & co compromised with the liberal freedoms and turned to horse trading with the political and military elite. We even got the infamous omnibus law on job creation and crack down on anti-corruption.
- And in face of this, progressives turned prisoners of a triangular relation and quarrel between liberals setting aside everything to defend freedoms and anti-corruption, social and union activists betting on transactional politics, and floating democrats trying reforms ‘from within’.

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- So it may seem as if Social Democracy really is impossible in Indonesia.
- However, if we go further back in history, we find that it was possible during the anti-colonial struggle and the first decade after independence.
- In contrast to those who organised on the basis of ethnic and religious communes, left-nationalists and reformist communists fought for equal citizenship and direct links between citizens and state, mediated by citizens own parties and organisations.
- This was then the unifying framework to which it was possible to add social rights including a common language, health and education, women’s rights and land reforms. And this was how the progressives built the world’s largest

peaceful popular movement and made huge advances in the 1955 national and 1957 local elections.

- Unfortunately, it was then undermined by the decisions in favour of ‘guided democracy’, with left populism and central army control.
- But in other contexts where the focus on civil and political rights and thus based social rights were sustained and expanded – such as in the Indian state of Kerala – social democratic development did evolve. Based on holding on to similar policies as the left wing nationalists and reformist communists had given up in Indonesia in the late 1950’s: broad alliances in favour of equal civic and political rights – and with this as a foundation for additional struggle for social rights to health and education plus a decent land reform.
- It’s true that even the Kerala priorities were not immune to clientelism and economic stagnation. But from the late 1980s, this was fought with democratic decentralisation and participatory planning, initiated by progressive politicians and civil society activists. This was not fully captured by the elite, as in so many other contexts, because of the land reform and active citizenship.
- So right now – when having to fight environmental degradation and Covid-19 – the Left Front has been able to do what reformist populists behind Jokowi failed to do in Indonesia: to sustain and use democracy in order to mobilise local governments and civil society to contain the pandemic along with welfare, job-programmes and a pioneering effort at knowledge based development, including for the huge numbers of returning migrant labourers.
- Thus, even many well-educated middle class people who for many years benefitted from neo-liberal development realised that they too, and not just the poor, needed public action for welfare and inclusive development. So the political result was massive victories in the 2020 local and 2021 state elections. There are certainly challenges to move ahead, including not to do as the progressives did in Indonesia when promoting reformist populism – i.e. to neglect democratic partnership governance. But at this point the right wing Hindu-nationalists do not stand a chance in Kerala

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In short, the results from my concluding book on efforts at Social Democracy in comparative perspective suggest that the attempts at it need to be reinvented, by

- (1) returning to the early successful work – in which there was a focus on equal and inclusive citizenship and democracy as a basis for, and

combined with, social rights reforms that support inclusive development. It can't be either or, it is the combination between equal citizenship and democracy on the one hand and social rights reforms on the other that is crucial.

(2) learning from the possibility of building the major pillar of broad interest movements even in very socially and ethnically divided societies by way of broad alliances behind welfare reforms such as for public health in Indonesia

(3) learning also from the need to generate follow up reforms to thus build series of transformative processes.

When that can't be done from within the palace, as some were hoping, it needs to be initiated by concerned intellectuals from outside – in collaboration of course by reflective activists in the movements

(4) perhaps most importantly, to acknowledge the need to deepen democracy by building frameworks for partnership governance so that all concerned can participate in policy development and implementation and negotiate comprehensive transformative reforms. *Participatory budgeting such as in Brazilian Porto Alegre could neither build new Social Democracy from below nor stop the decay and corruption in the capital. There must be links between the local activists and between them and the centre.*