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A Victor's History: A Comparative Analysis of the Labour Historiography of Indonesia's New Order

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Abstract

Some observers have identified a common pattern in developing countries whereby unions are transformed from a political force valued for their contribution to the struggle for independence to a state-sponsored 'tool of development'. A less well-explored question concerns the harnessing of labour historiography to justify such transitions. As this article shows, Suharto's New Order (1966–98) undertook a conscious and purposeful rewriting of Indonesian labour history in support of a single vehicle of labour representation organized around a narrative of the dangers of political unionism and designed to control and harness the industrial workforce in the name of economic development.

Keywords: history; Indonesia; labour historiography; labour movement; New Order; trade unions

International theorists of political unionism have long argued that developing country trade unions are more likely to be political than economic because of their involvement in nationalist movements and their lack of industrial bargaining power.¹ There is a vast literature on this topic, but two relatively old models are particularly useful in the Indonesian context. In the late 1950s, Galenson suggested that a duality of purpose is common in developing-country trade union movements because they must balance members' interests and the requirements of nation building.² In a survey of trade unionism in former British colonies published decades later, Gladstone proposed a closely related model, which identified a transition from a honeymoon period shaped by the 'real or presumed role of trade unions in the independence movements and the identification of prominent trade union leaders with those movements' to a state-sponsored restructuring of unions as a 'tool of development'.³ This model is pertinent to Indonesia, where the politically active unions of the late colonial and post-Independence periods were systematically restructured by President Suharto's New Order regime (1966–98) to serve the national interest, expressed in terms of economic development.

A question that is less well explored in the comparative literature is the role that official labour historiography can play in the attempts of post-colonial governments to justify such transitions. In Indonesia's case, the labour historiography of Suharto's authoritarian New

Order regime constituted a conscious and purposeful rewriting of labour history in support of a single vehicle of labour representation, designed to control and harness Indonesia's blue-collar formal sector workforce. Echoing influential strategists like General Ali Moertopo, the trade unionists and labour bureaucrats who wrote these histories heralded the formation in 1973 of the All-Indonesia Labour Federation (Federasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia, FBSI) as achieving unity and as evidence of a renewed commitment to workers' socioeconomic struggle. Even more importantly, these aims were achieved in a way that did not 'exclusively serve the interests of their own group'.⁴ FBSI, they concluded, was the product of careful consideration of the past, the subsequent learning of 'history's lessons' and the 'pure and consistent' implementation of Pancasila, the national ideology said to embody the national personality and culture of Indonesia.

This first systematic comparative reading of post-Independence labour historiography demonstrates the extent to which labour histories shaped – and were shaped – by the New Order's developmentalist ideology.⁵ It shows how New Order labour ideologues used the potted histories they presented in official speeches and in government and trade union documents to justify this radical restructuring of the Indonesian labour movement by developing an heroic narrative around a valorised minority of labour unionists who had struggled to achieve 'pure' (economic) unionism only to have their attempts at achieving unity repeatedly frustrated by the majority of unions, which had been subverted from their true purpose by political parties. So pervasive was the influence of this narrative that in the 1990s it captured even independent labour historians. While vehemently rejecting the outcomes of New Order labour policy and encouraging demonstrations against the regime, those who sought to rally history to the cause of the independent labour movement in fact reproduced key aspects of New Order readings of Indonesian labour history.⁶ Indeed, it was not until several years after the regime fell in 1998 that a new generation of mainstream trade unionists once again tentatively embraced the possibilities of the political.⁷

The 'renovation' of the Indonesian labour movement

Having turned Indonesia upside down after the putative communist coup of 1 October 1965, Suharto's new military-backed regime destroyed dozens of leftist organizations and murdered and imprisoned hundreds of thousands of people, including many trade unionists.⁸ From the time it seized power, Suharto's New Order had two priorities. The first of these was to safeguard the 'State Ideology' and the Constitution of 1945, which the New Order claimed 'had been imperilled in previous years'. Its second goal was 'the rebuilding of society and the overcoming of the legacy of economic chaos'.⁹ The state ideology referred to here is the Pancasila, the five principles on which Indonesian life is supposedly built, and which the New Order regime described as having roots in 'the history of [Indonesia's] own society – a pre-colonial, pre-independence history which is truly Indonesian', and therefore beyond the realm of mere politics.¹⁰ Indeed, as Ali Moertopo asserted, '*Pancasila* is the fundamental norms [*sic*] to be carried out by the nation and the State' while the New Order was 'the attitude of the Indonesian people in order to apply those norms correctly'.¹¹

The New Order explicitly positioned economic development and its co-requisites (such as stability) as the means by which the Pancasila state was to be achieved. As part of a national

political strategy designed to facilitate the participation of citizens in activities geared towards the achievement of national development, Moertopo masterminded the establishment of a corporatist structure of interest representation between 1971 and 1975.¹² This period was characterized by the ‘politics of fusion’, which saw the amalgamation of the non-communist political parties that had survived 1965 and the introduction of a floating mass policy, under which Indonesians were only permitted to engage politically at election time so that they could devote their energies to development.¹³ It also brought the formation of single-vehicle corporatist bodies for peasants, fishers, youth, women and labour – the so-called ‘functional groups’ that were to be the ‘backbone’ of Indonesia’s developing society.¹⁴

As part of this process, the regime set out to eliminate the legacies of Old Order trade unionism by forcing the non-communist unionists who had survived the events of 1965–66 to join the FBSI.¹⁵ History was central to this project. New Order ideologues argued that amalgamation was necessary in order to avoid repeating ‘the mistakes of the past’, when organized labour had eschewed its socio-economic responsibilities in favour of a divisive political unionism in which ‘outside’ interests (primarily the interests of political parties) were prioritized over members’ needs and the national interest.¹⁶ In Moertopo’s words:

In the past, the Indonesian labour movement was divided and difficult to unify because of ideological differences between its leaders, who emphasized the political struggle and neglected the struggle to improve the socio-economic welfare of its members... The FBSI’s struggle emphasizes the socio-economic struggle to improve workers’ welfare, and the achievement of better working conditions and social guarantees. In doing so, FBSI is returning the function of the labour movement to that of a labour union rather than of a political organization.¹⁷

Moderate socialist trade union leaders were involved in this restructuring of the labour movement.¹⁸ More prominent, however, were the leaders of sectarian unions, who generally employed a conservative social-democratic rhetoric in which workers’ interests were deemed to be best protected within a harmonious employment relationship predicated on Muslim or Christian morality. Like Moertopo, these conservative trade union leaders repeatedly emphasized the difference between the ‘ideological, long-term, socio-political struggle’ of political organizations and the ‘real, short-term, socio-economic struggle’ of the trade unions.¹⁹ In New Order Indonesia, this meant not that unions should avoid being controlled by political parties, as European social democrats had long argued, but that labour should not be involved in politics at all.²⁰

Themes of New Order labour historiography

Policy-makers and ideologues actively appropriated the history of trade unionism in their attempts to justify their commitment to the organic, corporatist state structures of industrial relations that came to characterize New Order trade unionism, arguing that unions had been previously unable to achieve their desire for unity because their links to political parties had distracted them from their ‘true’ socio-economic purpose.²¹ Political trade unionism, they claimed, made unions ‘too weak to fight for the interests of their members’, leaving ‘the main objective of improving the welfare of workers and of their families’ unattended.²² These accounts asserted that it was only when political parties and other labour intellectuals were

eliminated under the New Order that trade unions were free to unify and resume their rightful place as defenders of workers' socio-economic interests and the well-being of the nation. In doing so, they emphasized the discontinuity between 'Old' and 'New' Orders, maintaining that whereas New Order trade unions were characterized by their socioeconomic focus and responsible attitude, their predecessors had been subverted from their economic and nationalist purposes by political parties, which they said had betrayed Indonesia and Indonesian workers. As a result, New Order accounts tended to ignore important transitions during the revolutionary period (1945–49), parliamentary period (1950–57) and the final years of Sukarno's presidency, known as Guided Democracy (1957–65), as well as the continuities between the Guided Democracy period and the New Order. Instead, they highlighted repeated failures to unite the politically divided trade union movement of the late colonial period and Sukarno's presidency while heralding the establishment in 1973 of a single federation focused on national development and the socio-economic interests of workers.²³

According to New Order labour historians, the inherently political nature of Indonesia's labour movement was a product of its early ties to the nationalist movement and its exposure to outside influences, both domestic and foreign. Their potted histories argued that unions were caught between liberalism and communism, and were unable to achieve unity because of their links to political parties until such time as the New Order returned Indonesia to the Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. When describing the development of labour in the colonial period, New Order texts emphasized the subordination of organized labour to the nationalist movement while at the same time seeking to highlight tensions between the desire for unity among socio-economically oriented unions and the divisive influence of the communists. They also warned repeatedly of the dangers of politicization and its effects on attempts to achieve unity within the labour movement in their representations of trade unionism in the period between 1945 and 1965 arguing on the one hand that a minority of 'pure' trade unions with the support of the military and later the government had kept hopes of unification alive, while on the other condemning all unions for falling under the influence of political parties.²⁴ As the discussion that follows shows, these themes represented a distinct shift from the labour historiography of the preceding Sukarno period.

Subordinate to the nationalist movement

An important aspect of New Order accounts of the colonial trade unionism was their almost uniform identification of 1908 as the year that the organized labour movement began. By contrast, almost all labour histories written between 1945 and 1965 identified that pivotal moment as occurring with the formation of the Railway Workers' Union (Staatspoorbond, SS Bond) in 1905 (see Figure 1).²⁵ As was the case with labour historiography of the Sukarno years in general, accounts written before 1966 offered a range of interpretations of the significance of 1905. Communist writers sought to emphasize the working class' position at the forefront of the Indonesian revolution, claiming that it was 'only after the workers had begun to organize themselves in 1905 [that] the aristocratic intellectuals began to organize'.²⁶ Other accounts, including a 1948 article in the Labour Ministry's bulletin *Tindjauan Masalaah Perburuhan* associated the formation of the SS Bond in 1905 with the Japanese

victory over Russia, which it described as ‘part of the “Eastern awakening”’, and thus part of a firm, pan-Asian rebuttal of European dominance.²⁷

	Nederlandsch-Indisch Onderwijzers Genootschap 1894	Staatspoorbond 1905	Japanese victory in Russo-Japanese war 1905	1905 as the beginning of the trade union movement 1905	Postbond 1905	Cultuurbond 1907	Serikat Pegawai Pemerintah 1907	1908 as beginning of 'real' trade unionism 1908	Boedi Oetomo 1908	Suikerbond 1908	Vereeniging voor Spoor en-Tramweg Personeel in Nederlandsche-Indie 1908
Tedjasukmana ⁽¹⁾											
Sandra (1958) ⁽²⁾											
Sandra (1961) ⁽³⁾	1897									1906	
Aidit ⁽⁴⁾											
SOBSI ⁽⁵⁾											
GASBIINDO ⁽⁶⁾											
Hasibuan ⁽⁷⁾											
Trimurti ⁽⁸⁾											
Soekarno ⁽⁹⁾											
SPSI (1990) ⁽¹⁰⁾											
SPSI (1995) ⁽¹¹⁾	1879					1906				1906	
DoM ⁽¹²⁾	1897									1906	
Gol ⁽¹³⁾											
Simanjuntak ⁽¹⁴⁾	1897									1906	
Shamad ⁽¹⁵⁾											
Kertonegoro ⁽¹⁶⁾	1879					1906				1906	

Figure 1. The genesis of the labour movement, 1894-1908

Notes: (1) Tedjasukmana, *Indonesian Trade Union Movement*; (2) Sandra, *Gerakan Buruh Indonesia*; (3) Sandra, *Sedjarah Pergerakan Buruh Indonesia*; (4) Aidit, *Sedjarah Gerakan Buruh Indonesia*; (5) SOBSI, *Sedjarah Gerakan Buruh Indonesia*; (6) Pengurus Besar GASBIINDO, *GASBIINDO: Sokoguru Revolusi Indonesia*; (7) Hasibuan, *Political Unionism and Economic Development*; (8) Trimurti, *Hubungan Pergerakan Buruh Indonesia*; (9) Soekarno MPA, *Renovation of the Indonesian Labour Movement*; (10) SPSI, *Laporan Pertanggungjawaban Periode 1985–1990*; (11) SPSI *Gerakan Serikat Pekerja*; (12) Department of Manpower, *The Rights to Organise in Indonesia*; (13) Government of Indonesia, *Himpunan Peraturan Pemerintah tentang Ketenagakerjaan*; (14) Simanjuntak, ‘Perkembangan Organisasi Pekerja di Indonesia’; (15) Shamad, *Industrial Relations in Indonesia*; (16) Kertonegoro, *Gerakan Serikat Pekerja*.

As Figure 1 suggests, the overwhelming majority of New Order labour histories located the beginning of indigenous trade unionism *after* the formation of the conservative nationalist organization, Boedi Oetomo, in 1908. Prominent New Order trade unionist Sudono claimed

that, unlike the trade unions in Europe and ‘other developed countries’, which ‘from their very beginnings, were fighting for improved living, working, and social conditions’, Indonesian trade unions were established ‘merely to strengthen the national independence movement’.²⁸ Labour bureaucrat Shamad, too, emphasized the subordinate position of labour in relation to the national struggle, explicitly arguing in his later work that a truly significant national workers’ movement only began after the ‘national awakening’.²⁹ Likewise, an English-language volume published by the Department of Manpower played down the significance of the labour movement – which it maintained had ‘existed since the beginning of Dutch colonialism’ – in favour of celebrating the formation of nationalist organizations such as Boedi Oetomo and Serikat Dagang Islam, along with the communist and nationalist parties.³⁰ Finally, labour bureaucrat, Kertonegoro – whose 1999 account began with a list of unions established by the Dutch, which he said gave indigenous workers ‘the idea of establishing their own indigenous unions’ – also quickly shifted his attention to the ‘birth’ of Boedi Oetomo and Sarekat Islam, whose establishment, he argued, had ‘a strong influence on the growth of the trade union movement’.³¹

This apparently small shift thus carried a great weight of meaning. Most Old Order accounts not only celebrated trade unions’ involvement in the nationalist movement of the colonial and early post-colonial period, but indeed privileged it.³² In choosing the later date, New Order labour historians sought to establish the labour movement’s chronologically and functionally derivative relationship with the nationalist movement. This narrative was reinforced by their silence on occasions during the colonial period where communists were persecuted for their opposition to the Dutch.³³ As Figure 2 shows, although there was intense debate among ‘Old Order’ and transitional labour historians about whether the communists were the primary actors in the 1926 rebellion, all parties acknowledged the importance of labour as a sphere of resistance at that time. By contrast, the New Order potted histories examined here are silent on labour’s role as a key site of resistance to Dutch rule in the mid-1920s and on Dutch persecution of Indonesian communists.

In developing their narrative around this period, some New Order accounts described labour’s subordinate relationship with the nationalist movement as a disadvantage to trade unions. Simanjuntak, a very prominent Department of Manpower bureaucrat, who for part of his career headed the Industrial Relations division, argued that political unionism and the neglect of the socio-economic purpose of trade unions were in fact direct legacies of labour’s involvement in the struggle for independence.³⁴ Sudono and Shamad concurred.³⁵ However, most New Order labour historians emphasized the positive legacy of labour’s involvement in the nationalist struggle (when trade unions ‘held hands’ with the nationalist forces) as a precursor to FBSI’s willingness during the New Order period to put aside the interests of its members and help shoulder the burdens of development.³⁶

Susceptible to outside influences

Clearly one of the most important and interesting shifts in labour historiography – although less evident in terms of specific events mentioned – was the question of contamination through foreign influence and domestic political alliances. Links between political parties and Indonesia’s organized labour movement had always been strong, and since the beginning of

the twentieth century many trade union leaders had simultaneously held executive positions in parties or other political organizations. The strength of these connections was always acknowledged in the labour histories of the Old Order, although interpretations of them differed. Communist party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) accounts emphasized and applauded the links between the party and the unions,³⁷ while a 1946 article in *The Voice of Free Indonesia* canvassed both the benefits of trade union cooperation with political parties and the negative impact of struggles for political leadership on the labour movement.³⁸ The Central Committee of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Unions (Gabungan Sarekat Buruh Islam Indonesia, GASBIINDO) observed that even those unions who claimed to be independent had been influenced by the political streams of the time, namely Nationalism, Islam and Marxism, but did not suggest these influences were particularly damaging.³⁹ Indonesia's labour movement was also highly cognisant of foreign debates about trade unionism and was well-connected with the international labour movement. Yet while these Sukarno-era accounts sometimes noted opponents' ideologies and the way those ideologies arrived in Indonesia, little negative comment was made about the influence of foreign ideology in general.

	Perhimpunan untuk Kaum Buruh Onderneming Gula 1924	Sekretariat Serikat Buruh Indonesia Merah 1924	Serikat Pegawai Pelabuhan dan Lautan 1924	Strikes (especially in Surabaya and Semarang) 1925	Aliacham, Mardjohan, and Darsono interned, Alimin and Musso exiled 1925	Strikes 1926	General rebellion 1926	Communist rebellion 1926	Dutch crackdown 1926	Communist Party outlawed 1927	Communist-influenced organizations outlawed (including trade unions) 1927
Tedjasukmana											
Sandra (1958)											
Sandra (1961)											
Aidit										<i>Ends in 1926</i>	
SOBSI									1926		
GASBIINDO											
Hasibuan											
Trimurti											
Soekarno											
SPSI (1990)											
SPSI (1995)	1917										
DoM											
GoI											
Simanjuntak											
Shamad											
Kertonegoro	1917										

Figure 2. Playing down communist resistance to colonial oppression, 1924-27.

In contrast with these earlier accounts, New Order labour histories rejected all foreign influence, arguing that unions were almost irrevocably scarred by ‘freefight’ liberalism and the international cancer of communism, at a time when labour relations ‘was based on liberal democracy and the class struggle of Lenin and Marx’ – neither of which were ‘in line with the Pancasila spirit and environment or the national character’.⁴⁰ Trade unions, they argued, were ‘susceptible to foreign political, economic and ideological influences’ which could ‘be traced in the way of thinking, in the pattern of analysis and in the approach to industrial relations problems’.⁴¹ Shamad blamed the pioneering labour activist, Semaun, who he said introduced ‘industrial relations based on class struggle’ to a context in which the ‘liberal’ system was already in place, for politicising the unions. He also explained the problems of an industrial relations system ‘based upon Liberalism as well as Marxism’, noting the ‘increasingly important role’ of the communist party and the ‘antagonistic and confrontational practices of industrial relations’ not only among communist trade unions, but ‘also by other workers’ unions with a view to maintaining their prestige in the eyes of their members’ under Guided Democracy.⁴² Sukijat, a member of the executive committee of the official union of the New Order period and a former government bureaucrat, used even more colourful language, which reflected the regime’s animosity towards the communists. In the past, he declared, trade unions had been ‘devoured by the penetrative Marxist doctrine which infiltrated parts of the body [*sic*] of the Indonesian workers and ...succeeded in dominating the Indonesian labour movement’.⁴³

Perhaps the most damning critique of the involvement of these ‘outsiders’ in the trade union leadership was made in Hasibuan’s transitional account, written in 1968. Hasibuan argued that government regulations stipulating that outsiders could not hold leadership positions in union or federation were necessary since the depoliticization of unions were was ‘a greater and more complex problem than just educating union leaders about the inconsistency of political unionism with economic development or union interest’.⁴⁴ But despite deep inconsistencies in its own practice, trade unions’ subordination to political parties was also universally condemned in New Order labour histories, particularly accounts of the ‘liberal’ and Guided Democracy periods when it was claimed the union movement became irrevocably committed to the political path. ‘History shows’, claimed Simanjuntak, that unions ‘were often very weak to organize and to struggle for their own interest due to the commitment with one of the political parties [*sic*].’⁴⁵ It was not, he and his contemporaries argued, until trade unions were ‘freed from the domination of political parties’ by the New Order that they were able ‘to determine their own basis, objectives and policies’.⁴⁶

Divided by politics

According to New Order accounts, the cumulative effects of the labour movement’s origin in the nationalist movement and its susceptibility to outside influences and ideologies meant that the desire of labour to unite – which they claimed had existed since the ‘very beginning’ – was repeatedly frustrated by the political ambitions of the leadership and the interests of the political parties with which deviant unions were aligned. This was the only theme on which histories written in both periods at least partly agreed. In accounts written before 1965, communists and non-communists alike claimed credit for efforts to unify the labour

movement. Communist leader D.N. Aidit, for example, presented long lists of communist-initiated attempts at unification, while the Muslim trade union association maintained that ‘it was only with the careful preparations’ of the non-communists, Suryopranoto and Sosrokardono, that the first labour umbrella organization, the Union of Workers’ Movements, (Persatuan Pergerakan Kaum Buruh, PPKB) was formed in 1920.⁴⁷ Communists and non-communists blamed each other, or the colonial government, for the failure of this and other efforts at unification.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, in his transitional account, Hasibuan argued that all trade unions were political in the 1910s and early 1920s, and that the ‘only difference between a revolutionary and non-revolutionary union [was] in the method adopted to change the status quo’. At the root of this difference, he said, was a more essential divide, which reflected ‘the divergent political philosophies of their parent organizations’. It was this divide that caused the split in the PPKB, which he described as ‘a real blow to the labour movement’.⁴⁹

Accounts written after the formation of FBSI in 1973 also blamed the failure to unify the movement on all politicized unions. However, unlike Hasibuan, who roundly condemned the entire organized labour movement, New Order authors asserted that a small number of trade unions had remained true to the vision of economic trade unionism throughout labour’s turbulent history. These ‘true’ unions were most visible in their descriptions of splits in 1920 and 1945 and, of course, in the events of 1965–66. New Order labour historians argued that unions established by Sarekat Islam were divided in 1920 because the Marxist trade unions left PPKB.⁵⁰ Similarly, as Figure 3 demonstrates, in 1945 they claimed that the unifying function of Indonesian Labour Front (Barisan Buruh Indonesia, BBI) was disrupted ‘because one group, who wanted to be active in politics, formed the Indonesian Labour Party (Partai Buruh Indonesia, PBI), while another group established the Amalgamated Trade Unions of Indonesia (Gabungan Serikat Buruh Indonesia, GASBI), which was only active in the socio-economic field’.⁵¹ However, they made no mention of the subsequent split in GASBI, which would have contradicted the New Order’s assertion that socio-economically focused unions were free from political ties. Likewise, in the turbulent two year period shown in Figure 4, several attempts at unification (and their failure) described in earlier accounts went unremarked upon, bar the formation of GASBIINDO’s predecessor, the Indonesian Islamic Labour Union (Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia, SBII).⁵²

The other main narrative in New Order accounts concerned the growing strength of the communist trade union federation, the All-Indonesia Organization of Labour Unions (Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia, SOBSI), and its connections to communists overseas. Reference was made to SOBSI’s affiliation to the World Federation of Trade Unions in 1947, just one of many SOBSI-related events mentioned in the pre-New Order labour histories. In addition, repeated and direct criticisms appear concerning SOBSI’s involvement in the 1948 communist uprising in Madiun – a link that was recorded but seldom emphasized in labour histories written in the 1950s and 1960s. New Order accounts also directly juxtaposed SOBSI’s involvement in the so-called Madiun Affair with its alleged involvement in the events of 1965.⁵³ As Shamad explained, ‘history [then] repeated itself with the PKI’s 30 September Revolt, when SOBSI once more was the main supporter’.⁵⁴ Similarly, New Order authors explicitly blamed SOBSI for preventing the achievement of unity through its opposition to the government’s ‘suggestion’ that a United Indonesian Workers’ Organization

(Organisasi Persatuan Pekeraja Indonesia, OPPI) be formed during the Guided Democracy period – a suggestion that New Order authors claimed was well received by the majority of the labour movement.⁵⁵ This continued politicization of the labour movement meant, according to New Order labour historians, that repeated attempts to unite only succeeded after the birth of the New Order and the subsequent simplification of Indonesia’s socio-political structure.⁵⁶ In line with New Order ideology, the subsequent restructuring of the Indonesian labour movement was then predictably interpreted as proving that ‘trade unions were no longer tied to or dependent on political parties; they were free to determine their own basis, objectives and policy’⁵⁷ – a freedom which, according to the official union’s 1995 institutional history, was ‘used by trade union leaders to realize the unification of Indonesia’s workers’.⁵⁸

	Barisan Buruh Indonesia 1945	Lasjkar Buruh Indonesia 1945	Barisan Buruh Wanita 1945	Partai Buruh Indonesia 1945	Gabungan Serikat Buruh Indonesia (GASEI) 1946	Gabungan Serikat Buruh Vertikal (GSBV) 1946	GASBI and GSBV merge to become SOBSI 1946	SOBSI joined World Federation of Trade Unions 1947	Conflict over SOBSI's endorsement of the Linggardjati Agreement 1947	Split in the Sajap Kiri (Left Wing) between Communists and Moderates 1947	Gabungan Serikat Buruh Revolusioner Indonesia 1947
Tedjasukmana											
Sandra (1958)											
Sandra (1961)									1948		1948
SOBSI											
GASBIINDO											
Hasibuan											
Trimurti				1946							1948
Soekarno											
SPSI (1990)											
SPSI (1995)											1948
DoM											1948
GoI											
Simanjuntak											1948
Shamad											
Kertonegoro											1948

Figure 3. A narrative of divisive politics, 1945-47.

	Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia	Ikatan Central Organisasi Serikat Sekerja	Persatuan Organisasi Buruh	SOBSI implicated in Madiun Affair	Moves to reconstitute SOBSI	Gabungan Serikat Buruh Indonesia	POB and ICOSS plan to merge	Himpunan Serikat-Serikat Buruh Indonesia	Badan Pusat Serikat-Serikat Sekerja	Meetings held between HISSBI and BPSS (unifying effort)	Pusat Sementara Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia	SOBSI revived
	1948	1948	1948	1948	1948	1948	1948	1949	1949	1949	1949	1949
Tedjasukmana						1949						
Sandra (1958)												
Sandra (1961)						1949						
SOBSI												
GASBIINDO	1947					1949						
Hasibuan												
Trimurti												
Soekarno												
SPSI (1990)												
SPSI (1995)	1947											
DoM	1947											
GoI												
Simanjuntak	1947											
Shamad												
Kertonegoro	1947											

Figure 4. Over-simplification by omission, 1948-49.

A victor's history

As this discussion has shown, the 'renovation' of the labour movement undertaken in the 1970s by Suharto's New Order regime was couched in terms of the 'lessons' of a very particular history written in support of its authoritarian corporatist structures and to defend its repressive approach against its critics. This victor's history highlighted the political nature of Indonesian trade unions, failed attempts at unification and the threats of both communism and liberalism in order to promote a purely economic form of trade unionism that was subservient to national priorities. As the graphic analysis presented here demonstrates, the New Order historiography of the post-independence period was both selective and strikingly uniform, constructing the historical narrative of the revolutionary period through a process of omission as well as interpretation. As New Order authors had access to Sandra's relatively conservative 1961 account as well as Trimurti's 1975 speech, the choices New Order historians made with regard to what to describe in this period cannot be explained away as being the product of a lack of knowledge.⁵⁹ Rather, those choices demonstrate the extent to

which events were consciously chosen and described in ways that reinforced the New Order's very partial narrative.

The 'Old Order' histories examined here are also necessarily partial, as they too were written to promote a particular political message, shaped both by personal and institutional interests and, particularly during the Guided Democracy period, by pragmatism.⁶⁰ However, the differences between the historiography of the two periods are unmistakable. The older labour histories are both diverse and relatively rich in detail and analysis. While they sometimes ignored events that did not suit partisan purposes, they generally promoted their version of events through their narrative arguments and analysis rather than by omission. By contrast, anything that disrupted official narrative themes was excised from the 'potted histories' of the New Order period, leaving only small variations attributable to length and secondary sources used rather than to ideology, time of writing or institutional affiliation.

This is not to suggest that New Order retellings of Indonesia's labour history were pure fantasy. Trade unions were highly politicized during the late colonial and post-independence periods – and indeed, as the comparative literature predicts, their political significance oftentimes far outweighed their industrial strength. There is nevertheless also ample evidence that they were also concerned with the socioeconomic needs of their members and the implications of party dominance.⁶¹ A narrative describing a transformation from what Galenson calls a duality of purpose, in which trade unions sought to balance members' interests and the interests of nation-building, to a tool of development would thus have provided a more accurate representation of the historical development of Indonesian trade unions than the one presented in these potted histories.⁶² However, such a narrative would not have served the New Order's ideological project nearly so well.

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Kaye Broadbent) and *Indonesia Beyond the Water's Edge: Managing an Archipelagic State* (ISEAS, 2009, with Robert Cribb).

Notes

¹ Bates, 'Study of Unions and Development'. See also Essenberg, 'Interaction of Industrial Relations and Political Process'.

² Galenson, *Labour and Economic Development*.

³ Gladstone, 'Trade Unions, Growth and Development'.

⁴ See Moertopo, *Hubungan Perburuhan Pancasila*; and Simanjuntak, *Manpower Problems and Government Policies*. Pre-New Order accounts had emphasized the importance of the economic struggle within the dual economic and political objectives of Indonesian trade unionism.

⁵ This account of post-Independence labour historiography is based on a detailed graphical analysis of 16 labour histories from three distinct periods in which every mention of events in each account – such as the founding of particular organizations, the release of government labour policy and general political developments that had an effect on labour between the late 1800s and 1965 – was recorded and compared. Core Indonesian sources examined were six pre-New Order accounts, authored by individuals in government and politics and by communist and non-communist trade unions; two transitional accounts written in the early New Order period and eight New Order histories. These were compared with Ingleson, *In Search of Justice*; and Hawkins, 'Indonesia'. A particular difficulty faced in this area of research is the paucity of materials available from the preNew Order period as a result of the widespread destruction of 'leftist' documents during the New Order. Another problem is the fact that few texts written in Indonesia acknowledge the sources from which they drew their information, although an author's choice of sources is sometimes obvious. To deal with the lack of attribution, the genealogy of particular texts was determined by conducting a systematic survey of all available sources (in total well over a hundred sources were considered), rather than a focused tracing of citations.

⁶ In an interesting twist on the regime's emphasis on the dangers of political unionism, University of Indonesia-trained leftist labour historian Razif points to the declaration of non-alignment by the communist union as the exception to a general pattern of 'Old Order' trade unions' subordination to political parties – even though it in fact had strong links to the communist party and many of the other unions Razif names were also officially unaligned. Similarly, in celebrating the strength of the 'revolutionary forces' in the mid 1950s, an anonymous history distributed by the Workers' Committee for Reform Action (Komite Buruh untuk Aksi Reformasi, KOBAR) in its own way also reproduces New Order narratives of unity by implying that the communist union was the only labour union active in the period. See Razif, *Sejarah Pemikiran Serikat Buruh Indonesia* and KOBAR, 'Sejarah Pergerakan Kaum Buruh Indonesia'. See also Dita Sari, 'Buruh Indonesia Selalu Terus Melawan'. Labour NGO activists also reproduced official discourse. Prominent labour NGO activist Arist Sirait Merdeka, for instance, published a labour history which almost exactly reproduces the New Order's reading of labour history. Sirait, 'Kronologi Sejarah Kelas Buruh'.

⁷ See Ford, *Workers and Intellectuals*.

⁸ The circumstances surrounding the events of 1965–66 are hotly disputed. The most definitive account available is Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder*.

⁹ Witoelar, *Political Developments in Indonesia*, 9. The principles of Pancasila, loosely translated, are belief in Almighty God; respect for humanity; Indonesian unity; democracy guided by the principle of deliberation to reach a consensus; and the realization of social justice. As its name suggests, Pancasila Industrial Relations was said to be based on this philosophy.

¹⁰ Mashuri, 'Pancasila Democracy', 34.

¹¹ Moertopo, 'Some Basic Considerations in 25-year Development', 4.

¹² Moertopo, *Strategi Politik Nasional*, 89. For general discussions of the significance of development in New Order Indonesia, see Heryanto, 'The Development of "Development"', 8; Mas'ood, 'The Indonesian Economy and Political Structure', 188–189; and van Langenberg, 'Analysing Indonesia's New Order State'.

¹³ Reeve, *Golkar of Indonesia*.

¹⁴ Moertopo, *Strategi Politik Nasional*, 73. The concept of functional groups had been formulated during the period immediately before the New Order, known as Guided Democracy (1959–65).

¹⁵ Although the non-communist unions that had survived the post-1965 purges were never officially dissolved, they were effectively folded into FBSI's industrial sector unions.

¹⁶ Soekarno MPA, *Renovation of the Indonesian Labour Movement*.

¹⁷ Moertopo, *Hubungan Perburuhan Pancasila*, 23.

¹⁸ Moertopo's corporatist vision also was tempered by contemporary international ideas about unionism – concepts supported by unions in Western Europe and by the International Labour Organization, which promoted a system of tripartism based on social-democratic principles. Several non-communist labour bodies, notably the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the American Federation of Labor Congress of Industrial Organizations and the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation were influential in Indonesia at the time when the New Order's labour regime was taking shape.

¹⁹ Sudono, *A Collection of Speeches*; Sudono, *Sejarah Kelahiran dan Perkembangan FBSI*

²⁰ For an extended discussion of the influence of European labour theory debates on Indonesian trade unionism, see Ford, *Workers and Intellectuals*.

²¹ See for example Kertonegoro, *Gerakan Serikat Pekerja*.

²² Department of Manpower, *The Rights to Organise in Indonesia*, 2–3.

²³ This narrative largely ignored the legacies of Guided Democracy, when former president Sukarno, under pressure from the military, established the basis for many of the structures of political control that came to be identified with the New Order. It should be noted, however, that a number of the New Order histories surveyed did deal with the Guided Democracy period and the early years of the New Order before FBSI was formed and Pancasila Industrial Relations introduced in the same section

²⁴ As Ingleson and Elliott have shown, the revolutionary communist unions and their more conservative counterparts in these periods all pursued both political and socio-economic ends. See Elliott, 'Bersatue Kita Berdiri Bertjerai Kita Djatoeh'; Ingleson, *In Search of Justice*.

²⁵ Exceptions to this consensus included Sandra – the author of an earlier spirited defence of vanguardist Leninism – who, in a conservative history of trade unionism compiled at the height of Guided Democracy, identified 1908 as the true start of the organized labour movement and Sentot, who in 1945 emphasized unions' political nature in an account that has more in common with New Order histories than with the majority of labour histories of this period. See Sandra, *Sedjarah Pergerakan Buruh Indonesia*; Sentot, 'The Labour Movement in Indonesia'. In a report to the First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East in China in 1921 by prominent early twentieth-century labour activist Semaun, on the other hand, nominated 1917, when the VSTP 'was transformed ... into an Indonesian union' as the beginning of the indigenous labour movement. It is apparent, however, that Semaun was primarily interested in the proletarian credentials of particular unions rather than the labour movement as a whole. Semaun, 'Indonesian Movement in the Netherlands Indies', 59. Note that in this table, and those which follow, authors are listed down the side of the table, while the events mentioned in the texts are listed across the top with the date most regularly cited for that event. If the account concerned mentions that event, the corresponding box is shaded. The boxes that appear in black are highlighted to demonstrate a particular trend. If there is no year listed in the box, the author either used the year noted at the top of the column, or mentioned the event without reference to a year. If a year is written in the box, then the event was mentioned at that time. Where accounts were written about a particular period or published before the timeframe of the table, the entire row has been removed.

²⁶ Aidit, *Sedjarah Gerakan Buruh Indonesia*, 37; SOBSI, *Sedjarah Gerakan Buruh Indonesia*, 33–34; and Serikat Buruh Gula, *Lahir dan Perkembangan S.B.G.*, 5. See also 'The Indonesian Trade Union', 3; and Sandra, *Sedjarah Pergerakan Buruh Indonesia*.

²⁷ Chronos, 'Gerakan Buruh dalam Waktu Pendjadjahan'. Trimurti favoured this interpretation. See Trimurti, *Hubungan Pergerakan Buruh Indonesia*.

²⁸ Sudono, *Selected Speeches of Agus Sudono*, 42–43. Sofiati Mukadi, the Deputy Secretary General of FBSI's unitarist successor, the All-Indonesia Workers' Union (Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia, SPSI) echoed these sentiments, noting the emergence of trade unions 'along with' the nationalist movement. See Mukadi, 'Indonesian Trade Union Movement', 7.

²⁹ Shamad, 'Sejarah Lahirnya Hubungan Industrial Pancasila', 19; Shamad, *Hubungan Industrial di Indonesia*.

³⁰ Department of Manpower, *The Rights to Organise in Indonesia*.

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- ³¹ The foreword to Kertonegoro's 1999 account was written by Fahmi Idris, the first Minister for Manpower after the fall of Suharto. Kertonegoro clearly had time to consider his manuscript after the fall of Suharto, because his historical overview includes a section entitled 'The Reform Era', which accounted for just less than one-tenth of the entire chapter. However, no comments were made about the potential politicization of Indonesia's new unions. See Kertonegoro, *Gerakan Serikat Pekerja*.
- ³² The revisionist Sjahrir, leader of the Indonesian Socialist Party (Partai Sosialis Indonesia, PSI), was more cautious, arguing that Indonesia's unions had run the risk of being submerged in, or dependent on, the nationalist movement. Asmara Hadi, an official from the centrist Indonesian Printers' Union (Sarekat Buruh Pertjetakan Indonesia, SBPI) made an even stronger claim for independence, arguing that trade unions had been 'the foot soldiers of the political parties in the colonial period' but must now 'be directed towards the improvement of the livelihoods of their members'. See Sjahrir, *Pergerakan Sekerdja*, 23–25 and Hadi, *Sarikat Buruh*, x.
- ³³ John Ingleson, the seminal historian of the colonial labour movement, identifies 1908 as the beginning of the Indonesian labour movement but argues that unions were not 'merely appendages of the wider nationalist movement'. Ingleson, *In Search of Justice*, 4–5.
- ³⁴ Simanjuntak, *Issues in Industrial Relations in Indonesia*, 12–13
- ³⁵ Sudono, *Selected Speeches of Agus Sudono*; and Shamad, *Industrial Relations in Indonesia*.
- ³⁶ See for example Sukarno MPA, *Pembaharuan Gerakan Buruh di Indonesia*; SPSI, *Gerakan Serikat Pekerja*.
- ³⁷ See, for example Partai Komunis Indonesia, *A B C Revolusi Indonesia*.
- ³⁸ Voice of Free Indonesia, 'The Indonesian Trade Union', 24.
- ³⁹ Pengurus Besar GASBIINDO, *GASBIINDO: Sokoguru Revolusi Indonesia*, 36. Some trade union-authored histories of the period were more inclined to worry about politicization. For example, the Railway Workers Union (Persatuan Buruh Kereta Api, PBKA), a union affiliated to the socialist party-linked trade union federation, emphasized its own ongoing commitment to non-political trade unionism, maintaining that, since the beginning, it has always 'operated in the socio-economic field to improve the lot of its members and workers generally', and has not sought to be involved in the affairs of state or be 'controlled or dominated by a particular political party's ideology'. See PBKA, 'Laporan Kerdja 3 Tahun, Ie-9'.
- ⁴⁰ Badan Pembinaan Hukum Nasional, *Analisa dan Evaluasi Hukum*, 112–113. Minister for Manpower in the late 1980s and early 1990s Cosmas Batubara concurred, declaring that Pancasila Industrial Relations had corrected the 'wide liberalism of the past'. See Batubara, *Manpower Problems and Policy in Indonesia*.
- ⁴¹ Hardjomiguno, 'Pancasila as a New Approach to Industrial Relations', 26–7.
- ⁴² Shamad, *Industrial Relations in Indonesia*.
- ⁴³ Sukijat, 'Hubungan Perburuhan Pancasila', 48. This text was reproduced in Sudono, *Perburuhan Dari Masa ke Masa*. Other authors make similar claims. See for example Sumantono, *Participation of Workers/Employees*
- ⁴⁴ See Hasibuan, *Political Unionism and Economic Development*, 346.
- ⁴⁵ Simanjuntak, *Issue in Industrial Relations in Indonesia*, 12–13.
- ⁴⁶ SPSI, *Gerakan Serikat Pekerja*, 21.
- ⁴⁷ Aidit, *Sedjarah Gerakan Buruh Indonesia*, 39; SOBSI, *Sedjarah Gerakan Buruh Indonesia*, 37–41; Pengurus Besar GASBIINDO, *GASBIINDO*, 31.
- ⁴⁸ Aidit, *Sedjarah Gerakan Buruh Indonesia*, 48; Pengurus Besar GASBIINDO, *GASBIINDO*, 31.
- ⁴⁹ Hasibuan, 'Political Unionism and Economic Development', 19–22.
- ⁵⁰ See for example Shamad, 'Sejarah Lahirnya Hubungan Industrial Pancasila', 20
- ⁵¹ Ibid. Soekarno's formulation of the 1945 split is reproduced either verbatim or almost verbatim in almost all New Order labour histories examined.
- ⁵² The fact that New Order accounts record SBII's formation as occurring in 1947 suggests that this information was drawn from the GASBIINDO source. This is an example of the ways in which it was possible to trace the provenance of particular accounts.
- ⁵³ See for example Department of Manpower, *The Rights to Organise in Indonesia*; SPSI, *Rancangan Keputusan Musyawarah Nasional*. Almost exactly the same description of the Madiun Affair appeared without an immediate reference to 1965 in a number of other accounts, although in most of these, too, the link was ultimately made between 1948 and 1965.
- ⁵⁴ Shamad, 'Sejarah Lahirnya Hubungan Industrial Pancasila', 20

⁵⁵ SPSI, *Gerakan Serikat Pekerja*, 18–19. The failed OPPI initiative featured prominently in all New Order accounts.

⁵⁶ Mukadi, 'The Indonesian Trade Union Movement', 7.

⁵⁷ Kertonegoro, *Gerakan Serikat Pekerja*, 16–17.

⁵⁸ SPSI, *Gerakan Serikat Pekerja*, 21.

⁵⁹ Sandra's 1961 volume was one of three sources listed at the beginning of Soekarno MPA's history chapter. See Soekarno MPA, *Renovation of the Indonesian Labour Movement*.

⁶⁰ Compare for example Sandra, *Gerakan Buruh Indonesia* and Sandra, *Sedjarah Pergerakan Buruh Indonesia*. According to SOBSI's 1958 volume, few essays or lectures were written about Indonesian labour history between 1945 and the time of publication. However, far more labour history was written between 1945 and 1965 than after 1965.

⁶¹ See Elliott, 'Bersatoe Kita Berdiri Bertjerai Kita Djatoeh'; Ingleson, 'Bound Hand and Foot'; Ingleson, 'Worker Consciousness and Labour Unions'; Ingleson, 'Life and Work in Colonial Cities'; Ingleson, *In Search of Justice*; Ingleson, 'Labour Unions and the Provision of Social Security'; Ingleson, 'Legacy of Colonial Labour Unions'.

⁶² Galenson, *Labour and Economic Development*.