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Agrarian Problems Ahead of the 1955 General Elections in Medan City

Jean Ari Hasibuan¹, Mujahid Widian Saragih^{2*}, Yandi Syaputra Hasibuan², Andry Anshari³

¹PUSKAHAP FISIP USU ²Universitas Sumatera Utara

³Yayasan Sintesa

Abstract

This article discusses the agrarian problems that occurred in Medan ahead of the 1955 General Election. The agrarian problem stems from Dutch plantation activities in East Sumatra which required a lot of vacant land to become an industrial center, including Medan being a victim. In its development, many people were deliberately brought in to fill this area. During the Japanese occupation, the plantation lands were replaced for logistical needs by people from outside Medan who were organized by the Japanese to occupy the lands. The succession of power occurred again, the occupied lands then became a source of problems and gave birth to conflicts between stakeholders. This situation is then used as material by political parties that will contest the General Election by supporting one of the parties. This article is only limited to agrarian issues ahead of the 1955 Election in Medan City. Of course, it is very possible that there are similar articles that discuss the development of agrarian issues in subsequent elections, both in Medan City, and Indonesia in general.

Keywords: Agrarian, Medan City, General Election, 1955

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*Corresponding author: Mujahid Widian Saragih

E-mail: mujahid.widian@usu.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

The agrarian issue is indeed an ancient problem that has been discussed very often, be it in the form of articles, books, scientific journals and so on. Theoretically, agrarian disputes can be understood as a struggle for space (land) that demands the welfare of individuals and groups within the body of society, both homogeneous and heterogeneous. Thus, agrarian disputes can involve an individual, a group (customary community or one clan), or a group of people who have different identities with the same core issue, namely the struggle for space (land). The agrarian problem has of course been a natural thing since humans were born on earth and will eventually return to the earth (land). That is why this is still very sexy to be studied and discussed in various scientific groups as well as in certain activities that are indeed focused on the agrarian sphere (Rachman, 2017). In a narrow sense, the problem of land has once caused an uproar in Medan, which is one of the largest cities in Indonesia. Medan in a decade of independence turned out to have quite complicated agrarian problems to be resolved. This is because many people have migrated (moved) from outside Medan since the colonial era. The need for the Dutch to succeed in their plantation industry in East Sumatra, whose administrative base was in the Medan gementee, forced the Dutch to send Chinese coolies from the Malay Peninsula in the first quarter of the 19th century. Then towards the 20th century the Dutch colonialists again brought in coolies from Java. Until it was recorded that ethnically dominating society in Medan at that time were the Javanese. The increasing number of residents makes the space in Medan increasingly narrow. It was not instantaneous as a

result of taking these coolies from outside East Sumatra, because they were previously placed in plantation barracks, not familiar with the concept of land tenure (Pelly, 2015).

Medan's situation became increasingly critical since the Japanese arrived. Japan enforced a policy to bring in people from outside Medan, such as Toba and Simalungun who had farming skills. The former plantation land was used as a rice field as well as a place to live by the community at the behest of the Japanese for logistical needs during the Second World War. The Japanese occupation was only around 3 years but has accumulated land problems for the next government (Reid, 2018).

After Indonesia became independent on August 17, 1945 and the dispute with the Netherlands ended on December 27, 1949 (Ricklefs, 2017). The agrarian problem in Medan has been the main concern of the predecessors of this nation. One example of a case that later reached the court case was the land incident in Sei Agul. It started with AVROS, which is a representative of the North Sumatra provincial government who is trying to take back the land in Sei Agul that the local community has cultivated to support their livelihood since the Japanese occupation, as previously mentioned. The trial was held on March 25, 1952 which was attended by 150 peasants as a form of solidarity (Ikhsan, 2022). The final decision from the results of this trial was only reached in 1954, two years after the first trial began. The final court decision showed that the farmers had won in this land dispute case and AVROS plantations had no right to even an inch of land, the land that had been occupied by the community since the Japanese era.

These phenomena became the attention of the existing political parties, bearing in mind that elections would be held in 1955. Based on different ideological backgrounds, all of the political parties have different views on agrarian problems. Indonesian Muslim Shura Council (Masyumi), the ruling party in the national government at that time, adopted a policy of relocating squatters around the concession land and establishing government agencies to facilitate land execution. This policy is also known as 'pentraktoran'. (Lazuardi & Yety, 2020: 14).

Contrary to Masyumi, parties such as the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI) actually rejected this policy. For the PNI, support for the victims of the 'Pentraktoran' policy was an attempt to embody their ideology of the peasantry and marhaenism in Indonesia. Meanwhile, PKI also have a specific program about the peasant and agrarian problem. The PKI began to act by visiting the people living around the plantation area. It has become a PKI weapon to provoke the local community to continue to occupy former plantation lands, bearing in mind that there are still too many plantations or in other words they are too greedy in controlling land (Subhan, 2021: 52).

Through the Barisan Tani Indonesia (BTI) the occupation of illegal land started from the lands in Sari Rejo and Kedai Durian, all of which were occupied by the BTI and the peasants. Meanwhile, the PKI continues to echo on political stages so that justice and prosperity for the people of Medan must be realized in all aspects. Unfortunately, in the contestation of the 1955 General Election in Medan, the PKI was not the main choice, Masyumi as an Islamic party was still too strong for the PKI, even by relying on agrarian issues as its campaign material (Waspada, 09 February 1952).

In this paper, agrarian disputes have occurred within the Medan community at the beginning of the decade of independence. To find out about agrarian disputes that occurred at that time, it is better to trace back how Medan actually looked before the conflict occurred? what is the background of agrarian disputes and what is the process like? and who took advantage of this situation for the benefit of the 1955 General Election in Medan?

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper uses historical methods consisting of (1) heuristics, namely collecting historical sources consisting of contemporary newspapers collected directly from the Medan Waspada Daily office, journals, and various other literature. (2) source criticism, namely criticizing collected sources to determine the authenticity (external) and credibility (internal) of data as historical facts;

(3) interpretation, which is the process of studying historical facts to compile historical arguments and narratives; and (4) historiography, namely the process of writing as a synthesis and construction of history (Kuntowijoyo, 2017). Data reduction, data display, and conclusion are all part of the data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the holy book of Islam (Al-Qur'an) states that humans come from the land and will return to the land anyway. That is why there is never an end to agrarian (land) disputes for discussion both in the academic realm and in the public sphere. Conceptually an agrarian dispute is a struggle for space (land) that demands the welfare of individuals and groups within the body of society, both homogeneous and heterogeneous. This means that agrarian (land) disputes can occur in a person (individual), a group of indigenous peoples or have the same ancestry, or in a group that does not have to be of the same adat or ancestry. Thus, agrarian disputes can happen to anyone, depending on the circumstances that accompany the explosion of the incident (Narumi, 2014).

The end of the 19th century was the beginning of the birth of plantations in East Sumatra which was overseen by a businessman from a plantation in Surabaya. Through a man named Said bil Sagih, Nienhuys obtained a land concession from the Sultanate of Deli which became the initial stage for growing tobacco, this tobacco was later known as Deli Tobacco to various parts of the world. The rise of the plantation industry at that time certainly required more land. Not to mention that in its development the rubber industry is increasingly in demand by the world community. Much land later in East Sumatra was cleared for industrial plantations on concessions with the Sultanate of Deli (Lazuardy and Yety, 2020). This increasingly busy and diverse industry naturally requires more porters. Due to plantation policy, coolies were brought in from the Malay Peninsula in the first quarter. Furthermore, in the second quarter coolies were also brought in from Java to fill the vacancy of workers in various plantation industries. It is clear that a lot of vacant land has been used for industrial plantations. Due to Dutch policy, Medan was made a gementee (city of pradja). Furthermore, Medan invited various outsiders from various parts of the Dutch East Indies to come. These increasingly diverse people certainly also need a place to live, empty land has become the main target (Pelly, 2015).

Entering the era of Japanese occupation, the plantation industry, which Dutch colonialism had painstakingly built, was instantly replaced by the Japanese for planting logistical needs such as rice in the face of the ongoing Second World War (Kurasawa, 2015). The Japanese organized people from outside Medan, such as those from Simalungun and Toba, who basically had the expertise to grow rice and all things related to war logistics needs (Oktorino, 2020). These people who came from outside Medan were ordered by the Japanese to establish their homes on land where they planted rice, such as in Sei Agul and Kedai Durian. Or if necessary other ex-plantation lands are opened to be used as residences.

After Japan lost the land situation at the beginning of independence was not fully considered stable because the Dutch returned to Medan in October who landed at Belawan Harbor brought by T.E.D. Kelly so that led to a reaction from the people of Medan. Various lasykar and political associations were formed since the announcement of the Declaration of X by Vice President Mohammad Hatta in November 1945, which originally had the aim of carrying out general elections in January 1946 but turned against the Dutch who were trying to regain control of Medan (Anderson, 2019). Battle after battle occurred in various corners of Medan, the most famous of which is the "Medan Area Event". The dispute between the Netherlands and Indonesia was only resolved on December 27, 1949 through the Round Table Conference in The Hague (Kahin, 2022).

It was in the early 1950s that the agraria dispute became a hot topic of discussion from various walks of life at that time in Medan. The society that has become increasingly diverse as a result of the actions of the Dutch and the Japanese which has suffered its effects is the government of the Republic of Indonesia (Waspada, 22 October 1950). Starting from the Sei Agul incident, several people from AVROS at that time came to inspect the area which was a former plantation, it was

planned that these lands would be reactivated as plantation activities like in the colonial period. This news was then spread by the local people who had occupied these lands and had used them as residences. Not accepting the policy that AVROS wanted to submit, the community then gathered and made demands on AVROS, in short the contents of the demand were that AVROS stop taking land in the Sei Agul area considering that they had occupied the land that they had occupied since the occupation. Japan even before that (Plomp, 2017). AVROS, which is the representative of the provincial government, does not pay any attention to the demands of the people of Sei Agul. It was recorded several times that the people of Sei Agul experienced clashes with people (thugs) paid by AVROS. It is not known for certain since several clashes between AVROS and the community in Sei Agul claimed the lives of both parties (Waspada, 23 May 1954).

This conflict had begun to echo since 1952 but never ended, until then this case reached the court for trial. As many as 150 peasants flocked to witness the first trial which took place in March as a form of their solidarity and to banish all corporate operations which often harm small communities. During that year the trial had not yet received a clear decision from the court office in Medan (Waspada, 19 August 1952). The bright spot in the Sei Agul case was discovered only in 1954, when a court decision stated that those in charge of the occupation, management, and everything related to livelihoods were the Sei Agul people who occupied the area. This was based on the fact that they had cultivated these lands since the Japanese occupation and even during the Dutch colonialism. Meanwhile, AVROS claimed that as a plantation area, it was just their imagination or imagination, because until the residents of Sei Agul occupied the area, there had never been any plantation activities as they mentioned before, reactivation of all plantation activities as before (Ikhsan, 2022).

Another case of agrarian dispute that is no less interesting is in Sari Rejo. The Sari Rejo area became one of the logistics bases built during the Japanese occupation. In the early 1950s, the area was still widely planted with rice by the local community, continuing the tradition established during the Japanese occupation. If we pull even further back before the Japanese occupation, namely during the Dutch colonial period, the Sari Rejo area was fertile for planting plantation commodities, when the Japanese entered, all plants changed their function to become food crops (Henk, 2016). Like the Sei Agul incident, AVROS at that time wanted to take back the land that had been occupied by the Toba and Simalungun people who had existed earlier during the Japanese era. The local people, of course, did not give their land to AVROS, even though they were delegates from the government at the provincial level. The result was clashes between the two sides, AVROS wanted to take over while the local people chose to defend (Waspada, 30 May 1951). In that conflict, the Indonesian Farmers' Front (BTI) entered, which was an accomplice of the Indonesian Communist Party (Rachman, 2017: 174). BTI has a program to occupy wild lands that were former plantation areas. Incidentally, in the Sari Rejo area, there are still many vacant lands which are planned to be reused by the plantation. BTI then infiltrated the local community to immediately take the vacant land around their current settlement, otherwise they would be evicted, as was reported in the news the other day (Waspada, 02 June 1951). Without thinking much, the Sari Rejo people then brought machetes, hoes, and other sharp objects to clear new lands that had been marked by the BTI as master conceptualists in this case (Madinier, 2015). The people of Sari Rejo succeeded in occupying the vacant lands they had worked on as BTI had hoped. Based on BTI's policy, the occupied lands were then given to people who did not yet have permanent land as a place to live. It is not without basis that this land was given free of charge, the basic is that if more and more people live in the Sari Rejo area the plan to reactivate plantation activities will never occur because more and more local residents will fight and this makes it difficult for AVROS (People's Daily, 17 July 1951).

Slightly different from Sei Agul and Sari Rejo, at Kedai Durian five farmers were arrested because a Chinese complained to the police that the farmers had stolen coconuts from their land. According to his confession the land belonged to him whose land tax he had paid regularly to the previous owner. The purpose of paying taxes as said by a Chinese person was not to pay as they should, because in essence the taxes from the land he lived on were paid to the tax office, not to a

person or group. This means that the land acquired by the Chinese came from local thugs or Community Organizations (Ormas) who had masses to occupy land and then sold it to rich people like the Chinese earlier (Waspada, 09 February 1952).

Enraged by this situation, as many as 1,000 farmers staged a demonstration, a large crowd of people marched simultaneously across Medan to the local police station (Waspada, 14 February 1952). They then asked that the five farmers who had already been arrested by the police. They also demanded that the distribution of land be done fairly regardless of origin, whether poor or rich must obtain the same land to occupy. It turned out that the brain of this demonstration activity was BTI who wanted to continue to carry out land occupations and improve the livelihood of the peasantry. The police can grant the first demand by freeing five farmers who have been arrested before. While other demands could not be granted, because it was not their domain, it was the government that had more authority in this case. The demonstration was dispersed in an orderly manner without any anarchy taking place (Sumatran Newspaper, 23 August 1953).

To end land conflicts cultivated by the people on former plantation lands. So the government issued the Emergency Law on June 12, 1954. That means that all lands that have been taken, occupied, cultivated, and worked on by the people before the date the law was issued are considered permanent occupation by the people. This is an absolute victory for the farmers who have been working on these lands for a long time and used them as a place to live. For the businessmen, this is a crushing defeat for them, because the government has sided with criminals and of course they feel very disadvantaged by this decision (Ikhsan, 2022).

From the various agrarian disputes that have been described previously, it can be explained that the PKI took on the role that at that time was a contestant in the 1955 General Election in Medan, namely to make BTI a catalyst for organizing local masses in carrying out the practice of occupying illegal lands left behind by the former plantation industry. In several articles in the columns of the People's Daily, which was the mass media owned by the PKI, many echoed that foreign companies in East Sumatra should also be nationalized. (May 22, 1955).

Another PKI campaign practice was to visit communities living in former plantation areas, such as in Sari Rejo. The PKI agitated the people by spreading fear (xenophobia) that the land they were currently occupying would in fact soon be taken over by plantation parties who wanted to reactivate their activities like the Dutch colonial period to support the country's economy (Reid, 2018). Regarding supporting the country's economy, according to the PKI, it was actually just an illusion. Those who sat in the hot seat of the plantation industry only wanted to gain as much profit as possible at the expense of the common people. The PKI immediately offered its program that ex-plantation lands actually belonged to the Indonesian people, regardless of what ethnicity they came from, what was clear was that they were still Indonesians. All land must be distributed to the proletariat (lower society) to improve their livelihood (Liddle, 2017). The people who do not own land, it means that they live reluctantly and don't want to die, the people are still slaves in their own country which they say is already independent. Therefore, the community must move in taking over abandoned former plantation lands and distribute them as widely as possible to all Medan people. Because then the poverty rate that hit this region can be suppressed. Information like that was raised by the PKI to gain the sympathy of the people of Medan ahead of the 1955 General Elections in Medan (People's Daily, January 22, 1955).

During the 1955 General Election in Medan, the PKI did not dominate the vote acquisition results, they still lost to Masyumi and the PNI as the top vote standings. While the PKI was ranked number 3 in Medan, it was a fantastic vote and it should be noted that around the plantation area the PKI received the most votes as shown in the following tables:

Table 1.	Vote acc	juisition i	in Medaı	ı Timur	District	TPS	Kampung Duria	n 1
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No	Party	Vote Gain
1	Masyumi	74
2	PP Polisi	1
3	PSI	6
4	PKI	155

5	Gerakan Pembela Pancasila	4
6	Parkindo	18
7	PNI	28
8	NU	15
9	PSII	6
10	Partai Buruh	8
11	Perti	6
12	Kump. Bulan Bintang	1
13	Tharikat Islam	2
14	Huria Kristen Indonesia	1
15	Partai Wanita Rakyat	1
	Total Votes	326

Source: Waspada, 30 September 1955, hal. 4.

Tab	Table 2. Vote Acquisition in Medan District TPS Sari Rejo			
No	Party	Vote Gain		
1	Masyumi	40		
2	PNI	23		
3	PP Polisi	10		
4	PRN	1		
5	PKI	80		
6	Baperki	44		
7	Permai	1		
8	Gerakan Pembela Pancasila	5		
9	Parkindo	11		
10	PIR	3		
11	Murba	1		
12	IPKI	2		
13	Partai Buruh	11		
14	PERTI	2		
15	Kump. Bulan Bintang	1		
16	Partai Katolik	3		
17	AKRAP ST	2		
18	Kump. Rakjat Jelata	1		
19	Pers. Masy. Aceh	2		
	Total Votes	245		

Source: Waspada, 30 September 1955, hal. 1.

Table 3. Vote Acquisition in Medan Barat District Sei A	gul 1
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No	Party	Vote Gain
1	Masyumi	59
2	PP Polisi	13
3	PRN	1
4	Kario Siregar Dkk. Sibual-buali	2
5	PKI	98
6	Baperki	28
7	SKI	1
8	Gerakan Pembela Pancasila	2
9	Parkindo	26
10	PIR	1
11	PNI	30
12	NU	7
13	IPKI	4
14	PSII	5
15	Partai Buruh	1
16	PERTI	2
17	Kump. Bulan Bintang	2
18	Partai Katolik	11
19	P.P. Tharikat Islam	1
20	PIR (W)	4
	Total Votes	299

Source: Waspada, 30 September 1955, hal. 1.

Some of the tables above show that the PKI always dominated the vote in former plantation areas and became the practice of occupying lands without a master. This means that the PKI's efforts in packaging the agrarian problem and making it a campaign material for the PKI can be said to have been successful in welcoming the 1955 General Election in Medan as shown in the previous tables. This is inseperable from the fact that the land issue always be important part of the PKI's campaign in several large areas. The PKI, almost entirely using their underbouw BTI, have always fought for the interests of illegal cultivators in all plantation areas and in various non-plantation areas, including most areas on the island of Java bordering government forests. (Fathul Bahri, 2008: 54). For the distribution of seats themselves, namely: Masyumi (11 seats), PNI (5 seats), PKI (2 seats), Parkindo (2 seats), NU (1 seat), PSI (1 seat), Baperki (1 seat), PPPRI (1 seat), and PSII (1 seat) (Information Bureau, 1959).

CONCLUSION

The agrarian disputes that occurred in Medan prior to the 1955 General Election were the result of previous events. After being released from the shackles of the Netherlands and Japan, it became a serious problem for interested parties, especially the people who were organized from the previous era with the plantations which eventually sparked conflict. When Medan is overshadowed by agrarian conflicts there will also be General Elections held, so that this situation is taken advantage of by parties that have the same vision. So that what happens next is not a settlement, but only an endless struggle for space. The PKI appeared to take advantage of the ideological gaps that existed between Islam and Nationalism Party (PNI & Masyumi) especially in the agrarian problems. This party spread its influence equally in urban and rural areas, in urban areas the PKI targeted workers and in rural areas targeted poor peasants. The militant PKI cadres were seen to be more aggressive in campaigning for their party's programs than other parties. (Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2019: 180).

This article only describes how the position of the agrarian problem in the midst of the first election in Indonesia. In fact, until now the agrarian issue is still relevant to be used as a research topic, especially its relation to elections. Where, as we know, most of the executive and legislative political promises, one of which is definitely regarding the settlement of agrarian problems. It would be very good if in the future someone conducted comprehensive research on the linkages between agrarian issues and elections in each implementation.

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