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**The Teacher Movement in Indonesia in Post Soeharto Era:  
Between Democratic Citizenship and Civic Engagement**

**Rakhmat Hidayat**

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## THE TEACHER MOVEMENT IN INDONESIA IN POST SOEHARTO ERA: BETWEEN DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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### Abstract

*After May 1998, Indonesia began the transition from centralization to the era of autonomy. During 32 years, Soeharto's New Order regime (1966-1998) demonstrated authoritarian regime in many sectors, like politics, economics, social, especially in education. The political freedom of the Reform era has opened up an opportunity for the revival of social movements in Indonesia. Reform has enabled more open political structure, including a friendlier political atmosphere for the teacher movement. The purpose of this research is to explain how teacher movement in Indonesia made transformation from authoritarian which close movement to liberal with open movement. In New Order regime with authoritarian performance, Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia (Teacher Union in Indonesia) is as the single actor. The paper discussed three main aspects: (1) the explanation of the emerging of teacher movements in the process of democratic citizenship (2) the dynamics of teacher movement in developing teacher capacity in era of decentralization of Indonesia (3) the relations of teacher movement between the civil societies in era of decentralization. The teacher movement influences Indonesia's democratization process. Teacher movement has contributed substantially in increasing participation and democracy in Indonesia, building the legal and institutional infrastructure for democracy, and providing voice and educational advocacy in supporting the reform.*

**Keywords:** Teacher, Education, Movement, Democracy, Citizenship



## A. Introduction

This article attempts to gain a better understanding of teacher movement in Indonesia. Since the New Order era of 1965, teachers have been centralized by single organization. During that period, teacher was defined as a political commodity by regime of Soeharto. Under the political-economy policies of the President Soeharto, the government attempted to control the teacher as a part of bureaucracy and political interest. Our interest here focused on a democratic citizenship of teacher movement in Indonesia after Soeharto. Although teachers are favored topic in education, here we focus to study the relationship between social-politic in contemporary of Indonesia. The general finding indicated that teacher movements have given a democratic contribution for educational policy in Indonesia. Our key concepts are democratic citizenship and democratization. The following section will consider in more detail of how teacher movement of Indonesia has evolved from the mono-loyalty in the Soeharto era to the more democratic and contested system of the *Reformasi* era. Particular attention will be paid to the new perspective between democratic citizenship and civil society.

Since the collapse of President Soeharto's New Order regime in 1998, Indonesia has undergone a political transformation. After Soeharto, Indonesia has begun to emerge collective social movement, such as student movements, labor union, journalist movement, and peasant movements. Teacher movement is a social movement which emerged by democratization since New Order regime. This period called by Lussier and Fish (2012) as a part of the "third wave" of democratization. A period gave more high level of social and political engagement. In Indonesia, then, we are familiar this phenomena with civil society which emerged in the context of political transformation. Democratization has opened the door to new roles of civil society for social control in the society. In the context of history, PGRI is not a first teacher organization. The first and pioneer organization is *Persatuan Guru Hindia Belanda* (PGHB), which built in 1912. The member of this organization is part time teacher (*guru bantu*), teacher village, head master and supervisor of school (*pengawas sekolah*). In



the progress, PGHB was change the name organization become *Persatuan Guru Indonesia* (PGI) on 1932. This changing was surprised for the government of colonilization (Netherland) because this organization use the name "Indonesia". The name of "Indonesia" have a revolution meaning for the colonial authority. A brief history of the teacher organization illustrates a dynamic changing between colonization and the process of independence. Since the process of colonization, Indonesian teacher movement has written their own history in openly political discourse. This history describes how Indonesian teacher give a contribution for field of teacher until nowadays. When Indonesia became independent, PGI was change also become *Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia* (PGRI) on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1945. This changing was a collective consciousness for achieved independence of Indonesia. This momentum therefore celebrated every year as teacher day.

## **B. Method**

This research employs following procedure, (1) literature study. The researcher begins by reading widely for selecting basic information and the backgrounds of teacher movement in Indonesia. Material found at any references like textbook, research publications, scientific article as well as articles or publication report; (2) actor and stakeholder interviews such as *Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia* (PGRI), *Forum Guru Independen Indonesia* (FGII), *Ikatan Guru Indonesia* (IGI), *Forum Guru Sejahtera Indonesia* (FGSI), FIGURMAS, academician which concern about teacher movement. The research's type is qualitative research by collecting the data, which are collected from the fieldwork and also supported by written data or documents from any kinds of sources. The source and types of data used and the sequencing of data collection through the research process. Data from primary sources and secondary data analysed for the purpose of this research which is a qualitative nature. Published academic texts as well as policy-related studies in the teacher as well as political education policy in Indonesia will be the basis for the analysis. The interview was done with some key stakeholders as well as experts and actors who concern on



teacher movement in Indonesia. Experts interview was conducted to structure and guide the research process and gain the recommendations for certain key actors. Actors' interviews used to identify the background, dynamics and the perspective in teacher movement.

### C. Research Finding

Teacher movement in Indonesia has an extended history which a social-politic spectrum. In fact, Indonesia is a newly democratizing country after decades of authoritarianism. This condition was paradox under the hegemony of New Order regime. The New Order regime built the system the pseudo democracy not the real democracy and it's represented the authoritarian nature of the regime (Buchori, 2007:110; see also Hiariej & Tornquist, 2017: 78). Majority of teacher must affiliated with the ruling party; *Golongan Karya* (Golkar). They must choose Golkar in every general election. At that time, just one teacher organization which recognized by government. The organization is Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia or known as PGRI. The teacher must join at PGRI as well an obligation as a teacher. In fact, PGRI was affiliated to Golkar party that aimed to hold or seize political power of Soeharto. Teacher at all levels was highly mobilized and politicized especially for general election. The relationship between PGRI and Golkar make teacher must demonstrate single loyalty both of them. In fact, there are a few of teacher, which more critical in performing protest of position PGRI and Golkar. The consequence for this activity was alienated from the school, and changed the position from teacher to administration staff. On the other hand, PGRI was a strong power for teacher with their legitimate position and political resources.

In other areas, similarly, all of teacher also must be a member of *Korps Pegawai Republik Indonesia* (KORPRI). Korpri is an organization for the civil servants and members of Korpri directly was a member of Golkar. In fact, PGRI is a political support for Golkar, which played the political practice for benefit of Golkar in every general election. Indeed, PGRI was an affiliated to Golkar. There are a deeply connection between

Korpri and Golkar. Besides, teacher also must be a member a single teacher organization established by the government. There is no teacher organization but PGRI during New Order. Furthermore, teachers were not allowed to form organizations to develop a broad-based membership or criticize public policy and the government. There were severe restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression. PGRI had a large structure in big city and in village. In this article, I argue that PGRI is important actor in politics of New Order with the function of control and hegemony teacher. The authoritarian government was able to maintain political stabilization for all of social-politic organization and then give PGRI to play a significant role in teacher activities. PGRI, I argue, performs the functions of control and maintain the field of teacher, which contribute for political interest of New Order regime. It played an especially significant role in the Soeharto regime by undermining the ideological foundations of authoritarian rule. Here we see a triangle relationship between PGRI, Korpri and Golkar in the politic of New Order. This example clearly shows that the relation of three actors at that time have been effectively used to keep Soeharto in power through manipulating and incorporating their hidden interest to political agenda of regime (see Yoshihara & Dwianto, 2003:163).

In the Soeharto era, the strategies of political stabilization were organized through formal corporatist organization which built and controlled by the government. During the New Order years, state dominated corporatist organizations were a principal arena through same profession or organization for maintains interest of elite. At the same time, the teacher movements were increasingly integrated into the state via formal corporatist organizations. The 1980s were the golden era for the corporatist of PGRI. The New Order was firmly and decreed that only PGRI would be permitted provide teacher aspiration. In fact, the teacher movement was organized along classic New Order corporatist lines. Corporatism has been defined as 'a pattern of state-society relations in which the state plays the leading role in structuring and regulating interest groups, organizing them along functional rather than class lines



(in order to minimize both collaboration and conflict), and typically granting official recognition to only one representative body in any given sector' (MacIntyre 1991:1). Nordholt & Klinken (2007:5) present a related this situation as highest level corporatism as well as the characteristic of bureaucracy authoritarian regime in Indonesia. Whereas the New Order was characterized by centralized control, patronage and repression. There were even attempts to organize previously repressed groups like industrial workers and peasants. This organization maintains all of social organization such as teacher, journalist, farmers/peasant, etc. We can mention one example beside PGRI like *Himpunan Kerukunan Tani Indonesia* (HKTI; Indonesian Peasant's Harmony Association). HKTI, like equivalent bodies for labor and other groups, was dependent on the state for direction. It was affiliated to the state party (Golkar). In reality, the government can control people with these organizations. The government therefore state that these organizations as are formal organization and linkage with structure of bureaucratic government. Of course, the governments state the other social organizations are illegal.

The political space and freedom that civil society enjoyed in the immediate post-transition years are increasingly challenged by competing political interests. Remarkable progress in the area of civic participation was made during the *reformasi* period. The downfall of the Soeharto regime was followed by a series of political reform that went a long way toward establishing a more secure legal framework for civil society. In the face of a highly mobilized society, there was now little open resistance expressed from within the state to notions of democracy, accountability, supremacy of law. During the regime Soeharto, these teacher organizations began to coalesce and develop into an emergent social movement, distinct from the PGRI. Hundreds of teacher associations were established, based on issue such as develop capacity, teacher advocacy and other joint concerns. The government legalized teacher associations and also the other social organizations such as labor unions, journalist association as well political party. As we will see, this organization has increased civic participation in the context the emerging civil society after

reform era. There was also a rapid expansion of associational activity. The most striking development, however, was the rapid expansion and formation of teacher union (*serikat guru*). Several dozen such organizations was formed or declared themselves openly for the first time. In some cases, they were soon able to mobilize large numbers. A Lampung Peasants' Association was launched at a mass meeting of 12,000 farmers in March 2001 (*Kompas*, August 20, 2001). By mid-2002, the Serikat Petani Pasundan in West Java claimed some 200,000 members. These new unions were integrally concerned with land occupations, but they also began to mobilize in favor of more general policy demands.

#### **D. Discussion**

The proliferation of teacher organizations after 1998 was understandable given the euphoria of the immediate *reformasi* period and numerous teacher movements emerged. The reform gave more political space for teachers to build a teacher association as a space for articulate expression and the right of organization. We can explain that single monopoly to PGRI was changed. PGRI was redefined their status and position. However, monopoly access to teachers by PGRI was changing. This organization is an alternative association another PGRI. We can explain that the emerging many teachers organization as a reflection of dissatisfaction from PGRI which contacted by New Order regime. The new teacher association was founded because they assume PGRI couldn't articulate the right of teacher. The characteristic of new teacher association are more critical, independent, and became a social control for local government. The more important changing is the teacher association attempt to social force for advocacy the policy of education especially about teacher area. In our view, the emerging of new teacher associations is because a respond from corporatism of PGRI in New Order regime. On the other hand, PGRI have lost the dominant position, but still act as important actor in teacher movement after *Reformasi*. More importantly, many teacher associations were emerged in local context as a social consequence from decentralization policy which launched by government



after *reformasi*. A policy of decentralization has been pursued in the 2004. Also, at this time, decentralization gave more space for local government to manage their local resources. Local executive government leaders – governors, mayors and district heads (*bupati*) – enjoy greater independence, as do local legislatures (Widoyoko, 2004). The local association has focused in the policy of education especially teacher policy which the principal institution in local government. This institution is the local education authority (*dinas pendidikan*). This organizations attempt to criticize any teacher policy who present educational problems because during the New Order, the teachers were silenced and restrained freedom to think critically. This organization is quite critical to respond to the issues of education at the local level. Furthermore, most of the attention of teacher association in *reformasi* period has focused on rights of teacher such as salary.

Empirically, based on the research, we can describe one federation which covers many teachers from all over Indonesia. This federation was launched on January 17, 2002 which known as *Federasi Guru Independen Indonesia* (Federation of Teachers Independent Indonesia) which cover 20 organizations and teacher forum from all over Indonesia such as the Association of Teachers of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (Asgu- NAD), Coalition Teachers Unite (Kobar-GB) Aceh, Indonesia Honorary Teachers Association (IGHI) Padang-West Sumatra, Indonesia Teachers Dignity Forum (FMGI) Lampung, Jakarta Teachers Club (JTC), Aspiration Independent Teachers Forum (FAGI) Bandung. Through the first congress on April 11 - July 18, 2002 it was agreed that the federation continued to recognize the existence of each component autonomously. Board of federation is representative of the various components of the organization. The existence of these organizations brings welfare rights issues that are fair to workers and the democratization of the teaching profession in the world of education with the passing of transparency and accountability in every education policy and teacher involvement in any educational policy-making.

Today, organizations of teachers as professional organizations are no longer alone. Era of reform has made it possible for organization

teacher other than PGRI. According to law of teacher and lecture (*UU Guru dan Dosen*) mentioned that teachers are entitled to freedom of association in the organization of the teaching profession. It means that teachers can form professional organizations are independent and organization of the teaching professional association is a legal entity that is established and maintained by the teacher to develop the professionalism of teachers. The existence of all associations, alliances, forums and alternative teacher organization at this time has become an alternative for teachers to voice problems faced by teachers in Indonesia. We can mention some local association which more criticizing in teacher movement such *Forum Aksi Guru Indonesia* (FAGI) in Bandung, West Java. This association was built since 3 March 2000. The other local association is *Forum Interaksi Guru Banyumas* (FIGURMAS) in Purwokerto. The local association has a network of teachers in the various regions. They were constructed by the collective interests of teachers in the area were not accommodated during the New Order.

However, the teacher movement in the context of democratic citizenship is an alternative movement and reflects a changing shift from perspective elite to social-politic movement which emphasize the engagement many teachers. At this point, new teacher movement after New Order can be defined as an actor of civil society for consolidation of democratic transition as well as democratic education in Indonesia. Democratic transition could be defined as a complex process of shifting relations between the state and civil society in which authoritarian rule is gradually replaced by political democracy (Biekart, 1999:21-22; see also Hadiz, 2005:33-34). The above discussion highlights that teacher movement is always relate with the transition democracy in the reform era. Following from the previous section, citizenship in term of teacher movement emphasizes on active citizenship as well as teacher direct involvement in decision-making and monitoring public affairs (Stokke, 2017:30-31). Empirically, they can involve some of issue in term of teacher profession such as salary teacher, the criminal case from teacher to facilitate with the legal advocacy, or education budget from the local government.



## E. Conclusion

This paper attempts to describe teacher movement in Indonesia during the transition since 1998 from authoritarian to democratic regime. In the context of New Order regime, PGRI became the only association of Indonesian teacher to be recognized by government and this gave it a strong though and exclusive place in the Indonesian state's corporatist scheme. The political practices then prevalent --- what is called the Schmitter (Mas' oed,1989) --- as 'corporatism', which is a system of interest representation in which the units that make it up regularly in organizations are limited in number and is single. The 1980s were the golden era for the corporatist organization includes PGRI. At the same time, PGRI was organized along classic New Order corporatist lines. Clearly, as a consequence of reform period, there has been a reconfiguration actor in teacher movement. In short, we can define from PGRI to many teacher associations which more progressive, being democratic and reformist than PGRI. Moreover, the changing was from perspective elite which demonstrated by PGRI to perspective of social movement which articulated by new teacher associations. Structurally the most important change has been the emergence of new teacher associations as an independent actor from the state. These changes in the nature of movement are to be reflected in the context discourse and practice of civil society in Indonesia.

In this article I argue that teacher movement influence Indonesia's democratization process. The teacher movement has contributed substantially to increasing participation and democracy in Indonesia, building the legal and institutional infrastructure for democracy, and providing voice and advocacy in support of reform. In this article, I have attempted to show how the PGRI managed the teacher of Indonesia for the benefit of the dominant elite, rather than for Indonesian teachers in general. Various alternative movements after the New Order is still continuing to work to expand the space for teachers to articulate their



interests in addition to guaranteeing the right to organize as defined by the Law on Teachers and Lecturers. The success of a pro-democracy movement relies heavily on its ability to associate themselves with groups or large organizations that exist at the center. Today, as a consequently respond to demand democratic education, as mentioned by Nussbaum (2010) requires the active as well critical and reflective citizen. In short, the teacher movement should be understood as an important actor to promote the democratic education in Indonesia. In this way, they must more concern some of critical issues in term of the political education in this country. Firstly, institutional issues are important for the movement of teachers in post-Soeharto Indonesia. In other words, teacher movement must be more institutionalize as a critical part of civil society. As cited Törnquist, movement instituted professionally struggle will have breath longer. Secondly, strengthening the network is another important factor to be considered movement of teachers in post-New Order Indonesia. Significant progress needs to be made in consolidating the network and improving the performance of many activists which engage in the movement. In addition, they must involve with many actor pro democracy such as student movement, legal advocacy movement, or press movement. Increasing network not only nationally but also internationally particularly in South East Asian countries. It will greatly strengthen the movement. In line with what is presented in Budiman and Törnquist (2001), although their movements are not always sustainable, but their 'sound' provides a powerful inspiration to pro-democracy movements that will come. More importantly, it made not easy to propose teacher movement as a crucial position in Indonesian civil society because they face many challenging and problematic itself. In practice, the movements must more involve to develop a broader agenda of democracy education in Indonesia contemporary. If their energy well managed, their movement will provide great moral support for the prospect of democratic movements in Indonesia.



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