

Beyond Factory Walls: Transformation of Labor Movement Through Community Unionism in Bekasi Regency¹

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Abstract

This study explores the practice of Community Unionism (CU) as a response to the challenges that member of labor union faced in the area of Mega Regency Housing complex in Bekasi Regency, Indonesia. CU emerges as an alternative strategy that expands the role of union member from mere workers in the workplace to be part of the wider community. CU views workers are not only as economic entities, but also social ones, which in return can strengthen social solidarity among union member and political bargaining power. This research uses qualitative methods, including literature review, in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, to answer a question and analyze how CUs operate in one of housing complexes populated by union members in the region. The results show that CUs are able to improve the bargaining position of workers while providing significant benefits to local communities. This study contributes to the Indonesian labor literature by filling the knowledge gap regarding CUs in Indonesia, as well as offering insight into the potential of CUs in strengthening the labor movement and promoting social justice at the community level. The research emphasizes the importance of community-based approaches in contemporary labor movement strategies to achieve broader social transformation.

Keywords: *Community Unionism; Labor Movement; Political Participation; Social Solidarity.*

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Introduction

The labor movement in Indonesia remains a focal point for academic inquiry, with many studies addressing its challenges, such as fragmentation (Habibi, 2013) and limited political influence (Caraway et al., 2014; Savirani, 2015; 2022). Amid these issues, some research shifts attention to community unionism (CU), a strategy that fosters collaboration between labor unions and communities to strengthen solidarity in pursuit of social justice (Tattersall, 2008). Scholars such as Tufts (1998), Ellem (2003), Cockfield et al. (2009), and Wills and Simms (2004) underscore CU's role in enhancing unions' leverage over employers and the state, while also benefiting communities by increasing political participation and improving access to social services.

In Indonesia, CU-relevant practices have emerged, notably the “Buruh Go Politics” (BGP) and Jamkes Watch (JW) initiatives in Bekasi Regency. The BGP initiative, spearheaded by the FSPMI labor union, aims to train and support union members to engage in electoral politics, enabling them to run for legislative and executive positions to amplify workers' voices in policymaking. On the other hand, JW, established by KSPI, is dedicated to monitoring and advocating for fair implementation of health insurance policies, ensuring marginalized communities can access their rights to healthcare services. Although not explicitly framed as CU, previous research has explored these initiatives. Savirani (2015) and Saleh (2017) examine BGP from an electoral perspective, while Djani et al. (2017) and Herwinanda (2016) analyze JW's organizational



dynamics. This article aims to advance the understanding of CU by examining its application among labor unions in Mega Regency Housing, Bekasi Regency, one of the largest housing complexes in Bekasi.

Employing a qualitative approach, this study integrates literature reviews and case studies to trace CU practices, assess their alignment with CU theory, and evaluate their impact on the labor movement and democratic society. Primary data is collected through in-depth interviews with labor activists and field observations, complemented by secondary literature on CU practices in Bekasi Regency. The article seeks to: (1) reinterpret BGP and JW initiatives as CU practices, and (2) introduce CU as a conceptual framework within Indonesian labor studies.

Community Unionism

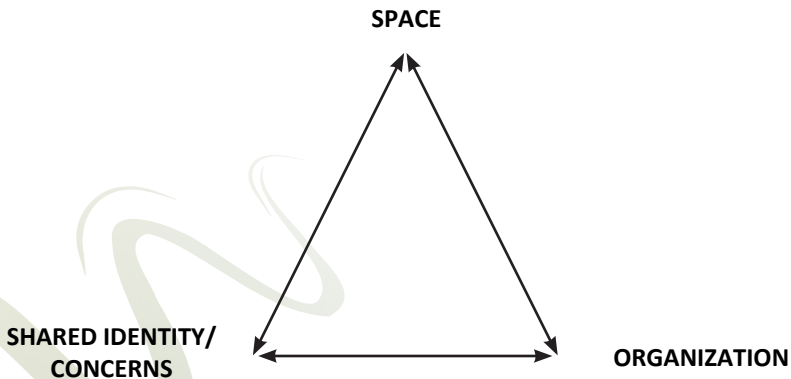
The concept of Community Unionism (CU) originated in the 1960s to describe student-led organizing in economically disadvantaged urban neighborhoods in the United States (Tufts, 2017). Over time, geographers adopted the term to analyze coalitions between labor unions and communities within labor geography (Banks, 1991; Tufts, 1998; Tattersall, 2010). Tattersall (2010) defines CU as a spatially-focused organizing strategy that mobilizes communities beyond workplace concerns, is identity-driven, and fosters coalitions between unions and non-labor groups. Key features of CU include its emphasis on activities outside the workplace and its pursuit of shared goals among unions, labor activists, and communities (Cockfield et al., 2009).



CU gained prominence in the 1990s amid a global labor union crisis (Tattersall, 2008). Scholars such as Banks (1991) and Brecher and Costello (1990) describe CU as encompassing diverse coalition forms. Its growth reflects unions' strategic response to declining membership, diminishing political influence, and weakening pro-labor regulations (Baccaro et al., 2003; Wills, 2001).

The significance of CU lies in its ability to transcend workplace-centric perspectives by incorporating broader community concerns (Duncan, 2015). However, interpretations of CU remain contested. While some scholars view CU as a spatial, identity-based strategy operating beyond workplaces, others see it as an alliance or coalition that fosters novel organizational forms (Tattersall, 2008; Tufts, 2017).

Figure 1: The Three Elements of Community



Source: Tattersall (2008)



Tattersall (2008) posits that spatial, shared identity, and organizational perspectives on Community Unionism (CU) are complementary rather than competing. This research adopts the core attributes of these three dimensions as its analytical framework.

Spatially, CUs are shaped by external environments and geographic contexts. Tattersall (2008: 425) identifies three spatial variables critical to CU success: the structure of political opportunities, such as electoral cycles and state openness, which refers to a government's willingness to engage with its citizens and provide opportunities for their influence in political processes; local participation spaces that serve as platforms for member engagement, fostering solidarity and decision-making; and mobilization capacity, which

entails the ability to scale actions, allocate resources, and sustain organization across multiple levels.

On the aspect of shared identity, CUs rely on a unifying relationship between unions and communities, grounded in shared concerns (Tattersall, 2008: 422-423). This relationship is supported by three variables: alignment with movement goals, capacity to foster political and member participation, and a social framework that influences public opinion and advances a transformative agenda.

Organizationally, CU effectiveness depends on how unions and communities structure their engagement. Four indicators define this aspect: organizational capacity and culture, coalition structure, decision-making processes, and the presence of bridge builders. Capacity and culture are reflected in leadership,



organizational style, funding, and communication (Tattersall, 2008: 420). Coalition structures involve staffing, membership openness, and external relationships that balance solidarity with autonomy. Decision-making success hinges on shared organizational ownership, fostered by transparent structures and informal trust. Bridge builders play a pivotal role in navigating cultural differences, managing conflicts, and operating across scales (Tattersall, 2008: 422).

Tattersall (2008: 420) further identifies four dimensions of CU success³: political outcomes, political climate change, external relationships, and internal capacity. A CU succeeds when it achieves political victories such as policy reforms or support for worker-friendly candidates, shifts public discourse to

3 Success here is not defined as outcomes, but as the achievement of a relentless effort.

influence policy and action, maintains alliances with external organizations to expand its network and influence, and strengthens internal capacity by building member skills, enhancing structures, and attracting new participants.

In the context of Mega Regency Housing, Bekasi Regency, this research applies these indicators to analyze how the labor movement incorporates CU principles and contributes to the transformation of the local labor movement. The subsequent section examines CU practices in Bekasi Regency, contextualizing them within the CU framework.

Tracking the Practice of Community Unionism in Bekasi Regency

Community Unionism (CU) serves as a conceptual framework and an actionable strategy, that



is not just theoretical but can be practically implemented through specific actions, within the labor movement. In Bekasi Regency, the principles of CU have been operationalized through initiatives such as *Buruh Go Politics* (BGP) and *Jamkes Watch* (JW). The BGP initiative, led by the FSPMI labor union, seeks to empower cadres to actively participate in electoral politics, both as legislative and executive candidates. Meanwhile, JW, initiated by KSPI, focuses on advocating for equitable access to health insurance for marginalized communities.

This section examines the practices of BGP and JW through the CU lens. The analysis of BGP draws primarily from Savirani's works, "Bekasi, West Java: Buruh Go Politics and the Weakening of Patronage Politics" (2015) in *Politik Uang di Indonesia: Patronase dan Klientelisme pada Pemilu Legislatif 2014*,

and "Unions and Elections: The Case of the Metal Workers Union in Election in Bekasi, West Java" (2022) in *The Jokowi-Prabowo Elections 2.0*, which comprehensively explore the involvement of FSPMI in electoral politics. Additionally, Saleh's (2017) study, "Labor Movement and Political Experimentation: Case Study of the Indonesian Metal Workers Union Federation [FSPMI] in Bekasi Regency", serves as a critical reference for understanding BGP.

For JW, the discussion is grounded in Herwinanda's (2016) study, "BPJS-K Policy Advocacy by Jamkes Watch Bekasi Regency", and Djani et al.'s (2017) research, "Claiming Welfare State: Universal Health Insurance and Labor Movement: Case Study of Jamkes Watch in Bekasi, West Java". These works provide detailed insights into JW's advocacy for universal health insurance



and its broader implications for labor movements. Together, these studies contextualize the CU framework within the labor movement practices of Bekasi Regency, offering a comprehensive understanding of how CU operates in this specific context.

1. Buruh Go Politics

Buruh Go Politics (BGP) emerged from the awareness among the FSPMI leadership in Bekasi Regency about the need for political involvement to advocate for labor rights as citizens. The initiative was conceived by the FSPMI Branch Council and later approved by the FSPMI National Board (Saleh, 2017: 12). The decision to engage in electoral politics stemmed from both internal and external factors (Savirani, 2022: 129-30). Internally, unions recognized their potential electoral influence. Externally, negative experiences

with politicians who failed to fulfill promises, government restrictions on demonstrations, and regulatory control over wage negotiations spurred unions to seek political involvement.

Although FSPMI does not have its own political party, it participates in electoral politics through a strategy referred to as political diaspora (Saleh, 2017: 12) or *zigzag politics* (Savirani, 2015: 254). This strategy involves nominating union members through existing political parties without providing financial incentives, thereby countering the practice of money politics. When selecting legislative candidates, FSPMI adheres to five principles: organizational experience, equitable distribution of cadres, union representation, a bottom-up process, and politics without money (Savirani, 2015: 252-3).



For the 2019 elections, FSPMI revised its political strategy by aligning exclusively with the Gerindra Party, following a challenging history of partnerships with multiple political parties (Savirani, 2022: 136). Gerindra was chosen because of its relatively weak voter base in Bekasi, enabling workers to exercise greater bargaining power with the party.

During the election, BGP volunteers played a crucial role in mobilizing votes at the factory and regional levels (Savirani, 2015: 267-8). These volunteers formed teams to support labor candidates across administrative units such as sub-districts, villages, housing complexes, and local neighborhoods (Saleh, 2017: 22; Savirani, 2015: 262; Savirani, 2022: 133). Most team members were FSPMI affiliates, though individuals from other labor organizations and community groups, such

as the KSN (Konfederasi Serikat Nasional) and Kasbi (Kongres Aliansi Serikat Buruh Indonesia), also participated (Saleh, 2017: 22). Volunteers were not compensated but financed their activities through *saweran* (community fundraising) and the sale of merchandise (Savirani, 2022: 133).

The strategy unfolded in three phases: pre-voting, voting, and post-voting (Savirani, 2015: 267-8). The pre-voting phase focused on securing worker loyalty at the factory level and reaching non-labor voters in the community. In the voting phase, volunteers monitored election proceedings, receiving training on election observation from the Trade Union Rights Center (TURC) and Fisipol UGM (Savirani, 2015: 266). In the post-voting phase, volunteers supervised the vote counting and recapitulation

process at various levels, from the village to the regional Election Commission office (Savirani, 2015: 267-8).

Through this strategy, BGP succeeded in mobilizing worker votes and achieved significant electoral victories, including the election of two BGP candidates, Nurdin and Nyumarno, to the Bekasi Regency Parliament in 2014, and Obon Tabroni to the House of Representatives in 2019 (Savirani, 2022: 130-133; 136-139).

From a CU perspective, several critical aspects of BGP are noteworthy. *First*, BGP fosters identity and solidarity by encouraging unions to build a political identity among workers and the broader public. The movement emphasizes that workers' struggles extend beyond workplace issues to encompass broader citizen rights. This approach mobilizes solidarity

not only among workers but also bridges connections with the wider community to address shared concerns.

Second, BGP's active participation in electoral politics demonstrates how unions can transcend their traditional role and emerge as significant political actors. The initiative proves that workers can engage in electoral politics not only as voters but also as candidates, advocating for workers' interests at the political level.

Third, despite lacking a formal coalition structure with community organizations, BGP effectively collaborates with NGOs and other groups. By connecting with farming communities, fishermen (Saleh, 2017: 22), and other social organizations, BGP broadens its network and influence. This underscores that labor



power is often strengthened through external partnerships and alliances beyond industrial contexts.

Fourth, BGP's commitment to combating money politics and elite influence stands as one of its defining characteristics. By refraining from providing financial incentives to political parties, BGP maintains its independence from elite-driven political power, positioning itself as a movement based on collective interests, not financial or political elite agendas. This illustrates that BGP is not merely a tool for elite political maneuvering but a transformative force advocating for workers' rights.

In conclusion, BGP exemplifies a deeper, more expansive approach to labor movement politics, seeking to create a more inclusive political space for workers. Through a combination of union identity,

broad community engagement, and resistance to corrupt political practices, BGP stands as a clear example of how labor unions can play a pivotal role in local political contexts.

2. Jamkes Watch

JW is an initiative that emerged in response to the need for equitable access to health, especially for the poor and marginalized groups (Djani et al, 2017: 22). Like the BGP, the JW was born from a paradigm shift in the labor movement towards broader social issues, including social security and health insurance (Djani et al, 2017: 21). The paradigm shift was driven by the success of the labor movement involved in the Social Security Action Committee (KAJS) together with other civil society movements, in pushing for the formation of Law (UU) Number 24 of 2011 concerning the Social Security

Organizing Agency or BPJS Law. This transformation expanded the scope of the labor struggle from the labor aspect to the public welfare aspect by placing health issues as an integral part of the workers' struggle.

JW is a continuation of the KAJIS struggle and a *diaspora* of BPJS Watch⁴ (Djani et al, 2017: 21). Institutionally, JW is part of KSPI, one of the largest labor confederations in Indonesia (Djani et al, 2017: 21). Among the KSPI leadership, Said Iqbal, who in 2010 served as the presidium of KAJIS, played an important role in the formation of JW. This reflects the indirect relationship between KAJIS and JW (Herwinanda, 2016: 51) as well as the moral responsibility of KSPI, as part of KAJIS, towards the implementation of social security.

4 According to Djani et al., BPJS Watch is an institution formed by KAJIS to supervise the implementation of the SJSN Law and BPJS Law.

JW's main mission is to ensure health rights for workers, workers' families, the poor, and marginalized groups through the BPJS Health (BPJS-K) scheme. They also oversee the management of BPJS-K, ensure the payment of contributions by local governments and companies, and ensure that health facilities serve patients properly. The birth of JWs was aimed at demanding effective implementation of universal health coverage, building solidarity between workers and the poor and marginalized, and improving the image of the labor movement in society (Djani et al, 2017: 23).

JW membership is referred to as volunteers recruited from KSPI members and the general public. JW adopts the FSPMI organizational structure with four areas: education, advocacy, organization, and media and publication. The organizational



structure is loose and relies on the solidarity and collectivity of volunteers. At the beginning of its establishment, each labor union in KSPI was required to send 20 of its members to volunteer (Djani et al, 2017: 23).

To achieve its mission and goals, JW has two principles, namely preventive and responsive, which are then translated into a socialization strategy and a mentoring and advocacy strategy. Socialization is conducted to increase people's understanding of social security programs and their health rights. Socialization methods include campaigns, social media, and direct socialization (Herwinanda, 2016: 67).

Meanwhile, assistance and advocacy strategies are carried out to resolve obstacles in the field, such as: assisting with administrative arrangements; ensuring health facilities serve patients well; negotiating with

health facilities for patients without BPJS; and advocating to various parties, including utilizing labor networks in the Regional Government and DPRD (Djani et al, 2017: 27). The assistance strategy has two models, namely assistance through call centers and direct assistance at health facilities (Djani et al, 2017: 24-5).

Initially, JW volunteers had no experience in health advocacy. The mentoring model applied was sporadic and spontaneous, with no standard guidelines. In the process, volunteers learned more as they went along, adjusting to the conditions and needs faced in the field (Djani et al, 2017: 23-4). Over time, JW created the Jamkes Watch Volunteer Handbook as a guide for volunteers (Herwinanda, 2016: 77).

There is a difference of opinion among volunteers regarding rewards or donations

from patients (Djani et al, 2017: 25). Some argue that it should be banned altogether, while others argue that donations are acceptable as long as they are submitted to the organization's treasury for operational purposes. In terms of funding sources, JW does not rely on union dues. Most volunteers use personal funds to support their mentoring activities. Volunteers who are still working as laborers allocate a portion of their income from the factory. Meanwhile, non-labor volunteers usually have a side business that they use as an additional source of funding.

JW is an example of class solidarity building among workers and communities. With a focus on socialization and mentoring, JW volunteers actively fight for people's rights regarding social security and health. Their actions reflect the spirit of *rights claiming* (Djani et al, 2017: 30)

that underlies the movement, where they fight for better access to health services and social security for everyone. The initiative taken by the JWs in Bekasi has the potential to develop into a broader social movement, which not only results in changes in access to health services, but also gains greater political support from different layers of society.

There are several parallels that can be drawn from the CU in looking at JW. *First*, JW operates in the context of local spaces in Bekasi, and other cities (Herwinanda, 2016: 78), with a focus on monitoring the implementation of health insurance programs and social services. This is in line with the space-based organizing strategy in CU that emphasizes community mobilization beyond workplace issues. On the spatial aspect, JW can be seen from three main dimensions: political opportunity



structure, local participation space, and mobilization capacity. In the political opportunity structure dimension, JW sees opportunities in the suboptimal implementation of the Social Security Law and BPJS. Although JWs face obstacles such as lack of resources and advocacy capacity that needs to be improved, they see opportunities to conduct oversight of the program and fight for public health rights.

In the local participation space, JWs actively assist patients at health facilities, conduct socialization and mentoring in the community, and utilize social media to disseminate information and increase public understanding. Meanwhile, in the dimension of mobilization capacity, JW can utilize multi-scale volunteer

networks for the benefit of the movement, including through existing networks in the Regional Government and DPRD.

Second, JW is driven by a common interest to ensure better access to health for workers, the poor and marginalized groups. JWs are based on a shared identity and unrest between labor unions and the poor/marginalized as “*little people*” for fair and equitable access to health. Therefore, JW indicates the beginning of the formation of class solidarity (Djani et al, 2017: 34). In addition, in terms of common interests, JW responded to people's difficulties in accessing quality health services, injustice in the health insurance system, and lack of control in the system.

Third, the JW is a clear example of cooperation between labor unions and non-labor groups in forming a coalition for a common cause. The JW



involves KSPI members and the general public as volunteers, creating a close relationship between the union and the community in an effort to ensure the right to health for all. This reflects one of the key aspects of CU, which is coalitions between labor unions and non-labor groups to achieve broader social and political change.

Through the CU, we can see how the BGP and JW in Bekasi Regency have successfully expanded the role of labor unions in society more broadly. The BGP is not only a transformative agent in electoral politics, but also forms identity and solidarity among workers and fights for democratic principles and social justice. On the other hand, JW shows how cooperation between labor unions and other community groups can fight for more equitable access to health for everyone, especially the poor and marginalized groups.

By adopting strategies of space-based organizing, building collective unrest, and forming coalitions between labor unions and non-labor groups, BGP and JW became living examples of CUs fighting for social and political rights for all. Their actions emphasize the important role of labor unions in shaping a more just and equitable society. Thus, BGP and JW not only represent the aspirations of workers in Bekasi Regency, but also serve as inspiration for movements elsewhere in fighting for collective interests and shared prosperity.

Next, the author will present how the two initiatives, BGP and JW, operate in a more specific space, namely Mega Regency Housing. By directing the analysis at this more detailed scale, we can understand more deeply how CU practices in the neighborhood.



Community Unionism in Mega Regency Housing

Mega Regency Housing (Perum Mercy) is one of the largest labor-based housing estates in Bekasi Regency⁵. Located in Serang Baru Sub-district, Perum Mercy has a population of around 9,600 - 11,000 households, mostly consisting of workers and their families. This demographic condition makes Mega Regency Housing a strategic location for the labor movement, both in terms of quantity and organizing potential.

In its management, Perum Mercy is faced with unique challenges due to its administrative structure that is divided between two villages, namely Sukaragam Village and Sukasari Village. Perum Mercy consists of 16 Rukun Warga

(RW) spread across the two villages. Five RWs, namely blocks A, C1, C2, H, and P, are located in Sukasari Village, while the other eleven blocks are located in Sukaragam Village. This creates complexity in institutional management, especially in terms of establishing a hierarchical relationship with the local government.

In response to this, the RW Chairman Association was formed as a coordination forum between RW heads who then became representatives of the housing community and became important stakeholders at the village level. This organization is chaired by the RW head of Block D, CC, who is a non-activist laborer⁶. Although dominated by laborers, each block has RW heads with diverse occupational backgrounds, reflecting the social and economic complexity of the Perum Mercy community.

5 Interview, Mr. S, labor activist and community leader in Perum Mercy, July 25, 2023.

6 Not in a labor union

In addition to the RW Chairman Association, Perum Mercy also has a TPU & Ambulance Mercy organization⁷ which plays an important role in taking care of all death-related needs and managing health needs by providing ambulance services for housing residents. TPU & Ambulance Mercy is chaired by the head of RW Block C2, Mr. S, who is also the head of BGP at Perum Mercy and a JW volunteer. In its organizational structure, the organization has six administrators who are not only from the labor group.

In its social structure, Perum Mercy has a number of important figures, some of whom have a background as labor activists or labor union members, which strengthens the sense of collective identity in the housing estate. In addition, it is also a

7 Organizational documents of RW Mercy Association and TPU & Ambulance Mercy.

significant local political arena with a very large population. In the 2024 legislative elections, several blocks in Perum Mercy had legislative candidates from various political parties, both from the Labor Party and other parties. Some of the residents of Perum Mercy who became legislative candidates from the Labor Party ran for various positions, such as the Bekasi Regency Parliament, West Java Provincial Parliament, House of Representatives or the DPR RI and Regional Representative Council or the DPD RI.

Thus, Mega Regency Housing is not just a place for workers to live, but also a complex arena of local political dynamics. This makes it an interesting research location to examine the working practices of the CU in the relationship between the labor union and the community there. This section will discuss how the CU works in Perum



Mega Regency. In addition, it will also discuss the dynamics of the relationship between the RW Head Association and the TPU & Ambulance Mercy organization with the labor groups in the housing complex.

1. BGP Mega Regency Housing⁸

As mentioned in the next section, BGP, which started in 2014 legislative election, carries out a vote mobilization strategy at the regional level by forming a team of volunteers based in administrative units, including housing. In Perum Mercy, the BGP volunteer team was formed in 2013 and became the first BGP community and has become an integral part of the Perum Mercy community.

8 Most of the data presented in this section, the author obtained when participating in the Mercy BGP Consolidation activity on July 29, 2023, which took place at the Block L Community Hall of Perum Mercy. This activity was attended by all Labor Party candidates, from all levels, who live in Perum Mercy.

In addition to the interests of labor electoral politics, BGP Perum Mercy (hereinafter referred to as BGP Mercy) was also formed as a forum for cross-union labor communication and friendship to facilitate the exchange of information about community affairs in housing.

Structurally, BGP Mercy has a core management structure consisting of the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, Public Relations, and two Field Coordinators. The core management is tasked with coordinating voter mobilization strategies to support labor candidates in Perum Mercy. In the momentum of the 2024 elections, there are five labor candidates, and this time the workers have their own party, the Labor Party, as well as three non-labor candidates from other parties. The five candidates include: Ely Setyarini for DPRD of Bekasi Regency,



Surohman for DPRD of Bekasi Regency, Rudol for DPRD of West Java Province, Abdul Bais for DPR RI, and Taupik Hidayat for DPD RI. Each candidate has a volunteer team that is formed by themselves by utilizing the individual networks of each candidate. Therefore, the capacity of the BGP volunteer team will differ from one another following how extensive the network is owned by individual candidates.

BGP Mercy functions to ensure that the voter mobilization that will be carried out by the volunteer team for each candidate is effective and well coordinated. Moreover, there are two labor candidates contesting in the same arena, namely candidates Ely Setyarini and Surohman. The implication of this situation is that the two candidates are the main focus of BGP Mercy. In dealing with this situation, BGP Mercy plays

an important role in minimizing the potential friction between the two candidates related to voter mobilization. In addition, since the Bekasi Regency DPRD is the smallest parliamentary level, mobilization from Perum Mercy has a significant impact, especially in Electoral District (Dapil) 1. By consisting of two villages and having a large population, votes from Perum Mercy residents have the potential to generate two to three seats⁹.

Ely and Surohman's situation puts BGP Mercy in a dilemmatic position in formulating strategies. On the one hand, Ely's profile shows that she is only an "assignment" candidate (from union) to fulfill the minimum quota of 30% women. In addition,

⁹ In the 2024 legislative elections, the Bekasi Regency DPRD allocates a total of 55 seats and seven electoral districts. Perum Mercy is in Dapil Bekasi 1, which consists of Setu, Central Cikarang, Serang Baru, Cibusah, and Bojongmangu sub-districts. Of the 55 seats, Dapil Bekasi 1 is allocated nine seats.



she is only active in the union and does not have significant activities in the community. Therefore, BGP Mercy tends to prioritize Surohman as a more potential candidate, as Surohman is well known by the non-worker residents of Perum Mercy. In addition, in Surohman's

residence stands Posko Orange, a complaint and service center established by the Labor Party for Dapil 1 area of Bekasi Regency, as Surohman is also the administrator of the Bekasi Regency Labor Party Exco for Advocacy, which also reflects his capacity as a potential cadre.

Photo 1. Surohman's winning post in Mega Regency Complex



Source: Research Documentation



On the other hand, there is an organizational directive to win the Labor Party without regard to individual candidates, the most important thing is that the Labor Party wins. In addition to being homework for BGP Mercy, Surohman himself, together with his BGP volunteer team, also carried out two strategies to solve these problems. First, Surohman's BGP team regularly holds discussions and continues to communicate with Ely's BGP team. Second, in every socialization and campaign activity, the BGP Surohman team will invite all Labor Party candidates to attend¹⁰. In the end, Surohman managed to secure one seat in the Bekasi Regency DPRD, while Ely did not¹¹.

In addition to carrying out mobilization strategies for electoral interests, BGP Mercy also acts as a forum that assists workers in carrying out their functions as members of society and strengthens workers' solidarity in social issues. It aims to enable workers to mingle with other community groups in Perum Mercy. The community dimension that BGP Mercy pays attention to arises from several things. First, because BGP operates at the local level where social interaction and residence are intertwined, it is natural for BGP Mercy to feel an active part in community affairs.

Second, the relationship between the two dimensions, namely electoral and societal, being the main focus of BGP Mercy's operations, is reciprocal. Electoral success requires community support to gain votes, while communities need MPs who can represent their interests

10 Interview, Surohman, July 26, 2023.

11 Based on the decision letter of the KPUD Bekasi Regency, the Labor Party managed to get 2 seats in the Bekasi Regency DPRD. The 2 candidates are Ali Nur Hamzah (District 7) with 6,981 votes, and Surohman with 3,651 votes.



in parliament as an integral part of community identity and needs. The “housing ego”, where there is a desire of Perum Mercy residents to have a member of parliament, was also utilized by Surohman in his campaign with the slogan “It’s Time for Mega Regency to Have a Council”. Third, there are actors who act as bridge builders at the leadership level, such as BGP Mercy Chair Mr. S, who also serves as RW Chair, TPU & Ambulance Mercy Chair, and Jamkes Watch volunteer. In addition, nine of the 16 RW heads in Perum Mercy are laborers, indicating a very strong informal relationship and configuration of interests between BGP Mercy and the Perum Mercy community.

Photo 2. Surohman’s Campaign Props



Source: Research Documentation

In its efforts in the electoral dimension, BGP Mercy prioritizes the principle of respect for regional stakeholders at the RT/RW level. Socialization and installation of Campaign Props (APK) are carried out by taking into account the approval and coordination of local stakeholders, as a form of

recognition of their authority and presence in the community. In addition, BGP Mercy also actively encourages cadres, especially candidates, to attend forums in housing, allowing them to interact directly with residents.

In addition to efforts in the electoral dimension, BGP Mercy also plays an active role in building strong relationships with the community through the community dimension. One concrete manifestation of this commitment is through the coordination of assistance in the health sector through JW, which provides access to health for Perum Mercy residents. Not only that, BGP Mercy also allocates the remaining funds from their activities, which come from PUK dues, for infrastructure development and social religious activities, as a concrete effort to improve the welfare and sustainability of life together at Perum Mercy.

2. Community in Community Unionism in Mega Regency Housing

There are two important stakeholders, from the community side, namely Paguyuban RW Mercy and TPU & Ambulance Mercy. Savirani (2015: 262) emphasizes the crucial role of RW heads in voter mobilization among labor voters. Their position as community leaders at the local level makes them the main gateway for candidates to reach constituents in their area. They have the advantage of direct access, trust, influence, networks, and knowledge of the residents in their area.

This strategic position encouraged BGP Mercy in 2014 to mobilize workers to get the position of regional leaders, both in the management of RT, RW, and other regional organizations. This effort proved



effective, where currently out of sixteen RWs in Perum Mercy, nine of them are led by workers, both activists and non-activists. The Mercy RW Association itself is chaired by CC, a non-activist laborer and Head of RW Block D.

Nevertheless, there are several challenges in the political mobilization of workers through RW heads. Firstly, as area leaders, they must prioritize the interests of residents in general over the political interests of workers. Second, not all workers' RW Chairpersons are labor union activists, so they do not have strong ties to the interests of workers collectively. Third, as representatives of the state at the smallest administrative level, RW Chairpersons are required to be neutral and not involved in the electoral political arena.

In the face of these challenges, the labor RW leaders have developed several strategies. First, they opened up space for all

parties to campaign in their area. However, to ensure the success of the BGP, one RW decided to only give permission to other parties if the party volunteers were its residents, while also making it difficult for activity proposals to be submitted¹².

Second, they do not show explicit support for the Labor Party. Support for the BGP is done implicitly, for example by using Labor Party attributes in daily life, or through small talk at the security post. When initiating conversations, they focus more on the individual candidates rather than the organization or the Labor Party. They also encourage people to vote for candidates with a good track record, who do not engage in money politics, and who are committed to fighting for the interests of the Perum Mercy community. In addition, they emphasized the social

¹² Interview, Mr. A, Head of RW Block L, July 26, 2023.



benefits provided by labor to the community, such as the JW and the fogging action during the dengue outbreak¹³.

Besides the Mercy RW Association, some workers are also active in the TPU & Ambulance Mercy organization. TPU & Ambulance Mercy is a self-help organization established on the initiative of a group of workers and residents of Perum Mercy to help and serve the health and death needs of residents. The organization provides vital services such as helping to take care of death-related needs and providing free ambulance services.

Institutionally, TPU & Ambulance Mercy is under the RW Mercy Association with a small structure of 6 core administrators and 3 core ambulance drivers. Led by Mr. S, who is also the Head of RW Block

C2, Head of BGP Mercy, and JW volunteer, the organizational structure of TPU & Ambulance Mercy consists of Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, R&D Division, and Maintenance Division. The R&D field is tasked with conducting research and development of organizational services while the maintenance field is tasked with caring for and maintaining ambulance cars.

The six administrators of TPU & Ambulance Mercy have diverse backgrounds in terms of profession and organizational experience. Two are laborers, two are non-activist laborers, and two are non-laborers. Therefore, TPU & Ambulance Mercy not only provides emergency medical services, but also becomes a symbol of solidarity between workers and people in the housing community. In addition, Mr. S's position as a JW volunteer gives him access to

¹³ Interview, Mr. B, Head of RW Block K, July 26, 2023.



various resources and networks for TPU & Ambulance Mercy and the Perum Mercy community. Mr. S's relationship in JW enables him to assist the community of Perum Mercy in accessing quality health services and getting the latest information on health policies, health programs, and health services available at¹⁴.

3. Significance of Community Unionism in Mega Regency Housing

To understand how the CU works in Perum Mercy, we need to draw on three aspects within the CU itself. *First*, in the spatial aspect, there are dimensions of political opportunity structure, local participation space, and mobilization capacity. In the context of the structure of political opportunities, BGP Mercy utilizes the existence of housing as a base for

mobilization and relies on social structures and networks that have been formed. Thus, they became the first BGP community in Bekasi Regency. In addition, the presence of the Labor Party provides a new impetus for the political mobilization of workers, opening up new opportunities for Perum Mercy residents to participate in political contestation at the local level. While on the community side, the existence of organizations such as Paguyuban RW Mercy and TPU & Ambulance are important platforms for workers to engage in politics and community life at the local level. In particular, the opportunity to obtain the strategic position of RW Chairman is an important opportunity for the labor movement.

On the participation dimension, Perum Mercy is a key participation space for workers, with their involvement in various activities and

¹⁴ Interview, Mr. S, July 25, 2023.



organizations at the housing level. Forums such as Paguyuban RW Mercy and TPU & Ambulance Mercy are important platforms for BGP Mercy to interact with residents and strengthen their support base. BGP Mercy plays a role so that workers can be involved in political and community activities at the housing level. Meanwhile, the informal relations and configuration of interests formed between the workers and the Perum Mercy community also helped strengthen participation and solidarity.

In terms of mobilization capacity, BGP Mercy showed significant efforts to strengthen their ability to mobilize the masses and achieve political and societal goals. Furthermore, there is Mr. S's role, as a "broker" who can provide access to various resources and cross-

scale networks that benefit BGP Mercy, TPU & Ambulance Mercy, and the Perum Mercy community in general.

Second, the aspect of shared identity/unrest. BGP and the people of Perum Mercy have shared interests in political representation and communal identity. Workers and communities in Perum Mercy want to have a voice in decision-making that affects their lives, and feel united in their community identity. In addition, BGP Mercy serves as a platform for workers to discuss and advocate for solutions to the problems they face. Through campaigns and activities, BGP Mercy not only raises community awareness about issues facing laborers, but also strengthens solidarity among them.

Third, organizational aspects. Organizational capacity and culture play an important role in the success of CUs. BGP



Mercy, as the main motor of political mobilization, has a clear organizational structure with a core management consisting of various key positions. Strong and inspiring leadership, as demonstrated by Mr. S, provides direction and motivation for members. The coalition structure within the CU in Perum Mercy shows close cooperation between various organizations, especially BGP Mercy, Paguyuban RW Mercy, and TPU & Ambulance Mercy. In addition, BGP Mercy's membership, which is open to all workers from various unions, strengthens inclusivity and participation.

Last but not least is the important role of a broker, a *bridge builder* in facilitating relationships between various organizations in Perum Mercy. Some individuals, such as Mr. S, have become *bridge builders*, active in various organizations and building strong relationships

with all relevant parties. They bring extensive experience in the labor union and community worlds, enriching their networks and understanding of social dynamics. They not only strengthen coalitions by building bridges between workers and communities, but also help in handling conflicts and diffusing cultural differences that may arise.

From what has been described above, the CU practice at Perum Mercy shows significant roles. *First*, the CU at Perum Mercy succeeded in delivering one labor candidate, Surohman, to the Bekasi Regency DPRD seat. This shows that the CU at Perum Mercy is successful in supporting political outcomes. *Secondly*, the CU at Perum Mercy has increased community awareness and the importance of political participation. In addition, CU practices at Perum Mercy have helped change the



public discourse on the role of labor in society and strengthened the political power of labor. Therefore, CU practices at Perum Mercy have shown success in changing the political climate. *Third*, the practice of CU in Perum Mercy has shown how the labor group is able to maintain relationships with external organizations. This can be seen from the strong relationship between BGP Mercy and community organizations in Perum Mercy. And, *fourthly*, by having legislative members representing Perum Mercy, the potential for internal capacity building of CUs in Perum Mercy becomes greater.

While the CU practices in Mega Regency Housing are commendable, some criticisms regarding potential weaknesses need to be considered. Firstly, the heterogeneity of the residents in Perum Mercy poses a challenge, so the labor-focused

mobilization strategy may not fully cover the interests of the whole community. In addition, the success of CU practices in Perum Mercy seems to be highly dependent on Mr. S's central role. This dependency poses a risk if Mr. S is no longer active or leaves his position.

This creates room for improvement. For example, the socialization of labor candidates should be tailored to the characteristics of the community in order to increase their electability. In addition, the adoption of more inclusive mobilization strategies, along with the development of collective leadership, can help reduce dependency on specific individuals. By making improvements, the practice of CUs or labor and community associations in Perum Mercy has the potential to increase their success in achieving their desired goals.



Conclusion

This paper has shown that as part of a democratic society, labor groups with their resources will have greater bargaining power if they are able to move out of the confines of internal factory and labor issues, and into broader community welfare issues. In this context, workers are not only seen as isolated entities within their work environment, but as important actors in the wider political and social arena. By broadening the focus of their struggles, labor groups can build stronger solidarity with the general public.

The perspective of Community Unionism is used in this article to offer a new nuance in labor studies by seeing workers as an integral part of the community, not just as workers in a factory. When they are in the factory, they are workers, and when these workers go home, they are community members.

This becomes important when the traditional labor movement is considered to have no significant impact.

The findings of this research reinforce the thesis that CUs can provide potential benefits to the communities they represent and enable unions to raise their political profile and access other groups. In addition, CUs are also a form of transformation of the labor movement that seeks to build relationships with society and redefine social values. This study shows the positive achievements of CUs in Perum Mercy, such as increased political participation and community awareness. Although, there is still room to improve the success of CU, especially in strengthening inter organizational cooperation and mobilization capacity.

This research also has some limitations that need to be considered. Data from

the literature study may lack relevance as most of them were conducted before 2019, while the involvement of non-labor actors in CUs has not been explored in depth. In this context, further research with a broader scope is needed to deepen the understanding of CU in Indonesia and maximize its potential in the transformation of the labor movement. Through this research, the author hopes to contribute to the development of labor studies and labor politics in Indonesia.



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