



## **JLPH:** Journal of Law, Politic and Humanities

E-ISSN: 2962-2816  
P-ISSN: 2747-1985<https://dinastires.org/JLPH> ✉ [dinasti.info@gmail.com](mailto:dinasti.info@gmail.com) ☎ +62 811 7404 455DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38035/jlph.v5i2>  
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# The Crawling Ban of the Labor Day Celebration in the Age of Indonesian Transition, 1966-1968

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**Abstract:** The dynamics of labor movements in Indonesia 1966 were shaped by the broader political and economic transformations that followed the 1965 coup attempt. The transition to Suharto's New Order regime brought about significant changes in labor relations, characterized by the suppression of independent unions and the prioritization of economic recovery over labor rights. This study used historical methods using archival primary sources and contemporaneous narratives. This research will reveal the dynamics of labor day in Indonesia in 1966-1988 as well as Indonesian politics in a historical perspective during. This research shows that Labor Day celebrations are embedded in Indonesian society. The new ruler did not easily erase the tradition of Labor Day celebrations. The abolition of Labor Day could happen after 2 years, which means 2 times the celebration was still held despite being under pressure. The celebration of Labor Day was eventually resumed illegally, but openly in 1995 (as a protest against the then regime). Post-authoritarian 1999 and since 2013, Labor Day has been declared a public national holiday by the Indonesian government.

**Keyword:** Labor Day, New Order, Labor Movement, Crawling Ban.

## INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of labor movements in Indonesia during the year 1966 were profoundly influenced by the political and economic transformations that followed the tumultuous events of the 1965 coup attempt. The transition from Sukarno's Guided Democracy to Suharto's New Order regime marked a significant shift in the governance of Indonesia, which had immediate repercussions for the labor force and the organization of labor unions. This period was characterized by a repressive political atmosphere, where the state sought to consolidate power and suppress dissent, including labor activism (Feith, 1968).

In the wake of the coup, the Indonesian government initiated a series of economic stabilization and rehabilitation programs aimed at restoring order and promoting growth. These programs were essential in transitioning the economy from a state-controlled model to one that allowed for greater market forces to dictate resource allocation. The changes included decontrol

measures and a reduction in bureaucratic oversight, which were intended to foster a more efficient economic environment. However, these economic reforms often came at the expense of labor rights, as the government prioritized economic recovery over the welfare of workers (Oei, 1968).

The labor landscape in 1966 was marked by a significant decline in the influence of independent labor unions. Under Sukarno, unions had enjoyed a degree of autonomy and were able to advocate for workers' rights. However, the Suharto regime viewed independent labor movements as potential threats to its authority and stability. Consequently, the government implemented policies that restricted the activities of labor organizations, leading to the establishment of state-controlled unions that were designed to suppress dissent and maintain control over the workforce. This shift effectively marginalized independent labor activism and limited workers' ability to negotiate for better wages and working conditions (Feith, 1968).

Moreover, the socio-economic conditions faced by workers during this period were dire. The rapid economic changes, while aimed at stabilization, often resulted in increased exploitation of labor. Many workers experienced low wages, long working hours, and poor working conditions as the government focused on attracting foreign investment and promoting industrial growth. The lack of effective labor rights protections during this time contributed to widespread dissatisfaction among the working class, which would later manifest in protests and strikes as workers sought to assert their rights (Oei, 1968).

The political repression of the Suharto regime further exacerbated the challenges faced by labor movements. The government's crackdown on dissent included violent measures against any form of opposition, including labor protests. This atmosphere of fear and repression stifled the ability of workers to organize and advocate for their rights, leading to a climate where labor activism was largely suppressed. The events of 1966 set a precedent for the subsequent years, where the struggle for labor rights would continue to be met with resistance from the state. Research on political policy during the new order has been found (Leifer, 1967; McLennan, 1966; Rajab, 2004; Suwirta, 2018; Wildan & Hidayat, 2019; Yery, 2000). we have not found specifically that discusses political turmoil from below. so, this study wants to discuss how political turmoil during the new order arose among the grassroots society.

## **METHOD**

The study used historical research methods, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The researchers gathered some primary sources National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, The Leiden University Library, and National Library of the Republic of Indonesia. After collecting data, the next step is to criticize and analyze data. The researchers wrote the historical narrative of The Crawling Ban of the Labor Day Celebration in the Age of Indonesian Transition, 1966-1968. Thus, this approach is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the labor movement in Indonesia at that time and how these events shaped social and political conditions in this country.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Early Crawling Ban**

In the middle of the night at the end of March 1966, Police Commissioner Awaloedin Djamin (1927-2019) was summoned to face Menpangak (Menteri/Panglima Angkatan Kepolisian), Minister/Commander of the Indonesian Police Soetjipto Judodihardjo (1917-1984, served 1965-1968) at his residence. At that time Awaloedin Djamin was busy being a committee for screening Polri members from PKI elements. He thought it was possible that he was summoned because of his screening duties. The guess was wrong. Menpangak Soetjipto informed Awaloedin that he had been appointed to head the Labor Department in the refined Dwikora (Dwi Komando Rakjat)/People's Twofold Command III Cabinet (Djamin, 1995).

Menpangak Soetjipto had just finished negotiating with Lt. General Soeharto, Dr. Johannes Leimena, Dr. Roeslan Abdulgani, Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, and Adam Malik. The negotiations related to which department was proportionally led by a Police officer and it was finally decided that the Labor Department would be in the spotlight. The choice of a police officer to lead this department was a maneuver to have the institution, which was labeled as problematic, held by non-civilians who were not from the Army. Since the SOBSI (Sentral organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia) versus SOKSI (Sentral Organisasi Karyawan Sosialis Indonesia, recently Sentral Organisasi Karyawan Swadiri Indonesia) rivalry in the early 1960s, it had become an open front between the communists and the Army.

Choosing an Army officer to be the Minister of Labor was feared to add sentiment to the existing rivalry, even though the Army forces as supporters of SOKSI won after the 1965 Gestok. Throughout the history of the Department of Labor from 1948-1966, from Minister S.K. Trimurti to Minister Sutomo Martopradoto, Awaloedin Djamin's selection marked the first non-civilian figure to head the department (Djamin, 1995). It was the beginning of a new era of militarization of the Indonesian bureaucracy that characterized the New Order. Minister Sutomo Martopradoto was the last minister (served 27 August 1964 - 22 February 1966) of the Department of Labor. He was arrested on charges of involvement in Gestok (Gerakan Satu Oktober) (Djamhari et al., 1986).

Frans Seda (1926-2009), then Minister of Plantations from the Indonesian Catholic Party, was appointed caretaker Minister of Labor before Awaloedin Djamin was appointed. One of Awaloedin's tasks in the department was to eradicate all SOBSI and PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, Indonesian Communist Party) influences. This had an impact on the vocabulary of 'labor', which had been labeled part of the problem, as well as disciplining it. The word 'employee' itself was also not chosen as the new nomenclature for the department. Neither the nomenclature of the defeated 'laborer' nor the 'employee' who emerged victorious from the G30S 1965 (Gerakan 30 September, The September 30th Movement) debacle was an option for the new minister.

The nomenclature 'Departemen Perburuhan/Labor Department' was then changed to 'Departemen Tenaga Kerja/Department of Manpower'. The word 'manpower' became a new mantra among dueling workers and employees. Likewise, when the new cabinet was announced on March 27, 1966, Awaloedin Djamin's name was broadcast as Minister of Manpower. Awaloedin said he was proud to be the first Minister of Labor and his inauguration as minister also raised his rank to Police Commissioner.

The May 1, 1966 celebration was a test for Minister Awaloedin after a month of being inaugurated. He saw that the celebration was a show of strength dominated by SOBSI and the PKI in the previous period (Prior, 2015). The idea to abolish and revoke the May 1 celebration was an option for Minister Awaloedin but was not executed in 1966. The Minister consulted with Lieutenant General Soeharto as Chairman of the Cabinet Presidium. The consultation decision resulted in the May 1, 1966 celebration still being held.

The organization of May 1, 1966 was approved by the authorities because they wanted to show the public that the embryo of the New Order was not anti-labor but anti-communist (Kroef, 1967). May 1 was seen as loaded with leftist values and symbols of the forces that were being wiped out at the time, such as SOBSI and the PKI, which could not possibly march again. The May 1, 1966 celebration was designed without the two disbanded organs. Gradually the May 1 celebrations were also distanced from President Sukarno as the supreme political ruler who was being stripped of his power. President Sukarno, who also gave speeches on May 1, 1946 and May 1, 1965, did not convey the mandate of May 1, 1966 directly.

In the capital city of Jakarta, the Central Committee for the May 1, 1966 Celebration divided the event into several groups. First, the Giant Meeting which was held on Saturday, April 30, 1966 at 08.00 in Lapangan Banteng (Banteng Square), Jakarta. Second, a pilgrimage to the

Heroes Cemetery in Kalibata and the Ampera Heroes Cemetery in Blok P Kebayoran. Third, an evening of entertainment and arts for workers and their families on Sunday, May 1, 1966. Fourth, the Production Parade on Monday afternoon, May 2, 1966 which started from Banteng Square with a route passing the State Palace. Fifth, Workers' Social Action from April 25 to May 17, 1966 ('Atjara Perajaan 1 Mei 1966 Di Ibukota', 1966).

The momentum of May 1, 1966 coincided with Asyura Day (10 Muharram 1386 H) and Sunday. The Central Committee of the Celebration asked all Muslim and Christian workers to pray for the struggle of the Indonesian people and workers in particular to achieve a just and prosperous society with the Pancasila ('Seruan Panitia Pusat Perajaan 1 Mei 1966 Kepada Buruh Jang Beragama Islam Dan Kristen', 1966). The Giant Meeting at Banteng Square was organized by the Joint Secretariat of the Indonesian Trade Unions under the auspices of the Golkar (Golongan Karja) Joint Secretariat (Djamin, 1995). Minister of Labor Awaloedin Djamin, Minister of the National Front Achmad Sjaichu (1921-1995) and Chairman II of the PBNU (Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama/Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board), and Menpangak Soetjipto Judodihardjo attended the event.

President Sukarno was not present as he had been at the May 1 Giant Meeting a year earlier at Istora 'Bung Karno' Senayan. President Sukarno's presence was only represented by a few pieces of paper from the May 1 written speech read out by Minister Awaloedin. It is not clear what reasons or factors caused the President to be unable to attend from the government side. The President advised the workers not to be divided and asked them to continue to defend Pancasila (The Five Principles of Indonesia) which is the basis and philosophy of the state. Pancasila unites all elements of the Indonesian people from various groups, including those who are leftist according to the President in the sense of the word progressive revolutionary anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, pro-independence, and pro-socialism. The President saw that the challenge being faced at that time was to increase the resilience of the revolution, especially in the field of production ('Pres. Sukarno Pada Hari Buruh: Pertahankan Terus Negara Pantjasila', 1966).

The resolutions produced by the General Meeting at Lapangan Banteng included calling for the purge of the Supreme Advisory Council (DPA, Dewan Pertimbangan Agung), the Temporary People's Consultative Assembly (MPRS, Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara), and the Gotong Rojong People's Representative Council (DPR GR, Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Gotong Rojong) from PKI elements (Azed, 2017); Replacing these elements with Ampera (Amanat Penderitaan Rakyat, Mandate of People's Suffering)-minded figures in high state institutions; Requesting that the March 11 Order be maintained; and the termination of diplomatic relations with the PRC.

The resolution of the May 1, 1966 giant meeting was signed by 10 representatives of Sarbumusi (Serikat Buruh Muslimin Indonesia), Gasbiindo (Gabungan Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia), Gobsi Indonesia (Gabungan Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia), KBIM (Kongres Buruh Islam Merdeka), KBKI (Konsentrasi Buruh Kerakjatan Indonesia), Kubu Pantjasila, SOKSI, Kespki, Sob Pantjasila, and KBM (Kesatuan Buruh Marhaenis). The most prominent resolution was regarding the Presidential Order dated March 11, 1966 (Supersemar, Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret) to the Minister / Army to be maintained until the implementation of the upcoming General Election. This was with the alibi "for the sake of achieving political stabilization, security and safety of the revolution and achieving guaranteed authority and leadership of Bung Karno's PBR (Pemimpin Besar Revolusi, The Supreme leader of Revolution).

The representative of Sarbumusi, as one of the winners of the rivalry with SOBSI after Gestok, also gave a message to stop the Politik Mercusuar (Soekarno's Political Branding). The values of internationalism and international labor solidarity had been completely negated in the celebration of May 1, 1966. President Sukarno's speech had a different tone than the speeches

of other leaders. Sukarno used the momentum of May 1 to appeal to the masses of workers and the general public to remain united with all existing streams, including the left, on the basis of Pancasila which protects all existing elements.

The speeches of other figures used May 1 as a campaign to suppress the left movement and speak out against President Sukarno's political stance, as shown in the May 1 mandate from General Soeharto to Minister Sjaichu. Desukarnoization had begun since President Sukarno was still in power and alive, it was not only after his death that Desukarnoization was carried out (Hasudungan, 2019). The ambivalence of the non-Sukarno elites showed a dualism of attitude on May 1. On the one hand, they celebrate, but on the other hand, they have an agenda that resists the celebration of May 1 because they are allergic to leftist movements.

This ambivalence was shown by Brigadier General Soerjo Soempeno, Pangdam (Panglima Daerah Militer, Military District Commander) VII Diponegoro and Regional War Ruler of Central Java / Yogyakarta Special Region in his May 1, 1966 mandate. The military ruler defined that the Gestapu (Gerakan September 30) / G30S/PKI Prologue made May 1 an arena to expand its politics and mature the militancy of its cadres. He convicted that the workers' victory on May 1 belonged only to the atheist Gestapu faction by accentuating the class struggle which deliberately divided and pitted the potential workers against each other. This clearly undermined Pancasila for him. In the evening, a May 1, 1966 reception was held at Hotel Indonesia, which was attended by Vice of Prime Minister (Waperdam, Wakil Perdana Menteri) Adam Malik. A place that was too luxurious, paradoxical, and had never been used to organize a May 1 reception night.

### **Banning and Recelebrating the May Day Celebration**

Minister of Manpower Awaloedin Djamin after the celebration of May 1 suggested that May 1 was not suitable to be the National Labor Day. May 1 as World Victory Day was deliberately denied with the replacement of the National Labor Day discourse. For Minister Awaloedin, May 1 had been misused by SOBSI and the PKI. This is the real reason that a National Labor Day is a necessity.

The Minister of Manpower himself has prepared all government provisions to revoke and abolish May 1 as Labor Day. The Minister of Manpower together with the all-leftist Trade Unions researched the most suitable historical facts as the basis for the National Labor Day. The Minister of Manpower and the team traced historical days during the colonial period but admitted that they did not find the expected results. Despite the absence of a 'National Labor Day' to replace the 'World Workers' Victory Day,' the government's provision to revoke May 1 still came out (Djamin, 1995). The revocation went through two stages of legal administration. First, Acting President General Soeharto on December 16, 1967 issued Presidential Decree No. 251 of 1967 on Holidays, in which May 1 was included. The 1 May holiday was still recognized although it would not last long. Second, before May 1, 1968, namely on April 18, 1968 President General Soeharto issued Presidential Decree No. 148 of 1968 concerning Amendments to Presidential Decree of the Republic of Indonesia No. 251 of 1967 concerning Holidays, where May 1 as a labor day was removed as a national holiday.

The President considered in his main consideration that "May 1 as a holiday for workers is no longer in accordance with current developments." This was added by Drs. Dwipayana, Head of Mass Media Affairs of Presidential Information, "May 1st Labor Day is always associated with Marxism/Leninism whose activities for its implementation have been banned by the MPRS session. That is why perhaps the President issued the decree. May 1 Labor Day is also politically-psychologically beneficial to the PKI, which is now trying to regain its strength (Syafitri, 2019).

The abolition of May 1 as a national holiday immediately led to the elimination of a national labor day in Indonesia. The question mark is why the abolition was only carried out in 1968

and not a year earlier, 1967. The facts show that the revocation of the Presidential mandate by the MPRS to Sukarno took place in March 1967. The removal of President Sukarno did not immediately erase all things that had been in effect in his time, such as May 1, easily.

On May 1, 1967 there was no general media coverage of the Labor Day celebrations even though it was a holiday. After a year as Acting President in 1968, General Soeharto had more authority to abolish May 1. This was in accordance with the stage of removing and completely abolishing the celebration of May 1 after the 1966 Labor Day could be celebrated with full distinction from the previous period and the 1967 Labor Day was quiet as a holiday without celebration.

So ended the celebration of May 1 during the first 2 decades of the young republic that had faithfully guarded the spirit of social justice discourse in Indonesia. May 1 became a banned activity under the New Order regime. May 1 celebrations had the same fate as the Chinese Lunar New Year (Imlek) and International Women's Day in the eyes of the authorities. There were no more Satu Mei celebrations until the end and fall of the New Order regime (1995-1999) (Hariyanto, 2018). Later the New Order government created Indonesian Workers' Day (Harpekindo) with Presidential Decree Number 9 of 1991. Harpekindo or National Workers' Day was not designated as a holiday, which was different from Labor Day before the New Order (Pauker, 1967). National Workers' Day refers to the history of the post-G30S fusion of labor unions that was embodied in the birth of the FBSI (Federasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia, All Indonesian Federation of Labor). The New Order government's National Workers' Day was not popular for the public.

World Labor Day was celebrated again as a resistance against Soeharto's New Order regime in Semarang and Jakarta on May 1, 1995. The mass action was carried out by elements of labor and students. Security forces such as the police and the Army moved violently with the arrest of protesters to disperse the action that was labeled communist in the narrative of the authorities (Hariyanto, 2018). The May 1 action became a symbol of resistance against the increasingly corrupt authorities and finally fell in 1998.

During the national political transition led by President B.J. Habibie (1936-2019, served 1998-1999), World Labor Day May 1, 1999 was celebrated with Reformation euphoria. The Workers' Day, which was banned in the previous period for decades, could be held again as part of democratization and public participation, especially the mass of workers. If President General Soeharto revoked May 1 as a holiday and banned it, the political reality in the Reformation era showed that President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (served 2004-2014), a retired Army General, declared May 1 International Labor Day a national holiday. This was contained in Presidential Decree Number 24 of 2013 concerning the Determination of May 1 as a Holiday, which took effect on July 29, 2013.

## CONCLUSION

From 1966 to 1968, Indonesia was marked by significant political and social transformations, particularly surrounding the labor movement and the broader implications of the New Order regime. The events of May Day, or Hari Buruh, during this time serve as a critical lens through which to understand the dynamics of labor relations and the state's approach to civil society. The New Order, established under President Soeharto, sought to consolidate power and suppress dissent, which had profound implications for labor organizations and workers' rights. In conclusion, the Crawling Ban of the Labor Day Celebration in the Age of Indonesian Transition from 1966 to 1968 reflects a broader struggle between labor rights and state control in Indonesia. The government's efforts to co-opt labor movements and suppress dissent illustrate the lengths to which the regime would go to maintain power and promote its vision of national development. Understanding this historical context is essential for comprehending

the current state of labor relations in Indonesia and the ongoing challenges faced by workers in their pursuit of rights and recognition.

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