

# SOEHARTO'S NEW ORDER, PRESS AND SOCIETY IN TENSION: A Social Reflection

**Herd Sahrasad**

*Paramadina Graduate School, Jakarta  
Jln Gatot Subroto Kav 96-97 Jakarta Selatan  
Email: sabrasad@yahoo.com*

**Abstract:** This article explains that in the Soeharto's New Order, when the press criticises strongly the state elites, it was easy to accuse the press of being against the law. The word of state elite, the Father, of the Bapak, is law. So, in Indonesian history, since independence, has proved that press closures fluctuate in rhythm with the political situation. From 1951 up to 1965, there were 156 closures of national press. It is only in the period of 1955 and 1956 no closure of press publication. While in the other years, there are closures for instance in 1957, 32 closures, in 1958, 24 closures and the peak of the closures was in 1959 with 38 closures, in 1960, 34 closures and in 1965 there were five closures and a trend which continue in the further years. The press closures reflect the strength of government vis-a-vis society. Sociologically, the government itself is dominated by the Javanese rulers. Their political culture has dominated the national landscape. Despite the fact that politics, the economy and technology has been changing in the New Order, the strength of Javanese culture has remained. There is no fundamental change in Javanese culture under the Soeharto's New Order.

**Keywords:** Press, state, society, New Order, Soeharto, Indonesia.

To begin with, Indonesia in 1980s is authoritarian bureaucratic regime under Soeharto with his generals and

conglomerats that dominated political-economic lanscape in the country, a periphaeral capitalist state in Southeast Asia.

At that time, I was a young journalist who always have a hope or at least illusion, for democratization to implement checks and balances between state and society, to open the mind of the people that we are as the commoners still have power and rights to express our aspiration and interest, to determine partly our fate and future without coercion and repression by the state or regime.

Indonesia under Soeharto is repressive developmentalist regime- to borrow Herbet Feith perspective-<sup>1</sup> in which all of the centripetal and opposition power have been crushed by the regime through regimentation, cooptation or repression. At that time, the late lawyer Yap Thiam Hien said, President Soeharto is like the law, so everybody who is against him, he/she would be considered against the law.<sup>2</sup>

## **Student Uproar**

In 1987 Indonesian press was shocked by a student uproar in Ujung Pandang, South Sulawesi. The serious unrest took place on October the 31st — November the 3rd. The

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Feith, '*Repressive-Developmentalist Regimes in Asia: Old Strengths, New Vulnerabilities*', paper for Conference on *Indonesian Class Formation*, Monash University, August 1979

<sup>2</sup> Yap Thiam Hien, "Law, State and Civil Society" in Arief Budiman (Ed.), *State and Civil society in Indonesia* (Australia: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990).

horrifying implication for the students and society, however, was longer than the short period of incident, which caused several students died and others wounded. A lot of Indonesian press activists grabbed the so-called incident of anti-helm, but they carefully published this bloody incident after obtaining permission from the government. In this case the press used a shadow language with added meanings on the printed page in general, to avoid censorship from the regime.<sup>3</sup>

The press activists realised that the impacts of this news toward Indonesia students, especially in Java island, are relatively significant. In fact, many debates and rumours emerged from the news among the students in Jakarta, Bandung and Jogja as a response to this news. The press activists hoped not to see another bloody movement in the near future if everything in process of development goes well. History, on the other hand, proved the opposite way. In 1988, students in several universities in Yogyakarta, Jakarta and Bandung surprisingly launched protests.

The issues of their movements are various. Started in October 1988, actually, the press was surprised by the student movement of University of Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Jogja. One of the issues is to demand the government to withdraw what's the so-called NKK/BKK (campus law). Since this

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with student activists in Jakarta August-December 1989. See *Media Indonesia* and *Kompas* daily, Jakarta 10 August- 20 December 1989. See also, *Tempo* newsmagazine, Jakarta August-December 1989

incident, the press activists were quite sure that the discontented elements among the students are soaring. The journalists' concentration in observing the student movement is stronger than it was previously. The journalists expected that the wave of student movement will occur following the Jogja incident. Meanwhile in some campuses in Jogja, Jakarta and Bandung, a lot of students discussion often involved journalists as participants.

The newsmen, therefore, know that the social-political discontents of the students sparked. It was only a matter of time, the student movement would happen. And this presumption was proved. In November the 5th, 1988 the ITB students in Bandung launched protests to Minister of Education, Fuad Hassan. The students demanded the minister to withdraw the NKK/BKK who had repressed them since the campus law was imposed in the aftermath the student movement in 1978.

The presses covered a little bit of the ITB incident, but it was apparent that to some degree the discontented students in Indonesia started to apply the news as a spirit to their struggle. Journalists smelt that students in Jakarta would joined the ITB and UGM actions by launching the similar protests. Campuses of IKIP and UNAS in Jakarta become centres of student discussions before the actions in the capital at that time.

To the press, the problem was that there was limited space to publicise the news on student movement. As a result it was so often that the press coverage appear in shadow

language and place this sensitive news in a limited page. It was, of course, the students repeatedly raised questions to journalists why the press publicise the student movement a little bit. And the press activists frequently explained about their limited freedom, while at the same time censorship was imposed by the government. Thank to their understanding, to some degree the press publicised fluctuatively the student activism.

The issues of the student movements were varies. Starting from demanding the withdrawal of NKK/BKK, the dispersal of SDSB (state lottery), to the unceasing protests in Bandung, Jakarta and Yogyakarta for the banning of businesses prostitution. These actions turned immediately into the palace politics, the most sensitive issue in early 1989: the protesting movement against to the government policy on Kedung Ombo project. The Kedung Ombo dam is a World Bank-financed project. The project was protested by the students which, within the students perspective, could shake the palace elites in Jakarta. The students used the local issue as a reflection of discontented feelings toward the state's development policy.

And the press responded considerably by giving extensive coverage of Kedung Ombo peasants and their environment. And in this regard, it often happens to be the case that the students contacted the press activists before launching their action.

Although Kedung Ombo was a local issue, this was, however, sensitive politically because it caused troubles to the

state elites. By helping and defending the Kedung ombo peasants, the students actually attacked to the state elites. This time the students came from Jogja, Bandung, Jakarta, East Java and Salatiga to support Kedung Ombo peasants vis-a-vis the state actors. The students joined the peasants in the flooded area of Kedung Ombo. They provided medicines, clothes and foods to the poor peasants.

The students support had encouraged the spirit of peasants to defend their rights and their lands. At the present time, hopefully the press covered the incidents to encourage implicitly the students spirit vis-a-vis state actors. When there were strong tendencies that the state actors would repress to the Kedung Ombo incident physically, in Jogja the students planned to launch a non-violence movement, and at the same time to protest the government repression toward the Lampung peasants. The students, press activists, Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and intelligentsia builded immediately informal links to mutual support in this situation. The students were aware that they need the press coverage to strengthen their bargaining position vis-a-vis state actors.

In February 26th, 1987, a non-violence action occurred dramatically, in which several thousands students took part. They challenged violent ways to solve socio-political problems. They called for the end of military solution for societal problems.

In almost the whole of this period, the press and students could not be separated with each other even though

the press has very limited space to articulate the student aspiration. In the period of March-April 1989, the press activists monitored that the students tend to compete with each other to show each force, especially in Jakarta, Bandung and Jogja. Their interests were frequently different and eventually, their weakly-built alliance apparently fell apart. In this case, the student movement occurred locally in Jakarta, Bandung and Jogja, the three centres of student-activism.

Their power tended to be fragmented because they were too ambitious in displaying their respective strength and leadership in the national political landscape. Nevertheless, the Jakarta, Bandung and Jogja student leaders tried to maintain their informal links at the minimum level. In this regard, the post 1978-students demonstrated their weakness compared to that of the predecessors such as the students of 1974 and 1978. With regard to this situation, some press activists were disappointed but they can do nothing to prevent the fragmentation of student power.

The press activists to some degree viewed the students as their counterparts to support the people in creating public opinion against the state hegemony. Meanwhile, after the Kedung Ombo case, the Bandung students were interested to defend the Kacapiring area people who are bulldozed by the state actors front their land. In April 1989, in Bandung, there were about 3000 students took part in a protest action to defend the Kacapiring people against the local state actors. The other student action launched protests to defend peasants in the Tanah Badega vis-a-vis the state actors and

business people who want to take over less compensated their land. In these movements, the students always contacted the press activists to publicise their action.

The press covered considerably the cases of Kacapiring and Tanah Badega, but it is not effective. One of the great obstacles in defending the people is that the rule of law is not for the common people but the rulers, the political élites and the haves. Fortunately, the failures of student efforts to help people of Kedung Ombo, Kacapiring, Lampung, Tanah Badega and so forth did not break their spirit to continue the action.

On the other occasion, in Jakarta, the students protested the raising of electricity tariff to the consumers with of 900 watt or below. All in all, the student movement had once again shocked the state elites.

### **State Response**

Faced with the restless students, the KNPI (Youth National Committee) and Jakarta government on April 13, 1989 responded by way of advancing Minister of Home Affairs Rudini to discuss with the students. And again, the press grabbed this rare event and publicise it in the front pages. The press activists suspected that Rudini tried to cool down the student movement. But some journalists pick up rumours saying that Rudini competed with other state elites in a disguised rivalry. While the students suspected that there is difference or conflict among the state elites in connection with their movement.



Meanwhile Minister of Cordinator for Security and Political Aftairs, Sudomo accused the students of being exploited by the other power to challenge the current national leadership. All of a sudden Sudomo's statement caused reactions among the students. Some students of Indonesia University (UI) met him to object his opinion. They also urged Sudomo to correct his statement in the press. And the press grabbed this event as a reflection that there is confusion and anxiousness among the state elites toward the student movement.

In Bandung, just four days after the meeting of Rudini and students in Jakarta, the students informed the press activists that they would continue the protest at ITB campus calling for the local state actors to free their imprisoned friends. In this action, the students involved NGOs activists and non-student participants. They disregarded state's elites appeal for mutual dialogue. And the tense situation was going on until the 5 August 1989 incident, in which the ITB students protested the presence of Rudini at their campus,. They criticised Rudini as undertaking political campaigns to political succession, They insisted that Rudini is a controversial elite and his presence was viewed as an intervention at a campus life.

Following the ITB protest, the angry rector fired all of the main activists involved in that action. The press activists tried to help the unlucky students by publicising the opinion of intelligentsia, politicians and Rudini himself proving that the students action cause no problem. This was a real fight,

but the rector, who has connection with the state elites, disregarded the press efforts.

And the press activists struck by rumours saying that a disguised power struggle among the state elites exploited the ITB incident beyond the students' estimation. The dismissal of students itself had reflected interests from outside campus to repress the student activism as soon as possible. So, it was wrong to assume that the local action such as the ITB movement protesting Rudini's presence would not influence the centre of power in Jakarta. In fact, the case of ITB proved that the local student movement was seen by the political elites as a challenge to the state hegemony.

With regard to Kedung Ombo case. Head of State himself had given a reaction by saying that the discontented peasants as the dissidents (*mbalelo*). And he stated that Kedung Ombo area was formerly a base of communists (PKI). Accordingly, the peasants were delegitimised and the press must more or less be extra-careful if it will contain the very sensitive issue. On the other hand, the Head of State's statement implicitly warned to the students not to continue their struggle to defend the Kedung Ombo peasants. Consequently, in Jogja, Salatiga, Semarang and Solo the student movement cooled down for a while. The press itself was warned frequently by the government not to publish the Kedung Ombo issue.

Although the press had limited space to become the articulator of the society such as students, intelligentsia, NGO activists and the press activists themselves vis-a-vis the state,

it has been serving as an arena to reflect state-society relations. On the one hand, the press at least has articulated the student aspiration and interest to the social justice, democracy and human rights protection in Indonesia. On the other hand, by this way, the press actually articulates its aspiration through student movement vis-a-vis the state. In fact, the press is relatively frightened to publish the student movement because it can be categorised as the news of SARA (ethnics, religion, race, intergroup conflict, but the meaning could become more than SARA itself). With the SARA categorisation, the press could be closed down forever. Actually, many student protests were not published in the mass media, including the press, due to the strict censorship. It also appears as a sensitive political issue to the state elites. The palace elites always suspected student movement as a factor of destabilisation and social unrest.

The press itself publicises the student movement to prove before the state elites that there are the social, political and economic imbalances in Indonesia. The press editorial usually called for an immediate solution for the problems through the openness and democratic ways.

With regard to the student movement, the publicists are aware that it is only the students who have rights legitimacy and influence to criticise formidably the state policy toward the people such as in the local cases of Kedung Ombo, Tanah Badega, Kacapiring and so forth. By doing that, the students criticise explicitly the palace politics in Jakarta.

The students, however, have no access to the masses to build the grassroots support after the enforcement of NKK/BKK following the crackdown on student protests in 1978. Following the 1978 incident, by the NKK/BKK the student had been depoliticised totally. The press repeatedly asked the intelligentsia and respectable politicians to call for the withdrawal of the coercive regulation, but up to now the result is distressed.

It is interesting that the student movement always attributed to the existing political structure. In the 1988-1989 cases, the students dared to launch rallies in the street, to come to the state elites headquarters such as the Home Affairs ministry, Education and Culture ministry, the Energy ministry and so forth in protest action because they realise that there are difference and conflict among the state elites. When the palace politics preoccupied by the difference and conflict about political succession issue, the students would seek space to take part in the state elites political game. According to a UGM activist Rizal Mallarangeng and a IKIP Jakarta activist Sugeng SP, the students had smelt the internal difference and conflict among the state elites in connection with political succession and autonomy of campus in Indonesia. To some degree, this situation encouraged the students to launch protest actions.

Some of the protesters were the campus press activists such as Toriq (UGM), Tri Agus Susanto (IKIP Jakarta), Nuku Soleman (UNAS), Eko Supriyanto Dananjaya (UMY) and so forth. They used the press campus activism to consolidate the

students gatherings before launching protests against the state elites. Besides the demonstrators, in 1980s there were also students' study club. In Jogja, there were more than 20 study clubs such as Teknosofi, Palagan, Dasakung and so forth. In Jakarta there were more than 10 study clubs, such as Kelompok Studi Indonesia, Lingkaran Studi Indonesia, Forum Mahasiswa Ciputat, Kelompok Studi Pena, Kelompok studi UNAS, Kelompok Studi Rawamangun and so forth.

In Bandung, there were PSIK ITB, Kelompok Studi Thesa, Kelompok Diskusi Sabtu, Kelompok Studi Pertanian, Kelompok Studi Sukaluyu and so forth. On average, every study club has a popular activist for instance in Jakarta there were Denny JA (Kelompok Studi Indonesia), Sugeng SP (a IKIP activist), Achmad Fadila (an UNAS activist), Amir Daulay (Jakarta Forum), Primus Interpares (a UNAS activist), Nory Andriyani (a UI student), Rocky Gerung (a UI student) and so forth.

In Bandung there were Harry Wibowo, M. Fazrul Rahman, Paskah Irianto, Arnold Purba, Wijaya Santoso, Suryadi Radjab, Enin Supriyanto, Miranda Risang Ayu, Yudi Latief and many students at ITB, UNPAD, UNPAR, IKIP, IAIN and so forth. In Jogja, there were Taufik Rahzen (a UGM student), Rizal Mallarangeng (a UGM student), Hatta (a UII student), Amin (a UII student), Toriq (a UGM student) and so forth. In Salatiga there were Andreas, Stanley, Buntomi and other UKSW students. To some degree, their activism uncovered by the press.

Both the demonstrators and the study club activists usually build informal links to the press and NGOs. The similar purpose between the students, press activists and NGOs is to build the societal power vis-a-vis the state. All in all, they agreed that to promote democracy, there must be a strong civil society. Democracy will not be prevailed if there is not balance of power between state and society, if there is not check and balance between state and society.

### **Dynamics of Press Young Activists**

Most of the press activists covering the student movement are the young newsmen. It is logical to recognise the role of press young activists in connection with the student movement. These press activists are not only becoming reporters but to some degree they are also the counterparts of students in discussion, exchange of information and so forth. The press activists to some degree have close contacts with the state elites because their strategic occupation. In Indonesia the press activists to some extent have valuable access to the state elites.

So, although in recent years the press have fallen into the hands of conglomerates associated with the state elites, the press still coloured partly by the critical reports. The young newsmen so often gained the leakage of information from some of the state elites and those who close to the state elites, especially about their difference and conflict of interest.

For the young newsmen the press still to some degree become an arena to articulate their intellectual ideology. It is

the search for the truth, to change the state in a more democratic, just and opened direction in correspond with the press activists/ability.

So, although the SIUPP (press law) has formidably limited the press freedom in Indonesia, some of the press young journalists still have spirit to take position side by side with the students in defending the people vis-a-vis the state, in putting pressure to the state elites to care about the societal problems. Some of the young journalists are the former study club activists such as myself. For these young journalists, the press is the only option to take part in stages of state in connection with the state and society relations. By informal links between students, intelligentsia and press activists, the young journalists can obtain the new ways on how to act in the stages of the state. With regard to the student movement at that tie, it was usually the students who follow the press wanted to make sure whether or not the state elites reactions regarding their movement. Indeed it is not coincidental if the press placed the student movement as the main target of news coverage! From the reactions of the state elites such as the Sudomo and Rudini cases, the society would understand to what extent the palace politics tolerate the discontented students.

With regard to the Kedung Ombo case, after the strong reaction of Head of State, the press was extra-careful to publish the issue. While in the ITB student movement context, it was clear that the press can do nothing to influence the rector of not dismissing his students. *Tempo, Kompas, Media*

*Indonesia* and other newspaper failed to clear up the situation. The Media Indonesia daily, for instance, tried to clear up the students and rector relations by way of publishing in front page a Media director's essay entitled "Demokrasi Ala ITB" (Democracy in The ITB's Style). This essay was purposed to defend the unlucky students from being fired by the rector.

The essay regretted bluntly the rector's decision to dismiss the students. But, unfortunately, in such a situation the government seemed to tighten their monitor and control to the press. The government sent warnings for the press editors not to publish extensively the student movement and Kedung Ombo issue based on stability approach.

In this occasion, it is quite clear that the press young activists plunge into the disillusion.

### **The Press and Palace Politics**

The Indonesian state and society seem to be enjoyfully preoccupied by the concentration of power in the palace elites, Jakarta. The press is a part of societal power, while the society disorganised and disoriented, the state power is more consolidated politically and economically.

I would like to remind every one that the Indonesian society was and is a peasant society. This indicates that the dominant culture is peasantry. In the peasant culture, the society is preoccupied by the palace elites (elite kraton) as the power holders in the state. Consequently, the press as a part of the society tend to be subservient to the state actors namely the bureaucrats, military elites and the palace associates. On



the contrary, the state elites can dominate the society arbitrarily.

In the New Order, indeed the urban class is growing, the middle class and intelligentsia are developing but their development is concentrated in cities. So, as a whole the society was and is a peasant society.

In addition, in the same time, the state has builded gigantic bureaucracy and the New Order political elites always stress the significance of monoloyalty the state apparatus toward their leaders. <sup>4</sup> The instruction from above to monoloyalty is interpreted by the state actors as also applicable to the society, including the press. ,

Meanwhile, the state elites usually regards themselves as the Law. I remember that the late Yap Thiam Hien ever said that the word of the Bapak, Father, is law. And in this context, the press cannot criticise the Bapak because this will be considered against the Law. Just as Bapak is always considered as the Law, so the press can be closed down forever based on Bapak's order.

In such a situation, the press always act in such a way to avoid the closure. An Australia analyst noted that while there has not in recent years been the large scale banning of papers that took place in connection with the Malari riots of 1974 and the general election and the student movement of 1978,

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<sup>4</sup> Donald K.Emmerson, "The Bureaucracy in the Political Context: Weakness and Strength", in Karl D. Jackson and Lucian W.Fye, (eds.) *Political Power and Communication in Indonesia*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

newspapers are periodically forced to close down if they are seen to be too provocative or questioning of government rule. The closure of the very influential "Sinar Harapan" in late 1986 and the more sensational "Prioritas" in mid 1987 are the examples.<sup>5</sup>

Although the press under pressure and threat of censorship, it can function as barometers of the political and socio-economic weather in Indonesia. An other analyst affirmed, "newspapers have pride of place in reflecting and moulding attitudes of Indonesia's national political elite and as barometers of the political and socio-economic weather in Indonesia. And in spite of the various formal, informal and financial pressures upon them, Indonesia's more independent newspapers maintain fairly high reporting standards, probably conducting the most sophisticated political debate of any domestic ASEAN, press."<sup>6</sup>

And another analyst stated that within the limited free space, editors, journalists and freelance essayists make their ways to express their critical and somewhat independent views. Thus, not only the editors and reporters but also their readers need to develop and learn the grammar of this shadow

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Macintyre, *Business and Politics in Indonesia*, (ASAA Southeast Asia Publications Series, Alien & Unwin Ltd, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> P. Rodgers, "The Domestic and Foreign Press in Indonesia: Free But Responsible?", *research paper*, (Centre for the Study of Australian-Asian Relations, Griffith University, 1980), p.2-8.

language for an exchange of added meanings on the printed page.<sup>7</sup>

It is, of course, the press shadow language had been difficulty to the readers in understanding the real meaning. The middle class and intelligentsia sometimes complain about the euphemism and symbolism language of the press in connection with the student movement, political and socio-economic issues.

This issue is also complained by Mochtar Lubis, a best journalist and former chief editor of "Indonesia Raya" daily. He complains that it took time and a serious labour to get meanings from the printed pages of the current Indonesian press.<sup>8</sup> But, in this context, one should know that in general the students understand the added meanings in the press reports about student movement.

In the period of 1980s, when the palace politics coloured by the issues of political succession, openness and democratisation, the students then saw that the difference and conflict among the palace elites had sparked. Following the Eastern Europe democratisation, Indonesian middle class, especially the intelligentsia, students, NGOs activists, the discontented retired generals and the press activists

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<sup>7</sup> Ariel Heryanto, "Introduction: State Ideology And Civil Discourse" in Arief Budiman (Ed.), *State and Civil Society in Indonesia*, (Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Mochtar Lubis, "Media Massa dan Bahasa Yang Terus Terang", *Prisma*, No.1, 1989, p. 37-51.

questioned about the prospect of democratisation, openness and political succession in Indonesia. It was then, the strong signal about the uneasiness of political succession came from the palace elites when the Head of State in his way back from Moscow to Jakarta just after completing a courtesy call to Soviet Union stated something about the succession.

At that time the Indonesia President stated that he would clobber both generals and politicians who would take over the presidency without going through accepted political channels. This statement had caused students to feel that there is something behind the scene in connection with the political succession. And the students used the press for a reflection about the palace politics.

While they were aware that the NKK/BKK, academic freedom, Kedung Ombo issue and other land issues could be exploited as a ground for their protest action. The local issues has been intensified to be national issues to criticise the state elites.

In this context, it may not be an exaggeration to argue that although the press operates under constant and intimidating pressure of government bans, restrictions and censorship. . . it appear to be one the most important battle grounds for competing ideologies...<sup>9</sup>

In the context of tho news on student movement, the press to some extent had tried to articulate the floating mass participation. In the New Order, one of manifestations of

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<sup>9</sup> Ariel Heryanto, p.293-297.

depoliticisation is the floating mass policy that is imposed by the government to the society. And the students are apart from the floating mass. So, when the press activists contained the reports on student movement, it is actually an effort to articulate the floating mass aspiration.

And this effort is partly purposed to repond the criticism of scholars about the strong tendency of Indonesian press to disregard the masses-oriented sociological reports.<sup>10</sup>

However, the press activists could not publicise bluntly and extensively about the student movement as long as the palace political elites do not tolerate the emergence of dissents as part of political openness. Whereas, in fact, the real openness has ended in the euphoria of Eastern Europe democratisation and the wake of student movement in 1989.

### **Press and Its Dynamics**

With its limitedness and weakness, the Indonesian press in 1980s tried to respond favourably to the student movement following the discontented elements tend to spark extensively.

It was not an exaggeration if Herb Feith argued that the late 1980s saw radical students reemerge as a major factor in Indonesian politics. They had been that in two major periods of intra-elite division in 1970s, but their Influence was

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<sup>10</sup> One of the critics about the Indonesian press in 1980s is Ashadi Siregar. See, Ashadi Siregar, "Peranan Pers Dalam Pembangunan: Mengartikulasikan Partisipasi Massa Mengambang", paper in a seminar organised by PAU Studi Sosial, UGM, August 10-11, 1988, p. 1-5.

drastically reduced after a crackdown in 1978. In the post-1978 phase of elite division, they have emerged with a new capacity to influence the national agenda, and with a new interest in peasant and worker issues.<sup>11</sup> While the press and students to some degree had moved hand in hand in a more democratic manner, powerful and critical direction in facing the state power in day-to-day politics.

Despite the fact that most of the press sympathetic efforts to the student movement failed to influence the palace policy in line with the students aspiration, to same degree the press had been the battle grounds for articulating socio-political discontents toward the establishment and status quo of the palace political elites.

The problems of press in articulating the student movement are the old ones, namely the government bans, restrictions and censorship. In the period of 1988-1989, it was not unusual that the government so often tolerate, but it also banned the press to publish about student movement without clear reasons except on the ground of the state stability. The government tended to vacillate between tolerance and anxiousness toward the press reports on the student movement.

For the government, too much cencorship will impress the domestic and international communities that there is no

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<sup>11</sup> Herbert Feith, "Democratisation In Indonesia: Misleading Rhetoric or real Possibility?", *paper*, (Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1991), p. 2-10.

press freedom and openness in Indonesia. On the contrary, if it tolerate too much the press report on the student movement, then it was quite possible that social unrest would spark. In this context, the government to some degree tolerate the press report on student movement. However, when the press report is considered as a danger signal, then the government banned it. Indeed, the dynamics of the press in the New Order always is in such a situation. In this context, the tolerance and the bans of government to the press, to a lesser degree tend to be more impressed as a reflection of difference and conflict among the palace political elites in connection with political succession, student movement, openness and so forth.

Based on the past experience, in the future it can be expected that the student movement will emerge as a consequence of the extensive socio-political discontents in the society. While the difference and conflict in the elite circle will encourage the students to launch protest actions against the state elites. Accordingly, the press has significant role to the state and society, including the students, in exercising the respective ideologies and interests even though the society are the powerless. The disturbing question is how to build power of the powerless in Indonesian context. It is not clear whether or not the current Indonesian students and press activists had taken the past lessons in facing the future challenge.

## **Press, Labour And Politics In Indonesia**

Sometimes as a journalist, I am anxious and tired to talk about Indonesian press, its past, present and future. The cliched image that is associated with Indonesian journalists, especially in foreigners' eyes, are press release, envelope and human beings with relatively no freedom to talk. The Indonesian press, indeed, is under the grip of state hegemony.

When I entered the press world full time in 1986 – after being a freelance. writer for several years- I found that the press world was still able to become an arena for scholars to articulate their intellectual ideology. What is the intellectual ideology? It is the search for the Truth, to-bring about social change in a democratic just and open direction.

The enforcement of SIUPP institution (Surat Ijin Usaha Penerbitan Pers or a kind of Government Licence for Press Publication) by the government is too coercive. It has made press plunge into the hands of business people and conglomerates. The SIUPP regulation has limited share ownership for journalists to about 20 percent while the rest of the shares are owned mostly by business people and conglomerates who invest the publication. The Indonesian press conglomerates include:

- The Ciputra Group has shares in "Tempo" newsmagazine and "Bisnis Indonesia" daily
- The Salim Group and Sukamdani Gitosardjono Group has shares in "Bisnis Indonesia" daily
- The Bimantara Group has shares in "Media Indonesia" daily



- The Bukaka Group has shares in "Warta Ekonomi" newsmagazine
- The Bakri Brothers Group has shares in "Popular" magazine
- The Astra/Summa Group has shares in "Editor" newsmagazine
- The Sutrisno Bachir Group has shares in "Prospek" newsmagazine, "Mode" magazine and "Infobank" magazine and so forth.

But the ownership of the press has not destroyed completely the spirit of educated youth to work as press activists. Working for the press is a more or less uncertain world in a such stiff competition. And perhaps, one asks why many graduates from universities become journalists in a such situation? To some degree, this is caused by the high level of unemployment among well-educated people in Indonesia. And how about me? Optionally, I work in the press to survive. I feel that since campus (universities) have been barren as centres of activism, when mass organisations and political parties have been stagnant, then the press and the NGOs (Non governmental organisations) have provided alternative ways to "take part" in the social-cultural, economic and political games on the stages of the state.

In the context of labour, politics and press freedom, I am as a journalist, always wrestling with sensitive and risky topics. For instance, how to verify the rumours that among state elites, there are differences, even conflict of interest

about labour problems and political succession? I and my fellow journalists must investigate these stories by approaching the political elites, especially military high officials or retired generals, whom we interview and discuss matters.

Sooner or later, sometimes even instantly, I will understand whether or not there are differences or conflicts among the state elites and from there I will smell in what respects are the differences or conflicts of interest among the state elites. In the context of labour movements, openness and democratisation, for instance, the differences among the state elites could be seen from their public comments and statements about the problems. Our talks with the state elites are often published in the headlines or on the front page of our newspapers.

Talking about social-political problems in the press, I will talk about some of my experiences in case of military, student movement and labour unrest.

Firstly, in connection with the military, I had a funny experience in 1988. As a journalist, I and two photographers had an assignment from my senior editor to cover student protests in outside the US embassy in Jakarta. The protesters made leaflets condemning corruption and economic monopolies.

When I was taking leaflets, a soldier suddenly came from a car that was parked in nearby. He dragged me and grabbed my throat, threatening, "What are you doing here? Are you looking for a beating? This was state secrecy," he said.

I answered, “Be patient. We were journalist and we had order from our editor to cover this event.” Before I had finished speaking, my photographers had run, away in fear. The soldier angrily probed my identity. And then, suddenly someone came from another car. I could feel from his behaviour that he was an intelligence officer. He whispered to the soldier to allow me to go away.

In connection with labour movements, in 1991, I had a funny experience when I covered a strike in a textile factory in Jakarta. Several journalists, including myself, had been suspected of being students and masterminds of the labour strike. And again, our identity has been searched, even by the Satpam (security guard).

And secondly, another experience was in 1991. At the time of the Gulf Crisis, security in the US embassy and its surrounds had been tightened. Several times student demonstrations were launched to protests against the US and at the same time to reflect their social-political discontent with the Indonesian state. The mass media tried to objectively report about the Gulf War. Media, our newspaper, tried to be sympathetic to the Iraqi's fate. The Iraqis were attacked by the US and its allies, then we saw they were the tragic losers in this war. With regard to the Media's attitude to the Iraqis, the Westernised elites and middle class in Jakarta mockingly called Media a Saddam Hussein newspaper. I imagined that the Iraqis fight with the US more or less resembled the conflict between labourers and business people and their allies in Indonesia.

With regard to labour problems, young journalists like myself who are sympathetic to labourers has categorised by business people and state bureaucrats as "wartawan buruk" (bad journalist), partly because labourers are seen as bad, "buruh=buruk" (labourer = bad, poor human beings). If journalists publicise labour unrest in their press, many business people will interpret this as a challenge to their establishment.

In the metropolis of Jakarta, it is quite normal to see the condemnation of legal/illegal residences or the scrapping of the peddlers, is not an unusual panorama in this metropolitan. Recently, the people at Tanah Merah, in the Plumpang township in Jakarta have had their houses demolished by the state. Committed students defended the people who had been victimised. And I urged Brother Hariman Siregar, a social analyst, to support the students by articulating his view in our newspaper. We were aware of Hariman's commitment to our people, and we hope his favourable opinion will encourage the students to better understand their social problems and conditions. So, in my experience journalism is a more or less art to bring about social change. And the government seemingly suspects it.

As a former volunteer in a small NGO in Jakarta, I and my fellows are quite familiar with students activism, human rights activists, environmentalists and non-violence activists' programs. These kinds of journalists are satirised by the established and conservative groups as "wartawan LSM" (wartawan lembaga suka miskin=journalist for poor

institution or wartawan lembaga swadaya masyarakat= journalist for Non-Governmental Organisations).

Many journalists are former student activists and former study group activists. And we who share the same ideas, usually discuss and develop new ways on how to "play hit and run" in the stages of the state with a completely limited freedom. One of the rather effective ways vis-a-vis state is to build informal cooperation between press, NGOs, intelligentsia and students in echoing our criticism and opinion toward the state.

Since 1989, even perhaps before that year, in the cases of student movement to defend Kedung Ombo people, Tanah badega peasants, worker unrest and Lampung peasants, it is usually the students and NGO activists who have informed us (press) by facsimile or telephone, about where and when they will launch protest actions. And when the time is coming, the students, NGO activists and journalists moved together in the street rallies to protest against government policies and so forth. So in such situations, it is difficult to differentiate who are demonstrators, NGO activists and journalists.

But, then, the government usually sends an order by telephone or a written warning to the press not to continue reports about Kedung Ombo, student movement and labour unrest and so forth. Here what the so-called budaya telepon (telephone culture) and censors are occurred. And this curbs space for press to become dynamic.

But I think it is wrong to argue that reports on student movements and labour unrest are printed only to get new subscribers and to increase market share. In fact, by reporting about student movements in Media, for instance, this newspaper will frequently be warned by the government. Our desire is to display the society and state actors about their problems, about the will of students and youth for social change, democracy and openness in integralistic character. But one must remember that reporting about student movement will make the newspaper be monitored tightly by the political elites consider it as touching on ethnic, religion, racial or intergroup issue (SARA).

So, it is not without consciousness and consequences if the press publicise about student movements and labour unrest. The newspaper itself could be endangered.

### **Press and Labourers**

When student movements tended to diminish in the 1990s, newsmen looked for other issues. As it happened this was a time when labourers desperately needed press coverage. So, it was no coincidence that the press, including Media, to raised labourer issues on their front pages.

In Media's case, one of our considerations was to argue that the labourers' fate must be respected, that workers rights must be fulfilled consistently to make for in a more economically democratic society and to secure a sustainable development. It is not without reason that we give considerable spaces to labourer unrest in Jakarta and other

cities. We are aware that labourers are potential socio-political power in Indonesia, even though they are silenced.

There are hundred of thousands of labourers but their political power has been fragmented, disorganised. Their strikes and protest actions are sporadic and it resembles social explosions for a moment. Press attempts to publicise labourer actions largely reflects its concern toward the current Indonesian problems.

Hopefully, the press can influence the policy makers and state elites to meet worker demands.

Although the press has not produced excellent sociological reports about labour problems, we as journalists try to put pressure to the government in dealing with labourer unrest. In general journalists view the labourers as politically weak, more or less, as themselves. Labourers and journalists are the people living on the outskirts of the periphery.

In Media and other press, the reports about labourers are evidence of moral support for the suffering lower class nowadays. The labourers, helped by students and NGO activists usually make a plan for strikes. And all of them usually inform Media and other press when they will undertake strike and protest actions. So, when the time for strikes and actions approaches, the press will help to publicise their movements in strategic pages. We in Media will manage our journalists, who will cover the strikes, who will approach intelligentsia and who will contact legal experts, all of whom can help the workers struggle.

We are aware that the labourers position is weak and vulnerable vis-a-vis business people and state bureaucrats. So we usually urge the intelligentsia to speak out in our newspaper to support the labourers struggle.

Why do we choose the intelligentsia to defend labourers? Because some intelligentsia are committed. Those members of the intelligentsia who dare to echo their concern to favour the labourers are the voices of truth. In this case, our informal cooperation with the intelligentsia is very significant. They would like to articulate their ideas in support of the lower class and then we release their view in our newspaper to bounce back the serious societal problems to state and society. But, unfortunately, state elites' response so often favour business people or conglomerates.

When thousands of labourers of Gadjah Tunggal, shoe factories of Taiwan, South Korea and other factories launched strikes, our office has been visited by a military officer and received phone calls from the authorities not to continue our reports about labour unrest. In this case, the business people or conglomerates offered an advertising and the state elites even threatened to close down our newspaper on the pretext that we were raising SARA. In such a situation, things become very difficult for the press.

In reality, the prohibition against publishing extensively about labourer strikes is still going on. And again, press suffers from a loss of freedom of creativity. After the strikes and demonstration have finished, their leaders or organisers are frequently fired by their company management. And so often



tile fired labourers complain about their problems to LBH (Legal Aid Institute), Media and other press. They asked us to help, if we can, especially in articulating their interests for social justice, whether through letters to the editor (*Surat Pembaca*) or by reports. Of course, we try to fulfil their requests while building our solidarity as a common working class. The question is why this working class always loses in their struggle against the management? I try to get an answer from legal experts and labourers. They say that because there is no rule of law, worker rights cannot be enforced.

It is a sad tragedy that most of the press efforts have failed to strengthen their bargaining position vis-a-vis companies. In general they are not skilled labourers. Most of them are uneducated people, so the failures of press and NGO to help this class have made them plunge into illusions.

On the other hand, some bureaucrats and economists state that if the worker demand for higher wages is fulfilled, economic growth will decline. To some extent, this causes business people not to increase the labourers wages, even though press and NGO criticise these bureaucrats and economists view to defend their struggle.

Well, anyway, the strikes rate goes up and down sporadically. My impression, then, is that without press coverage, the strikes would not cause state elites any anxiety. In my experience, in connection with labourer exploitation, an informal cooperation between press, intelligentsia and NGO activists in articulating their view about the exploitations, have encouraged the labourers to be more

daring in taking a stand against the state and business people. In this regard, SPSI (official Indonesian workers union) is dysfunctional, the press has articulated the workers problems, and at the same time to display this potentially centrifugal power toward the state.

Of course, the press is limited in its ability to defend the labourers, press is not the Just King (Ratu Adil) or a revolutionary hero (pahlawan revolusi). With limited freedom, the press is only able to show its moral support for the lower class in Indonesia.

Nevertheless, press is still a medium to give feedback to technocrats, political elites and policy makers in managing labour problems. With regard to labourer actions, it is clear that their movements would not be acknowledged by the state and society without the role of the press. And in return, the press is a social institution that is bound to its social realities and tries to always be sensitive to social issues. The press, to some degree, is still able to reflect societal problems. With informal contact and cooperation between press, labourers, intelligentsia and NGO activists in echoing labour problems, at least the press still has a legitimacy among the people as a consequence of its social commitment to the unlucky class.

There fore, to some extent it can be argued that the press has displayed cultural opposition to the conservative groups and the status quo of elite class, even it is often framed in euphemisms or disguised languages.

## **Press, Politics and Intelligentsia**

Talking about the fate of labourers, we must also look at the fate of the intelligentsia in Indonesia. It is not only the fate of labourers which is uncertain, in fact intelligentsia to some extent is uncertain too. For instance, Dr Arief Budiman was banned from going abroad (Malaysia). He is one of our favourite intellectuals who is committed to the lower class.

This is a sensitive political issue. In this context, politics is defined as a struggle for power, state and society relations. How should the press face the Arief Budiman issue? The press activists informally support Arief Budiman by way of reporting about his problem, by way of approaching the state elites such as Minister of Coordinator for Political and Security Affairs Sudomo, Minister of Home Affairs Rudini, The Armed Forces Chief Try Sutrisno and so forth.

Regarding Sudomo and Rudini, for instance, journalists try to pose critical questions while putting pressure to them so that they lift up the ban on Arief Budiman going abroad. I do not claim that the press played a very important role to defend him, but rather, to some extent the press has a general role in promoting the intelligentsi position vis-a-vis state power. Arief Budiman has an powerful international network and the press has a role to pave the way for his efforts vis-a-vis state power. And eventually, the ban was lifted.

I will give another illustration about the limited role of the press in politics. This time is about ITB students. After their demonstration of August 5, 1989, a number of students were jailed and expelled from their educational institutions.

The press activists, including myself, tried to contact intellectuals to morally defend them by echoing their view in Media. We hoped the state actors would act wisely toward the students after reading the view. We know which the intellectuals will support the students, and we hope that the government elite will read the intellectuals' view. But government elites warned us not to print the full story about them. Of course, our reports are not enough to inform the society. And in general, regarding this case, press can not do to much because of the warnings. And then, we saw that the students have been victimised in court. Again, this reflects the weakness of the press vis-a-vis the state.

The press, however, will not disengage from the societal problems. so, when the students and NGO activists are suspected by state elites, and when the society is depoliticised and marginalised, it is natural for press activists to contact intellectuals such as Abdurrahman Wahid, Juwono Sudarsono, Dawam Rahardjo, Aswab Mahasin, Y.B. Mangunwijaya, Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, Dorodjatun Kuntjorojakti, Mulya Lubis, Burhan Magenda, Arief Budiman, Fachry Ali, Hotman Siahaan, Magnis Suseno, Ignas Kleden, Mudji Sutrisno, Víctor I. Tanja and so forth to articulate their views. These intellectuals always try to prevent the state hegemony by their fair and constructive views about state - society relations.

Of course, the interpretations of the state elites are different.

So, to some degree, the young journalists are mediators, articulators and catalysts of social forces to direct the social change.

Although the capital for press such as Media and Busnis Indonesia comes from business people or conglomerates, the press still displays their critical power in a complicated situation. One of the problems is the press tends to depend upon advertising. Meanwhile the advertisers are business people or conglomerates who underpay for their workers or who would not like to be criticised strongly about their weaknesses. This is a dilemma.

With regard to the press, intelligentsia, NGO activists and students who have no balance of power vis-a-vis the state politics, their informal cooperation to some extent at least can restrain the conglomerates and state hegemony over the society. The press can perform as a social force in the Indonesian political stagnancy.

In my experience, issue of political succession and communism (PKI) is a very sensitive one and a dangerous matter. I remember when I and other journalists tried to question a general, in Jakarta. A young journalist asked about execution of comniunists, a sensitive issue. And suddenly the general got very angry with the question, and he ordered his adjutant to put the journalist in a security office to be interrogated and probed his identity for a day. And then he was warned not to repeat the problem.

Actually, the issue of communism is quite sensitive. Perhaps, the above journalist is not aware that in Indonesia, one should be careful to talk about execution of communists.

It could be categorised as an issue of SARA (suku, agama, ras, antargolongan: ethnics, religion, racialism, intergroups) or even as a subversive deed. In fact, SARA is multi-interpretable, it depends on the perception of state elites. So, if there is an Indonesian journalist who either does not regard nor understand about SARA, his career or his life will be endangered.

In connection with political succession, it is interesting that the press sometimes displays its confusion. Many Indonesian journalists are trapped in a riddle about who will be candidates for president and vice-president in the near future. If the incumbent president is not re-elected for some reasons, then who will be a president? Because no clear political mechanism about succession exists, every journalist tries to get information, views and comments from whoever they can among the state elites. So, when President Soeharto said while in flying back from Moscow to Jakarta in late 1989 that he would clobber anyone who tried to replace him without going through accepted political channels, the journalists were startled. The journalist, including myself, smelt at that time there was "something" behind the president's statement.

And then, in 1990 the Muslim leaders organised a conference in Malang where they established a Muslim intellectuals organisation, the so-called "ICMI". The President

and vice president give their blessings to this Muslim organisation. But no military elites attended the conference. Journalists felt that this indicated a difference or perhaps even a conflict of interests among state elites. One should know that before ICMI was founded, some Muslim leaders established Kelompok 21 (Group of 21) to support the re-election of the incumbent president. This event made journalists repeated ask what is going on in Indonesian politics.

Since then, there has been much talk of succession in the state and society. Meanwhile the ulamas of NU (Islamic scholars of a traditional Muslim organisation) has made their debut by collecting signatures to support the incumbent president. My view is that the NU ulamas have used the unclear situation in Indonesian politics to take part in the political game. And the press, exactly, is attracted to the Muslim dynamics in such a situation. The debates of succession, therefore, are busier.

More recently Abdurrahman Wahid, Arief Budiman, Aswab Mahasin, Rahman Tolleng, Marsillam Simanjuntak and so forth established Forum Demokrasi. For the press, Forum Demokrasi is timely to open space for free intellectuals in the political game. So, it is no coincidence that the press gave good coverage to Forum Demokrasi.

Press activists, to some degree hoped that Forum Demokrasi would develop a culture of democracy in Indonesian society to become a just and democratic society. Forum Demokrasi has no real power, it is a relatively weak

organisation because they have no large masses like Muhammadiyah dan NU. But, hopefully, the Forum can become "small. civic forum" to exchange ideas and criticise the government through collective action by the intelligentsia.

Meanwhile the political succession tends to dominate the press coverage after the Indonesian society and elites clearly have fallen into differences or even conflict of interest.

Forum Demokrasi raised questions about democracy and openness in Indonesia. Since then, press was coloured widely by the intellectuals debates about succession and democracy. Before the journalists have known what would happen in the near future, they are surprised by Muhammadiyah and Serikat Islam leaders who publicise their political attitude to endorse the re-election of the incumbent president. Some of Indonesian journalists are confused, others are in alert about the sensitive political games.

In this case, Rompas, Media, Tempo, Editor and Suara Pembaruan are the publications that give attention to the issue of political succession and democracy in Indonesia.

Regarding the differences or conflicts among the state elites, I and my fellows try to approach generals or retired generals to get their opinion. We approach intelligentsia and NGOs activists as well as students to talk about what is going on behind the scenes.

So, when Forum Demokrasi was warned seriously by Mendagri Rudini and Menko Polkam Sudomo, we tried to monitor other minister's opinions about Forum Demokrasi. This time, Menhankam LB Moerdani said that the Forum is



okay, no problem. So our newspaper published it to show state and society that there was pro and contra about the Forum. And because of this, many intellectuals and journalist knew about the differences that existed the state elites about the Forum.

By placing the state elites's view in the press, it will be obvious who are pro-openness, democracy and vice versa.

So, it is no surprise if the press covers widely and competes with each other to print statement of important officials who are not in rhythm with the Head of State. In the last elections, for instance, the press printed various statements about the presidency.

PDI (Indonesian Democratic Party) elites called for presidential term to be limited. While Nico Daryanto of PDI proposed Pangab Try Sutrisno as a candidate for vice president and Yahya Nasution of PDI proposed Mendagri Rudini as a candidate for president. The chairman of other party, PPP (United Development Party), Ismail Hassan Metareum stated that his party advocated Jenderal (retired) Soeharto as the next president.

While Guruh Soekarno (a PDI parliamentary candidate) himself stated that he is ready to become next president. He argued that it is impossible to wait for an ideal president, so he is always ready to become the next president if the people would like to elect him. On the other hand, Golkar (government party) has not yet nominated its candidate for the next president and vice president. Of course, the press covered the events at large. As the stock exchange of

candidates for presidency gets busier in the press, the more jokes emerge, mostly about the state elites. This also reflects a skilful press ability to make jokes or allusion about political succession.

In these cases, sometimes the press seeks a space to play in the stages of state, to become acquainted with differences and conflicts among Indonesian state elites. With giving space alternatively to Menko Polkam Sudomo, Mendagri Rudini, Menhankam Moerdani, Pangab Try Sutrisno, Jenderal (retired) Sumitro, Mensekneg Moerdiono, the President and other state elites, press has been an arena for state elites to talk about their views, interests and aspirations. The Press, thus, becomes an arena of disguised power struggle among the elites in the language of Demokrasi Pancasila. Based on this reality, one can also argue that the press has been dominated by state elites to maintain their hegemony.

Of course, to some degree the press has been an arena of state elites in their power struggle, while intelligentsia, labourers, students, NGO activists, middle class and common people become audiences in the wider arena, trying to take part by echoing their opinions about democracy and the current political situation.

The state elites play arbitrarily in the central arena, while the society echoes from the periphery to influence the state to move in the direction of economic-political democracy.

Therefore, like in a Puppet Show, the state elites are the main actors and the society as audiences. The power behind

the scene is possibilities and perhaps, God, while the press is its arena.

Well, in this paper, I should mention another case in connection with political succession. Among the press activists, in the recent years, there is a rumour that Abdurrahman Wahid has supported Moerdani indirectly to be the next president, an issue that Wahid himself has denied in Media and other newspapers. When this rumour circulated widely among the Islamic leaders and ulamas, there was a tendency for Islamic groups become more willing to renominate the incumbent president for the next term. The press activists generally tried to approach the state elites and intellectuals to obtain certain information in connection with the rumour. The Islamic leaders, as they told me, are very anxious about the issue.

Therefore, they support the incumbent president for the next term, while making movements and gestures to display their support. Consequently, for the press their dynamics is timely to be placed in the strategic pages. To some degree, many journalists saw this as reflecting re-emerging Islamic power, which is sensitive and significant for Indonesian society as a whole. So, the press tried to give considerable space to the dramatic Muslim dynamics recently, such as in the case of *Kebulatan Tekad* (a statement of Total Support for the incumbent president) by *Kelompok 37* (Group of 37), engineered by the *Alarnsyah Rátu Perwiranegara Group*.

Among the journalists, such as myself, there is a question why the Islamic groups hurriedly stated their support for the renomination of the incumbent president? To some degree, perhaps, they were anxious with Moerdani's supposed moves. To some extent, journalists expect that the Islamic groups want to display loyalty to get further political-economic concessions. Everything is in riddles.

From the above explanations, it is clear that the press is an arena of state elites in a disguised power struggle.

Ironic that when the political journalism in Indonesia tends to deteriorate, partly after the press had been pushed aside by state hegemony and conglomeration, it is precisely needed by the political elites in a disguised power struggle. Ironic that when the press is so powerless, it has been exploited by state elites to spread out their influence over the society, to strengthen their power vis-a-vis their rivals. To some degree, it has been caused by the absence of the mechanism of political succession, the absence of functional political institutions, the dysfunction of parliament and political parties.

It is possible, therefore, that the pluralism of opinion among state elites reported in the press reflects confusion, disorientation and discrepancy with each other, rather than by democracy. The difference of political view from state elites in the press is a reflection of conflicts of interest, not because there is openness. In such situation, it is certainly that the next Sidang Umum MPR (great session of Congress) will be the

main focus of press, it will determine whether or not there are to be major changes.

In connection with politics, there is another illustration. Several years ago, NGO activists talked about the Kedung Ombo Dam case in the Brussels Conference of INGI. They were warned seriously by the state elites. Following the Brussels event, in recent years the NGOs tend to be suspected by the state elites. The NGOs existence is in a complicated and dangerous situation. And the press activists are aware about it. So, journalists, including myself have attempted to defend NGOs. This is why we asked Prof Juwono Sudarsono, Dr T. Mulya Lubis, Dr Arief Budiman, Prof. Dawam Rahardjo, Arbi Sanit and other intellectuals to talk in our newspaper. They so often call for mutual understanding between state and NGOs. Hopefully, these intellectuals are influential and their view will be appreciated by state elites so that the NGOs are not pushed aside and banned in Indonesia.

Since the Brussels conference of INGI, I know that to some degree the state elites have suspected NGOs activists as a henchman and proxies of foreign powers. The NGOs activists tend to be suspected as delegitimising state elites abroad. Whereas, I know that they have no bad intentions. They just want to improve life in the political, economic, and socio-cultural sphere by- correcting the weaknesses of Indonesian government policies.

In the NGOs case, press activists would like to ask the Non-NGO intelligentsia to defend the NGOs existence. One should know that in Indonesia some of the campus scholars

dare to defend NGOs existence. In any experience, editorials of our newspapers and reports as well as analysis about the strategic role of NGOs are other ways in which support is expressed for NGOs. In this context, however, there are various interpretations among the state elites regarding our efforts.

Of course, our good intentions are not always effective. In fact, there are ministers who suspect the NGOs more, but there are also the neutral state elites, the sympathetic elites and so forth.

In this context, the campus scholars are the presses main bastion to articulate about the NGOs positive roles, even the truth, justice and so on. The press so often explains that the NGOs do not challenge the state power. In their practices, NGOs are complementary factors of the state in Indonesian development.

### **Press and SIUPP**

Talking about politics, one must take into account press freedom. In Indonesia nowadays, one of the manifestations of state hegemony is the curbing of press. In facing SIUPP regulations, press has lost its power. In recent years, the press, such as Media, has attempted to have restrictive legislation lifted. The struggle is shifting from SIUPP regulation to “Peraturan Menteri Penerangan (Menpen) No.1 tahun 1984” which facilitates the closure of a press publication. After the closure of Sinar Harapan daily, Prioritas daily and Monitor weekly, Media daily has attempted an all-out struggle to have

the Menpen regulation revoked. Our newspaper criticised strongly the Menpen regulation and was supported by the opinions of former journalists' opinion such as Mochtar Lubis (former chief editor of Indonesia Raya), Rosihan Anwar (former chief editor of Pedomana), Chalid Mawardi (former editor of Duta Masyarakat), and Aristides Katoppo (former director of Sinar Harapan). And their opinion were also supported by intellectuals such as Mulya Lubis, parliamentary members and so on. In Indonesia's coercive politics, actually, our newspaper has undertaken dangerous measures.

With regard to our criticism, state elites were extra-careful, especially the minister of information (Menpen). Immediately after meeting with the President, the minister echoed that Menpen regulation is needed and SIUPP regulations would be maintained.

The reaction of the minister of information was a cliched response of the state elite: very intractable and stagnant. This state elite still used an old weapon by saying that on behalf of Pancasila and UUD 1945, the press must be regulated. He said that the regulations are needed to prevent Marxism and other extreme views being expressed in the press. Whereas, in fact there is neither a leftist press nor another extreme press after the enforcement of Pancasila as the sole ideology.

It seems that the regulations are the state weapon to destroy the power of the press and society vis-a-vis the state, so the ability of the press to act as a control on government is not effective.

In this context, I want to remind you that in the case of the East Timorese issue, Berita Buana journalists have been the victimised for reporting about it. In highlighting the issue, they have been considered by the state elites as making "mistakes". And consequently, the management has fired the journalists concerned, most of them young professionals. Fortunately, Berita Ruana daily was not closed down by the government. But this event is a bad precedent. There is no guarantee of rule of law to journalists.

Of course, the above explanations are only a part of my reflections as a journalist. But, I want to remind you that in Indonesia the press is still in process. It's right that the press is not powerful. The press activists are part of a newly emerging middle class. Politically, the press is marginal, but for the middle class and well-educated people as well as common people, the press is needed as a reflection of the depression, frustration and other problems of the society.

Even among the state elites, the press is so needed to look at the aspirations and tendencies of Indonesia society and to communicate with the people.

The press like the labourer class is to some degree always up against state power. But the press also is an uneasy relationship with the society. Recently there is an example that the press could be closed down by the societal action (pengadilan masyarakat) such as the case of Monitor. The society and press do not enjoy the benefits of the rule of law. This is our bitter experience, but what is to be done? We have done anything and we will try again.



In this regard, it is so important to look back at the SIUPP (Press Law) and its side effects. This press regulation has brought about the newsmen who can not finance their publications. The regulation has conditioned the press to become a "capitalistic organ of Information". In regulation of Minister of Information (Peraturan Menpen) Number 01/1984, in article 10, verse (2) is mentioned that, "The legal form of the press publication is limited or incorporated company (PT) , foundation (yayasan), cooperative (koperasi) or a state enterprise (BUMN)..". But the capital power for the press publication is the main point to get a government licence to establish a press company. The publishers' idealism is not enough in such conditions, and on the contrary, the conglomerates and business people are so powerful to get a government licence for press publication. ,

Meanwhile the. article 19 verse 2 in the Press Law specify the minimum capital of the publication. And the Minister of Information Regulation number 214/Kep/Menpen/1984 has affirmed that everyone must enclose a statement must be approved by bank guarantees. The minimum venture capital amounted to Rp500 millions (US\$250,000)/ but in fact is usually not enough and is frequently higher than that amount due to red tape and other problems. For example, the "Editor" weekly magazine, according to the publisher, has spent Rp 2 billions (US\$2 millions) to 30 weekly editions.<sup>12</sup> In the case of a daily

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<sup>12</sup> Swasembada magazine, No.1/IV/1988, Jakarta

publication or a daily newspaper the cost is possibly higher than for weeklies.

It is logical, therefore, if a well-known journalist is worried about the expansion of conglomerates in the press world in Indonesia. To some extent, the press activists are worry and anxious that this expansion will sooner or later dominate the press world. The press activists are worry partly because they feel that their arena has been encroached upon by the outsiders. Moreover, they are anxious about the impact of the dynamics of non—press conglomerates on the development of press in the future. The capital in business has a dynamic and a dimension that is not always equivalent and comparable with that of the capital of press society. So, the expansion of conglomerates can become a threat to the newsmen power in the press world.<sup>13</sup>

With regard to this situation, my question is what are the side effects of the expansion of business in the press world to state-society relations in the future.

Meanwhile, the SIUPP (press law) have constrained the big press group from expanding. The regulation has distorted the development of press, for instance the so-called Anti-monopoly Regulation (Peraturan Anti-Monopoli dalam bisnis pers). The Anti-Monopoly Regulation is viewed by press analysts as an irrational pro-equality regulation. Consequently, the big publications like Kompas have entered non-press

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<sup>13</sup> Jakob Oetama, *Perspektif Pers Indonesia* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1987)

business such as shrimps business, hotels, bank, supermarket and so on. To some degree, the press activists come into the non-press enterprise as an insurance to provide employment if their SIUPP is revoked by the rulers.<sup>14</sup>

The press world and business world, therefore, are in a reciprocal relationship. Politically the press existence is uncertain, so it is quite understandable the giant press corporations like Kompas must diversify their soaring capital to non-press businesses.<sup>15</sup>

Indonesian history, since independence, has proved that press closures fluctuate in rhythm with the political situation. From 1951 up to 1965, there were 156 closures of national press. It is only in the period of 1955 and 1956 no closure of press publication. While in the other years, there are closures for instance in 1957, 32 closures, in 1958, 24 closures and the peak of the closures was in 1959 with 38 closures, in 1960, 34 closures and in 1965 there were five closures and a trend which continue in the further years.<sup>16</sup>

When the New Order was established, press censorship was continued by the state elites. For instance, in connection

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<sup>14</sup> Christianto Wibisono, "Siapa Raja Pers Indonesia?," *Swasembada Magazine*, No.1/IV/1988, Jakarta

<sup>15</sup> Ashadi Siregar, "Peranan Pers Dalam pembangunan: Mengartikulasikan Peranan massa Mengambang," in Akhmad Zaini Abar (Ed.), *Beberapa Aspek Pembangunan Orde Baru* (Solo: Ramadani, 1980).

<sup>16</sup> Edward D. Smith, *Sejarah Pembredelan Pers Indonesia*, translated by Atmakusumah, (Jakarta: Graffiti Pers, 1983).

with Malari events in 1974, the government closed down 11 press publications, namely *Harian Abadi*, *Harian Kami*, *Indonesia Raya*, *Pedoman*, *Nusantara*, *Mingguan Wenang*, *Mingguan Mahasiswa Indonesia*, *Majalah Pemuda Indonesia*, *Majalah Ekspres*, *Harian Suluh Berita dan Jakarta Times*.

And in 1978, at least seven newspapers were banned, but then they re-emerged after all of chief-editors signed the treaty stating that, “We will obey, fulfil and follow the stipulations as underlined in the regulations and law of Press Council (Dewan Pers), Code of Journalistic Ethics (Kode Etik Jurnalistik) and other stipulations regulated by the government to build the free and responsible press.”<sup>17</sup>

Even such situation, the press banning continue, *Sinar Harapan*, *Prioritas*, *Tempo*, *Editor*, and *Monitor* were closed down not so long ago. And the tragedy of three publications haunts every press activist nowadays.

The press closures reflect the strength of government vis-a-vis society. Sociologically, the government itself is dominated by the Javanese rulers. Their political culture has dominated the national landscape. Despite the fact that politics, the economy and technology has been changing in the New Order, the strength of Javanese culture has

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<sup>17</sup> Rosihan Anwar, “Kualitas Wartawan dan Profesi Jurnalistik”, in Herald Tidar and Petrus Suryadi (Eds.), *Persuratkabaran Indonesia Dalam era Informasi: Perkembangan, Permasalahan dan Perspektifnya*, (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1986)

remained. There is no fundamental change in Javanese culture.<sup>18</sup>

In this context, the endurance of Javanese culture is caused primarily by the fact that Indonesian was and is a peasant society.<sup>19</sup> It is right that to some extent that socio-cultural changes have taken place in Indonesian society, but these changes are limited to the cities, whereas the most people live in the peasant culture.

The peasant society has a lot of respect for the state apparatus, bureaucrats, political apparatchiks, military commanders and state elites. This is a reflection of the past relations between the palace (kraton) and society.<sup>20</sup> In such a situation, the state has dominated the society. There are parallels with the process of state conquest of societal politics, bureaucracy has a gigantic presence over the society. Whereas the press is part inherently of societal power.<sup>21</sup>

One can imagine how the press develops in such a situation! On the other hand, the state elites of the New Order

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<sup>18</sup> Fachry Ali, *Refleksi Paham Kekuasaan Jawa dalam Indonesia Modern*, (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1986)

<sup>19</sup> Allen M. Sievers, *The Mystical World of Indonesian Culture and Economic Development in Conflict* (Balitome and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1974).

<sup>20</sup> Robert van Niel, *Bangkitnya Elite Modern Indonesia* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1985).

<sup>21</sup> Karl D. Jackson and Lucian W. Pye (Eds.), *Political Power and Communications in Indonesia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1978).

tend to absorb all social forces, including the press. Therefore, it is almost impossible for other forces to exist.

The press activists are aware that the concentration of power in the hands of state elites is a reflection of Javanese rulership and this is not conducive to developing freedom and democracy. But the press is so volatile, weak and powerless to criticise formidably the current socio-political order.

On the other hand, the state elites are the most powerful forces and at the same time control the law. So, when the press criticises strongly the state elites, it was easy to accuse the press of being against the law. The word of state elite, the Father, of the Bapak, is law.<sup>22</sup>

In such situation, one should understand why the press, including Media Indonesia, is always acrobatic vis-a-vis the state. Accordingly, the press is acrobatic in day-to-day politics of the state elites and society in Indonesia.

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<sup>22</sup>. Yap Thiam Hien, "Law, State and Civil Society" in Arief Budiman (Ed.), *State and Civil society in Indonesia* (Australia: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990).