

– Patriarchal textile industry in Jakarta –

In Jakarta, working conditions are an unacceptable burden for women*, especially within the textile industry. This was observed by comrades of the FAU during a meeting with the Inter-Factory Workers' Federation, the Federasi Buruh Lintas Pabrik (FBLP). An interview with Dian from the FBLP.

By: JayParker -

A report by comrades* of the FAU mentions the short documentary "The Day Voices Raised", which was produced in 2017. It shows the working conditions of women in the textile industry. The Inter-Factory Workers' Federation (Federasi Buruh Lintas Pabrik - FBLP) was founded in 2009 to address sexist conditions. The focus of the foundation was on the removal of time limits from gender-specific contracts and the immediate end of violence and discrimination against workers* and LGBTQI* persons.

The FBLP is working to generate scientific data through a Research and Development Section that will play an important role in this struggle. This is an important strategy that must play a greater role globally in the grassroots trade union organization. In this way, inequalities can be made visible, knowledge of domination can be infiltrated and facts can be demonstrated. Self-empowerment is also promoted through training, e.g. the Female Workers School, which has taken place since 2016, as well as workshops and Radio Marsinah.

The report shows that women are also structurally disadvantaged. Among other things, their salaries are taxed more heavily than those of men. At the same time, however, their salaries are also lower, as it is assumed that their salary "only" represents an "additional income for the family". In addition, Indonesia is witnessing an increasingly influential identity policy under the increasing influence of the military. The democratic and emancipatory structures in the region, which are already under construction, are being attacked. The next parliamentary elections are scheduled for April 2019.

Structures of oppression can be fought only together

J: What's the general structure of labour unions like in Jakarta?

DIAN: The general structure of labour unions in Jakarta or in Indonesia follow the labour regulation (UU No. 21/ 2000),

- A trade union in factory level can be built by at least 10 labours, and registered to manpower department (labour department) nearby. The structures are at least consist of 3 structures like chair person, secretary and treasure.
- 3 trade unions of factories level (3 different factories) can build federation and 5 federations can build confederation

- These requirements in building unions make workers easier to build unions, but the workers situation such as contract, intimidation to workers who join union make this still not easy. So there is still a problem of freedom association.
- The law about freedom association in building trade union was created after Suharto's fall. Before, only one trade union permitted to exist. The democracy's space lead to new culture in developing trade union by involve the members, the trade unions be more active in holding education in factory level, believe in mass action, national strike for their demands, direct action, etc
- Many trade unions in Indonesia are 7.000 trade unions in 2017. This amount is decreasing from 14.000 trade unions in 2007 (1 decade ago). Meanwhile, the members of trade unions in 2017 are 2,7 million people or decrease from 3,4 million in 2007. Most of them are in Jakarta, because all of trade unions are national scope.
- In the aspect of workers participations are really depend on the trade union in factory level itself. If the trade union in factory level is active as a trade union (education, daily advocacy, etc) then the members will be active also.
- In unions that the members are mostly from garment, food or any industry that hires women as workers, but the officers of trade union, mostly are still men. LGBT also become the part of trade union's members but mostly they don't declare themself as LGBT and the unions do not see them as LGBT or their right as LGBT

J: How high is the proportion of women within the FBLP?

DIAN: 90% are women

J: Are you also in touch with unions of other branches? Are the conditions there similar?

DIAN: Yes, we are in touch with unions of other branches, the condition of workers in all unions are similiar. The differences are the policy of unions toward some issues such as LGBT, women's perspective, pluralism. In other trade unions especially in garment sectors, most of their members are women but the officers of trade union still dominated by men.

J: According to your report FBLP was founded due to the necessity to overcome limited labour contracts. Were you successful in this regard? What is the proportion like between permanent and temporary contracts? Do only women have temporary contracts?

DIAN: We did not yet succeed. We and other unions had general strikes for 3 times in regards to this issue but we still not succeeded. In some cases contract workers succeeded in becoming permanent workers, through direct action (thousands of workers occupied one factory until the owner decided all workers became permanent workers, after this success we moved to other factories. It happened massively in Bekasi in 2014, but was then repressed by army and the direct

action stopped after the leaders of the biggest trade unions signed a MOU with the army to stop the direct action).

Contract status are happened to all workers, regardless of gender. Mostly workers now are contract.

J: What challenges did you encounter when founding an independent labour union? Did you face structural problems?

DIAN: Yes, we found difficulties to recruit new members and to have cadre from the members because of the contract system, intimidation, and the massive dismissal.

J: Do trade union activities play an important role in Jakarta? (Are there anarcho-syndicalist approaches or theories part of your movement?)

DIAN: Yes, the activities of trade unions play an important role in Jakarta, especially regarding wage issues, but after demonstration by islam fundamentalists, most trade unions failed to build a movement in workers issue, including wage issue. The fragmentation of trade unions happened after some big trade unions got involved in political competition among the political elite, including in the organization of islam fundamentalist demonstrations.

In Jakarta anarcho-syndicalist approaches are not yet part of the movement. Maybe there are some individuals, but I didn't find them yet.

J: In the report you mentioned the worker and activist Marsinah, who became part of Indonesian history as a tragic hero, and after whom you named your radio project. Has her murder any influence on movements today?

DIAN: Yes, it has influence on the movement today. After Marsinah's murder, the tension of movement was higher to topple Suharto, so Marsinah has a big influence on us to have democracy's space and because she fought for wage increases, she became an inspiration for the workers' movement until today.

J: Very successful spontaneous strikes took place at sewing factories in 2011. But with the help of trade union officials this form of action was illegalized. Which trade unions were involved in this process? What legal changes were passed? How do you react to this intimidation?

DIAN: It was 2010 actually (November and December 2010) in KBN Cakung industrial park, the trade unions are SPN, FSBI, SBSI 92, FBLP. We agreed to have strikes two times (25 November 2010 and 3 December 2010), after the first strike the governor of DKI contacted the trade unions except us and promised to fulfill the demands. That's why suddenly the 3 unions canceled the strike but FBLP still try to have a strike and succeeded, the local strike of KBN Cakung happened. After that, those trade unions banned us in every front or alliance until 2013.

J: The FBLP is particularly active at KBN (industrial park for clothing factories) in North-Jakarta. About 38,000 people are working there. These workers are represented by five labour unions. The degree of organization is currently at around 10 percent. Until 2014 the FBLP had members in 12 factories. But in the same year mass lay-offs took place in reaction to a strike. This had severe consequences for FBLP. Currently you have organized members at two factories. According to your report FBLP consists of 1500 members at this stage. Do you still organize strike actions or other activities?

DIAN: We did not organize any further strikes yet again after the decreasing number of our members.

J: What kind of historical changes did you experience during your work life?

DIAN: In 2015, government legalized the law of Social Security, the workers movement struggled for this. Although my union doesn't really agree with the concept of BPJS [*Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial* (Social Insurance Administration Organization)] but actually it is the result of workers movement's struggle.

J: How do you experience the impacts of globalization under capitalist conditions? How important is the location policy in Jakarta?

DIAN: The impacts of globalization that I experienced are the contract system. The contracts are becoming shorter and shorter. We can find 20 days contracts that we couldn't find before. More flexible the capitalist system, then the work relation became more flexible as well. There are some productions done in the houses of workers. It happened in West Java. Also, mostly the factories moved to small towns (relocation), because the big city will be more focussed on digital industry (online).

J: For which clothing companies do the factory workers produce? Is that commonly known in the factories? Are you connected with groups at locations where the products are sold?

DIAN: Mostly the textiles are produced for the market in the US and Europe. Yes, but we do not yet connect with groups where the products are sold.

J: How can a strategy based on solidarity among groups on the global level look like? How can workers in other parts of the world support you?

DIAN: Maybe the solidarity can be like stop buying the products and campaign it in social media.

J: How do you (the women) manage to come up with all the strength to not just fight the bad working conditions in the factories, but also struggle against the sexist climate of being groped and touched? Do you get support from home? From your families? Husbands and children?

DIAN: Most of the women that are involved in our struggle are also victim of those kinds of violence that they experience in their life. We support each other to stop becoming victims but start to be survivors. Sometimes the family does not support them in the beginning but then they start getting the family's support.

J: I thank you, Dian, and all other courageous women and supporters for their efforts and wish you much energy in the struggle for justice and against all kinds of exploitation. I want to close this text with the passage at the end of the short documentary, which shows what matters most in the fight, when women face each other and call out: „Fight back, okay!? Resist, okay!?“

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