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## The Discourse of Capitalist Class and Public Policy in the Handling of COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

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# The Discourse of Capitalist Class and Public Policy in the Handling of COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

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## ABSTRAK

Keterlibatan kelas kapitalis pada fase awal penanganan pandemi COVID-19 di Indonesia sangat mengemuka. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendiskusikan wacana kelas kapitalis pada fase awal pemerintah Indonesia menghadapi pandemi COVID-19. Studi ini berargumen bahwa wacana kapitalis terutama dalam fase awal ini mempunyai pengaruh kuat atas kebijakan-kebijakan pemerintah dalam menghadapi COVID-19. Menggunakan metode diskursus kualitatif, studi ini menemukan bahwa pandemi COVID-19 di Indonesia didominasi oleh dua wacana yang masing-masing cenderung erat terkait dengan wacana kapitalis baik kapitalis medis maupun kapitalis non-medis. Bagi para kapitalis medis, pandemi COVID-19 merupakan alat penting untuk mendisiplinkan masyarakat dan pemerintah dalam penggunaan medis yang penting dalam meningkatkan akumulasi kapital mereka pada masa depan. Dengan demikian, wacana yang mengemuka dari kelompok ini adalah wacana pendisiplinan masyarakat atas penggunaan medis. Namun di sisi lain, kelompok ini juga merasa terganggu karena ketergantungan bahan baku yang sebagian besar didatangkan dari negara lain, khususnya Cina. Sementara itu, bagi kapitalis non-medis umumnya mereka melihat pandemi ini sebagai bencana bagi keberlanjutan akumulasi kapital mereka. Oleh karena itu, wacana yang didorong oleh kelompok ini adalah dampak ekonomi dari pandemi ini. Meskipun kedua wacana ini berbeda, namun keduanya tidak kontradiktif, melainkan saling melengkapi. Di samping itu, wacana kedua kelompok kapitalis tersebut ditemukan mempunyai pengaruh yang sangat besar terhadap kebijakan negara dalam penanganan pandemi COVID-19 di Indonesia, bahkan cenderung menjadi penghalang bagi pemerintah untuk segera mengambil kebijakan yang tepat dan cepat dalam menghadapi meluasnya pandemi ini di Indonesia.

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Kata kunci: COVID-19, diskursus, kebijakan publik, kelompok kapitalis medis, kelompok kapitalis non-medis

#### **ABSTRACT**

In the early period of handling the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, the Indonesian government prioritized the economy and health sectors. This study argues that these government actions and policies are heavily influenced by discourse from the capitalist class. This study aims to discuss the articulation of several different discursive elements of the capitalist class in the early period of handling the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia and its impact on public policy. This study focuses on two capitalist classes, namely medical and non-medical capitalists. This study found that the discursive elements from the government on these two significant issues had in common with the discursive elements of these two capitalist classes. The discourse of public discipline over the use of medical products from medical capitalists had the same discursive elements as that of government discourse. Both of them articulated this discourse with the aim of public health, but theoretically, this is important to increase the accumulation of capital in the health industry in the future. Another group of capitalists, however, generally see this pandemic as a disaster and an obstacle to continue their capital accumulation. Therefore, the central discourse that was raised by this group was the economic impact of this pandemic. Although these two discourses are different, this study found that they are not contradictory but rather complementary. The discourse spread by the two capitalist classes influenced state policy in dealing with COVID-19 in Indonesia significantly. This study emphasizes the importance of the discourse articulation of the capitalist class in the politics of policymaking, especially in Indonesia.

Keywords: COVID-19, Discourse, Medical capitalists, Non-medical capitalists, Public policy

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Since December 2019, coronavirus disease or COVID-19 has been widely discussed in the world, including in Indonesia. It was discussed more intensely after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on 11 March 2020. Nevertheless, many countries were still considered slow in responding to the virus, even after the outbreak in China (Fisher, Teo and Nabarro 2020; Scally, Jacobson and Abbasi 2020). Some observers judge that economic considerations in the current era of global interdependence are the main reasons for the delays in handling COVID-19 (IMF 2020). However, although lockdown is a difficult option for many countries, in the end, some countries have chosen lockdown as a final option (Scally, Jacobson, and Abbasi 2020).

Like other countries affected by COVID-19, Indonesia lagged in anticipating the spread of coronavirus (Jaffrey 2020). During the out-

break of this virus in other countries, the Indonesian government was busy discussing the economic impact caused by the pandemic. Even the government made a campaign and policies that accommodate foreign tourists while asking the public to stay calm. In addition, government officials issued controversial statements, such as: “COVID-19 cannot reach Indonesia because Indonesia has a tropical climate”; “pray more frequently, so COVID-19 will not infect us”; “adopt a healthy lifestyle by consuming traditional herbal ingredients “ (Asmara 2020; Setyawan 2020). However, Indonesia officially reported its first cases of COVID-19 on 2 March 2020. Interestingly, the two patients were infected with COVID-19 after having direct contact with a Japanese citizen.

After COVID-19 struck Indonesia and was declared a global pandemic, the discourse was still not much different. In general, the government has made various appeals to the public to avoid the virus, for example, appeals to do social distancing and avoid crowds. The government also will file criminal charges against an individual or groups who disseminate fake news related to coronavirus. Meanwhile, at the same time, the government itself was busy discussing the economic impact of the virus. As a result, the virus spreads rapidly and widely without adequate control in Indonesia. In mid-March 2020, Indonesia became the worst country in handling COVID-19 in Southeast Asia. For instance, in terms of the time needed to reach the first 50 cases at the Southeast Asia level, Indonesia is in the second-lowest position after Brunei Darussalam. In fact, according to The Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security (JHCHS), the death rate for COVID-19 in Indonesia that exceeds 8 percent is the highest in the world, exceeding the death rate for COVID-19 in Italy, Iran, China, Japan, and Spain in which the citizens are infected more (McBeth 2020).

This study argues that the responses taken by the Indonesian government in the early period of handling the COVID-19 pandemic are influenced by discourse produced by the capitalist class. Discourse is a historical system of meaning that forms subjects’ and objects’ identities (Howarth 2000, 9). Two main issues that became the government’s primary concern in the early period of handling the COVID-19 pan-



demic—economy and health—were considered inseparable from the influence of the capitalist class. In Indonesian politics, many studies have shown that the capitalist class was the leading force in politics of policymaking, even considered to have gripped the state power (Robison 1986; Robison and Hadiz 2004; Winters 2011).

This study focuses on two groups of capitalist powers that are believed to have played a significant role in influencing government actions in dealing with COVID-19. Both groups are called “medical capitalists” and “non-medical capitalists.” Medical capitalists refer to groups of capitalists engaged in the pharmaceutical or medical industry. This group is highly interested in disciplining the public on the use of medical products (Illich 1976; Conrad 2007; Moynihan and Cassels 2005). In its relation to COVID-19, it can be seen that empirically, the impact of this virus is very effective for disciplining people to use these products.

Meanwhile, non-medical capitalists in this study refer to groups of capitalists engaged in industries other than pharmaceutical and medical industries. The non-medical capitalist groups have the most significant concerns about this pandemic because it disrupts business and the economy. This paper aims to discuss the influence of these two capitalists on the actions or policy orientations of the Indonesian government in handling COVID-19 with the perspective of discourse theory.

## POLITICS OF POLICY MAKING IN INDONESIA AND THE RELEVANCE OF DISCOURSE THEORY

There are three approaches in studies of politics of policymaking in Indonesia:

1. State actors as the main actors who are autonomous and determinant over the politics of policymaking. This approach is generally based on behavioral and state interest approaches.
2. State actors are not autonomous in policymaking but are influenced by other social forces, especially business actors. This approach is generally based on post-static approaches such as cultural and structural approaches.

3. Business actors and other groups have the power and interest to influence the policymaking process. This approach is followed by the pluralist approach (MacIntyre 1991; Chalmers 1996; Rosser 2001; Ford and Pepinsky 2014).

However, contemporary studies generally believe that the roles of the capitalist class in Indonesian politics are influential. Some observers believe that the capitalist class in Indonesia was born and raised by the state, and it had grown into an immense power so that the state had almost been controlled and directed by these actors (Chalmers 1996; Robison and Hadiz 2004; Winters 2011). This condition does not mean that the power of the state does not exist. Many observers found that access to and control over the public office and state authority was the primary determinant of how private wealth and social power was collected and distributed (Winters 2013; Hadiz and Robison 2004).

The strength of the business and state relations in Indonesian politics impacts the popularity of two political economy approaches in Indonesia, namely structural political economy and oligarchy. Both became very popular in Indonesian political analysis. This approach has become a standard approach in political analyses in Indonesia. Some observers excessively argue that the current approach to Indonesian politics has not caused sharp debate because of the lack of diverse perspectives (Ford and Pepinsky 2014, 4).

Sum and Jessop (2013) pointed out the importance of a perspective that goes beyond structural analysis. They believe that structural forces are not the only forces that influence or determine the direction of public policy. They argue that although the capitalist class has structural power, they break into factions based on their position in the accumulation process. This division can prevent the state from agreeing on a development strategy for a corporate accumulation (Jessop 2008).

Furthermore, the reform agenda that capitalists support may clash with the interests of the working class, consumer groups, professional organizations, and other interest groups. These groups may have a close relation with political parties that prevent the state from supporting or carrying out the capitalist agenda. Because of these various divisions

and hindrances, the capitalist group does not fully determine the policies made by the government. Instead, this group depends a lot on the process of opinion mobilization, searching for strategies that unite other interests. Capitalists and non-capitalists realize that to make the state issue a policy, they must resolve or eliminate the differences in their interests and reach an agreement on hegemonic projects (Jessop 1990; 2008).

In his later writing, Jessop (Sum and Jessop 2013) introduced discourse as an essential strategy in the hegemonic project. He argues that discourse is vital as a strategy for the capitalist to direct various interests of other groups to be in line with the interests of the capitalists (Jessop 2004). This study looks into the need for a discourse approach to contribute to political analysis in Indonesia. For this purpose, this study uses discourse theory developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) to study Indonesian politics. Politically, this theory aims to achieve a radical plural democracy that has been hindered by neoliberal hegemony (Mouffe 2018). It means that even though it opposes classical Marxism and essentialism, this theory is very much concerned with the neoliberal order. Some theorists see this theory as necessary for how the capitalist system develops and survives (Dahlberg 2014).

The discourse theory lays on discourse as a social ontology where they understand the nature of social order, system, or social identity as a discourse. They see all objects or practices as the object of discourse. They broaden the field of traditional discourse theory - talk and text analysis in context or discursive and non-discursive - to include the entire symbolic system and social order (all social practices and political activities) (Howarth 2000, 5). In this sense, they emphasize the discursive character of all social objects and practices. All objects and social practices are discursive because their meaning and position depend upon their articulation within socially-constructed systems of rules and differences. In other words, all social objects and realities are objects of discourse because their meaning depends on the socially constructed system of rules and significant differences. This understanding does not reduce anything to the discourse or skepticism about the existence of

the world. On the contrary, this avoids skepticism and idealism by arguing that there is an objective reality, but no objective truth or meaning goes beyond discourse (Howarth and Stravrakakis 2000, 3). As Laclau and Mouffe put it:

*“The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of ‘natural phenomena’ or ‘expressions of the wrath of God’, depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985,108).*

This thought implies that all things are conditioned through the discourse, contrary to the view that discourse is considered necessary in one condition and not significant in other conditions. Since all aspects of the social world have meaning, discourse theory argues that meaning is only possible through discourse (Howarth and Stravrakakis 2000, 3). Discourse in this sense refers to a meaningful system of practice that has historically shaped the identity of the subject and object (Howarth 2000, 8). Discourse does not simply represent or reflect a pre-existing or underlying reality. Instead, it serves to partially bring that reality into being so that it has a constitutive function.

Laclau and Mouffe believe that social order or discourse has dependent, relational, differential, and political power inherent in it. The consequence is that the existing social order or practice is only a hegemonic order of hegemonic discourse. They offer two ways to view the articulation of hegemonic discourse, namely through the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference. The logic of equivalence operates by creating a common identity, which expresses the negation of discursive orders. In this logic, the production of signifiers to unite a

common identity is a significant concern suppose the logic of equivalence divides the system of difference. On the other hand, the logic of difference extends the system of difference by disarticulating chains of equivalence and combining elements into another, broader order. This logic seeks to weaken and move the antagonistic pole while trying to reduce the division to the boundaries of society. In this regard, one thing to note is that the relation of difference—‘x is different from y’—should be considered the fundamental relation of anything recognizable as a discursive element. The equivalence needs to be understood as being pasted onto difference. Equivalence equates one element with another, not in every regard (the two elements do not become identical), but in both elements’ relation to a third element ‘a’. The general formula for equivalence that considers the difference between equivalent elements would thus read: ‘x is different from y, but concerning both go hand in hand’ (Nonhoff 2019, 73).

## METHODS

This study uses the qualitative discourse method, especially content and linguistic analysis. This study lays on constructivist and reflexive principles (Alvesson and Skolberg 2000; Phillips and Hardy 2002). This method impacts the method of obtaining data and serving findings. This method is very relevant considering that the discourse on this study’s focus is indirectly or implicitly spoken.

The data in this study were obtained from government reports, magazines, newspapers, including video data such as news and discussions on television from January 2020 until the end of March 2020. It should be emphasized that in a discourse approach, all data is important without distinguishing between primary or secondary data sources. Meanwhile, data analysis in this study was carried out in conjunction with the data search process. However, at the final stage of the study, coding was also carried out to review findings. One thing that is the main principle in this research is reflexivity, in which interpretation is explained at all stages of the research process. This principle believes that the data are not obtained in a neutral space, apolitical and free

from ideological interests. It means that there is no 'world out there that can be accessed and investigated (through the scientific method) independently of subjective interactions and discourse mediation' (Sparringa 1997, 71; Alvesson and Skolberg 2000, 5). Consequently, finding and categorizing discourse elements in research cannot be separated from the practice of interpretation, and the researchers' values are mixed up in the process. This principle provides an adequate framework for studying the chain of equivalence and the chain of difference which is the focus of this study. The process is not entirely objective, but it is an interpretive practice.

## FINDINGS

### *Discourses by Medical Capitalists Encountering the Covid-19 Pandemic*

In controlling COVID-19, the role of medical capitalists cannot be ignored. They regulate the distribution of medical equipment and medicines that are used to treat the disease. Their position in dealing with the disease is very dilemmatic. They are the group that benefits the most from the increasing demand for medical products. On the other hand, the pandemic harms them because the raw materials they use so far have been imported, especially from China, which is the pandemic's initial epicenter and is a country that has been severely affected by the pandemic.

Medical capitalists benefited from the increased demand for medical products and medical tools to control the spread of COVID-19. The medical disciplinary effort is vital because the accumulation of profits from medical capitalists is not only there for the moment, but it will also increase capital accumulation in the long run. The medical disciplinary effort has become an academic concern of social scientists, especially in studies that discuss medicalization. These studies generally notice the attempts of medical capitalists to increase public awareness of medical issues and even their attempts to turn non-medical problems into medical ones for profit accumulation (Conrad 2007).

Various discourses that developed from medical capitalists were motivated by the discourse of medical discipline. From January to March 2020, the media in Indonesia generally presented discourses such as good personal hygiene and a healthy lifestyle, including consuming vitamins, supplements, and medicines, habituating handwashing, and drinking *jamu* (traditional herbal drinks) to boost the immune system. In addition, since the outbreak in Indonesia, advertisements in many media in Indonesia, especially television, are flooded with health products that claim to boost endurance, such as supplements and fever drugs. This discourse was also generally found in various official social media accounts of the medical industries in Indonesia. Generally, the discourse was followed by suggestions to practice high-grade personal hygiene and a healthy lifestyle. Various discourses were also commonly conveyed by medical professionals. A television program titled *Hidup Sehat* represents this discourse. In the early days of the pandemic, this program always discussed the importance of good personal hygiene and a healthy lifestyle to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. These discourses generally encourage the public to be disciplined on the use of medical products. As a result, these discourses became more popular in a short time and were practiced by some Indonesian people. In a short time, medical products such as masks went viral in the media and became hard to find.

Another growing discourse was the use of traditional or herbal medicines, particularly *jamu*. Since the development of the discourse on the benefits of *jamu* in preventing COVID-19, advertisements in various Indonesian media have been flooded with herbal products that are claimed to be able to boost the immune system. Discourse about the efficacy of red ginger to prevent COVID-19 further increased the intensity of advertising of herbal products and *jamu* in many media. This discourse was increasingly popular when in various interviews and media reports, medical professionals justified the discourse. However, the narrative emphasized that medicinal herbs are not for curative treatment but merely for immune system boosters. Through these various discourses, the consumption of *jamu* became a public conversation, and

many people in Indonesia went on to practice the discourse. In addition to herbal products produced by the medical industry, one of the popular herbal products is homemade *jamu* made from red ginger and various other medicinal herbs such as turmeric, galangal, and ginger. Discourse about the benefits of red ginger has become increasingly popular with the advertisements of herbal products made from red ginger.

Various discourses that were eventually embedded in the broader audience had a direct impact on medical capitalists. For example, the demand for medical products, including traditional medicines, increased. The increase in demand will also increase the profit accumulation of the medical capitalist group. However, with medical disciplinary efforts and the introduction of traditional medicine, future profits can also increase. In several studies, this was seen as the main force that triggered medicalization by medical capitalists.

Meanwhile, medical professionals tended to be considered as medical capitalist tools to medicalize society. Medical capitalism continuously promoted its products to the public both directly through advertising and indirectly through intermediaries such as medical professionals. The ultimate goal was that medical knowledge and disciplinary efforts would increase their capital accumulation (Illich 1976; Conrad 2007; Moynihan and Cassels, 2005). Other discourses from other medical capitalists that were less common than those mentioned earlier were discourses related to the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. COVID-19 has disrupted the global economy, including the medical or pharmaceutical industry in Indonesia. The condition is worsened by the dependence of the Indonesian medical industry on imported materials. Around 90% of the essential ingredients of the medical industry are imported from China and India. With the former being the pandemic's initial epicenter, Indonesia's medical industry is also impacted. Meanwhile, the medical industry with no imported raw materials has a different narrative, such as the traditional medicine industry.



*Discourses by the Non-Medical Capitalists  
Encountering The Covid-19 Pandemic*

In general, this capitalist group is one of the groups directly affected the most by the COVID-19 pandemic. This disease has caused enormous economic losses for the capitalists. At the same time, China, the epicenter of the pandemic, is a global economic power, and Indonesia's most important economic partners. Therefore, as mentioned in the theory of capitalism and wealth defense strategy, these capitalists will do anything to secure their wealth, including influencing public policy. The goal is to manage the economic impact of COVID-19 to maintain the existence of the group. Although according to the Marxist perspective, the capitalist group is very influential in the public policymaking process, this group still needs to ensure that the actions and policies made by the state are in line with their wishes and expectations. Therefore, this section will discuss the discourse of this group of capitalist in dealing with COVID-19 in Indonesia.

The central discourse of non-medical capitalists is very closely related to the economic problems due to the spread of COVID-19. The discourse has risen since before the outbreak reached Indonesia. The issue was mainly due to the significant influence of China in Indonesia's economic activities in recent decades. One of the discourses that became the initial discussion of this group was the impact of the outbreak on tourism as it would cause enormous losses in the tourism sector. In recent years, the tourism sector has been designed as a primary sector that must progressively contribute to Indonesia's national income. Various restrictions, including travel restrictions in many countries to suppress the spread of the disease are considered one of the main threats to tourism. This discourse was continuously conveyed by these capitalist groups on many occasions so that this discourse can be found easily in various media in Indonesia from January to February 2020. For example, the chairperson of the Employers' Association of Indonesia (APINDO), Hariyadi, revealed that COVID-19 had affected several sectors, such as tourism, aviation, and hospitality, due to a drop in

the number of tourists visiting Indonesia, especially those from China (Makki 2020b).

The capitalist group pushed the government to control the economic impact caused by the spread of COVID-19 in many regions of the world, especially China. The economic impact was inseparable from the fact that most foreign tourists in Indonesia were from China. In that situation, they proposed prioritizing domestic tourists as a solution for the decreasing number of foreign tourists. This proposal was conveyed by the Chairperson of APINDO, who requested specific incentives to encourage domestic tourists to travel. One incentive was to provide discounts on domestic travel tickets (Makki 2020b). The Ministry of Transportation then implemented that policy to support the aviation industry. Another critical discourse came from the Vice-Chairperson of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry for Tourism, Kosmian Pudjiadi. He encouraged the government to provide relaxation on payments, local tax, and central government tax; to eliminate penalty and interest of 2% per month; to hold government meetings in developed tourist destination areas. He also suggested preventing psychological effects due to COVID-19, promoting airplane or train travel with the consideration that the death rate of COVID-19 was only 2.5% which was a much smaller percentage compared to the death rate from dengue fever, tuberculosis, and SARS (Prabowo 2020). This group also urged immediate discussion and enactment of the Omnibus Law on Job Creation (Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja) to overcome the effects of the outbreak on the national economy. The chairperson of APINDO said that the Omnibus Law was urgently needed to overcome the economic impact of COVID-19 (Putri 2020).

After COVID-19 struck and spread in Indonesia, the discourse of economic impact and the importance of government intervention to overcome economic problems due to the outbreak became increasingly prominent among non-medical capitalists. The growing discourse was the impact of COVID-19 on tourism and other economic sectors. Many employers' associations, such as the Employers' Association of Indonesia (APINDO), the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association

(PHRI), the Indonesian Young Entrepreneurs Association (HIPMI), the Indonesia National Air Carriers Association (INICA), the Indigenous Indonesian Entrepreneur Association (HPPI), and even the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce, generally had the same discourse. They encouraged the government to focus on the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was hoped that the government would provide incentives and other facilities for the sustainability of their businesses.

Some discourses related to this, for example, were made by the Chairperson of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Rosan Roeslani. He asked the government to increase incentives or tax relaxation to businesses that experienced financial loss due to COVID-19 (Novelino 2020). Meanwhile, the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vice Chairperson, Shinta Widjaja, expressed that entrepreneurs now needed fiscal incentives in order to ease the burden on corporate cash flow (Wiguna 2020). Roeslani also suggested that companies affected by COVID-19 be given leniencies, such as leniency concerning debt installment payments (Egeham 2020). APINDO also suggested that the government subsidize holiday allowances for workers. The company needed subsidies as a result of the decline in production. The Secretary-General of the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association, Maulana Yusran, requested that the electricity price per kilowatt (kWh) be reduced by 50%. “Regarding electricity, we ask that the electricity price be discounted up to 50% per kWh if possible,” stated Yusran (Indraini 2020). Some other discourses were tax breaks, postponement of retribution and payment of electricity bills and national health insurance, and the acceleration of the discussion of the Omnibus Law.

Meanwhile, this group also objected to the lockdown plan that many people discussed. For example, it was mentioned by the Chairperson of APINDO, “We certainly will choose an option other than a lockdown, but we have to assess other consequences as well” (Malik and Prasetya 2020). Some associations even suggested that people continue working during the pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, these discourses were very dominant in numerous Indonesian media; conventional media such as news-

papers, magazines, television, radio, and internet-based media. Various discourses about the dangers of the pandemic for the national economy followed appeals to remain calm. The accompanying arguments were the reaction of this capitalist group.

### *The Influence of Capitalist Discourse on Public Policy in Facing the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia*

Discourses from the government in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak showed many similarities with the dominant discourse, especially those that concern both medical and non-medical capitalists. Before the COVID-19 outbreak hit Indonesia, the government's attention to the economic impact of the outbreak in China and several other countries was very apparent. The argument became clear when the Chinese government decided to close access to the country, especially Wuhan, on 23 January 2020. From January to February, the economic discourse was very prominent, resulting in little attention from the government towards health issues.

Attention to the economic impact peaked after the government suspended flights to and from China on 5 February 2020. It was not only the capitalist group who expressed discourse on economic impact, but many state officials, after the government decision, were more outspoken in discussing the economic impact that Indonesia faced. For example, in early February, the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, Wishnutama Kusubandio, said COVID-19 harmed the tourism sector. One of the strategies that were undertaken to overcome this problem, he said, was to improve and optimize meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE). The same thing was also said by the Coordinating Minister for Maritime and Investment Affairs, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, on 6 February. He stated that an outbreak in China would undoubtedly impact the Indonesian economy, especially tourism and coal industries because China is a major trading partner in said industries.

The consequence of these discourses was that initial policies in dealing with the impact of COVID-19 became economy-centered policies.

By the end of February 2020, the government issued a policy package of economic stimulus I to deal with the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Incentives of IDR 10.3 trillion were given to several sectors affected by the disease: food, investment, and tourism. In the tourism sector, the government provided an incentive of IDR 298.5 billion for airlines and travel agents to attract foreign tourists. Meanwhile, IDR 443.39 billion was disbursed to domestic tourists in the form of a 30 percent discount on airplane tickets for 25 percent of seats per flight to 10 tourist destinations. This discount is valid for three months, from March to May 2020. To provide more support for the ten tourist destinations, the government will waive hotel and restaurant tax for six months. In return, for regional revenues, the ten tourist destinations will be given a grant compensation of IDR 3.3 trillion. Other incentives given to airlines are discounts on aviation fuel which is also valid for three months. Furthermore, the government provided a stimulus fund of IDR 1.5 trillion for housing in the investment sector. IDR 800 billion was used to subsidize the difference in interest for ten years so that the interest paid by consumers is only five percent. Meanwhile, IDR 700 billion was allocated to subsidize housing advances. The government mentioned that this policy's main objective was to stabilize the national economy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not long after the policy package was ratified, the COVID-19 pandemic reached Indonesia. It resulted in the expansion of economic impact discourse, which was limited to the tourism sector and the economy. It prompted the government to issue a policy package of economic stimulus II with a total budget of around IDR 125 trillion. Minister of Finance, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, said: "At the time of stimulus I, we considered the risk to be limited to the hotel and restaurant sector. However, the status of coronavirus that becomes a global pandemic has a greater risk impact" (Handayani 2020).

Some of the main points of the policy package II include, first, the relaxation of employees' income taxes (PPh 21) in which the government bears PPh 21 for the six months until the end of September 2020 on the income of the manufacturing industry with a maximum

income of IDR 200 million. The second main point is the relaxation of deductible income tax on imports of goods (PPh 22), which is given for six months from April to September 2020. The third main point is the relaxation of monthly income tax (PPh 25) by giving the PPh 25 cut of 30 percent to 19 specific sectors, KITE Taxpayers, and KITE-IKM Taxpayers for six months, a total estimated reduction of IDR 4.2 trillion. The fourth main point is the accelerated Value Added Tax (VAT) restitution for 19 specific sectors with an estimated total of IDR 1.97 trillion. There is no limit on the number of special VAT refunds for exporters, while for non-exporters, the value of VAT refunds is set at a maximum of IDR 5 billion.

Meanwhile, for non-fiscal stimulus, the first policy is to simplify and reduce the number of Restrictions and Prohibitions (*lartas*) for export activities whose purpose is to increase exports and competitiveness. The second is the simplification and reduction of the number of Restrictions and Prohibitions (*lartas*) for import activities, especially raw material import activities, whose purpose is to increase the availability of raw materials (Susiwijono 2020). The third is accelerating Reputable Traders' export and import process, which are companies related to export and import activities with a high compliance level. The fourth is improving and accelerating export and import process services by developing the national logistics ecosystem.

Government attention to the economic impact of COVID-19 does not stop there. At the end of March 2020, the government issued a policy package for COVID-19 handling with a total budget of IDR 405.1 trillion by stipulating 2020 Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 1 Year 2020 on State Financial Policy and Financial System Stability for Handling Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic and/or in the Context of Facing Threats that Harm National Economy and/or the Financial System Stability. Of the total budget, 150 trillion is allocated for national economic recovery, and 70.1 trillion is budgeted for tax incentives and stimulus for People's Business Credit (KUR). Meanwhile, for the health sector, a total of 70 trillion allocations is made, while for social protection, the allocation is 110 trillion. However, the last-

mentioned policy package differs from previous policies. In this policy, the government pays attention to the economic and health sector as well as, even most importantly, to social security.

In addition, in Government Regulations in Lieu of Law Number 1 the Year 2020, several other policies support the capitalists. For example, in Article 5 Paragraph 1, the government reduces income tax of domestic corporate taxpayers and permanent establishments by 22%, valid from 2020 to 2021, and 20%, which will come into force in 2022. In Article 5 Paragraph 2, the government pledges that domestic taxpayers who are limited liability companies with the total number of shares being traded on a stock exchange in Indonesia at least 40% can obtain a rate of 3% lower than the rate that has been lowered as stated in Paragraph 1.

While economic impacts are a concern and are taken seriously by the government, this is not the case with health issues. Government attention to health issues is not as great as their attention to economic issues. Before the outbreak reached Indonesia, policies related to health issues mainly were only appeals by state officials, for example, a statement from the Minister of Health, Terawan Agus Putranto, at the end of January 2020 asking the public to boost their endurance and immune system. He said, “The enemy of the virus is only immunity. If our immune system is good, there is no need to fear the virus” (Zaenuddin 2020). In addition, the government always urged people to remain calm. According to the Minister of Health, the disease caused by coronavirus could heal itself, and the death rate caused by it was low.

After the first positive cases were reported in Indonesia, public policy in the health sector initially did not change much. In general, the new policy was an appeal, such as an appeal to the public to boost their immune system by practicing good personal hygiene and a healthy lifestyle such as washing hands, not wearing masks for those who are not sick, and drinking *jamu*. Regarding the consumption of *jamu*, several state officials expressed the importance of drinking it to boost immunity, from the Minister of Health to President Joko Widodo. The latter said that he drank *jamu* made from red ginger three times a day to boost

immunity. He said, “I usually drink a mixture of curcumin, ginger, lemongrass, and turmeric. I used to drink it only in the morning. Now, because of a coronavirus, I drink it in the morning, afternoon and evening” (Makki 2020a). The government claimed that the first three patients had recovered from COVID-19 because they drank *jamu*. According to the patient, the *jamu* was a gift from the President.

The government’s serious concern towards the health sector only began in late March. Some crucial policies, for example, were the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and rapid test kits and the preparation of quarantine areas. The climax was a policy package for handling COVID-19 with a total budget of IDR 405.1 trillion with a proportion of IDR 70 trillion specifically allocated for health posts.

Many public policies dealing with COVID-19 were basically in line with the discourse delivered by capitalists, both medical and non-medical capitalists. It was further confirmed by the government’s statement that there were two main priorities in dealing with COVID-19: the health sector and the economy sector. These two main priorities, namely the health and economy sector, basically go hand in hand. The main discourse is the appeal to stay calm, stay productive, and medical discipline. This discourse is not only in line with the non-medical capitalist discourse which wants society to remain productive so that economic activities can continue as usual, but also in line with the medical capitalist discourse which wants medical discipline in society.

The main emphasis of this study is the unification of the discourses of these two capitalist groups. This is different from existing studies which generally only emphasize economic priority over health in state policies to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic (Fealy 2020). The tendency of the state to take sides with non-medical capitalist groups in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic is only possible if it is supported by the discourse of medical discipline from medical capitalists. Through this discourse strategy, capitalist groups can dominate discourse in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. In addition, the current condition of the Indonesian government, which is considered to be strongly influenced by the capitalist economic structure, also plays



an important role in the success of this capitalist strategy (Warburton 2016).

## CONCLUSION

This paper has two conclusions. First, this study sees that capitalist power in Indonesian politics is still extreme. The central policies adopted by the government in the early period of handling the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, namely between January and late March 2020, were very close to the discourse of the capitalist power, both medical and non-medical. The discourse of public discipline over the use of medical products from medical capitalists had the same discursive elements as that of government discourse. Both of them articulated this discourse with the aim of public health, but theoretically, this is important to increase the accumulation of capital in the health industry in the future.

Meanwhile, non-medical capitalist generally sees this pandemic as a disaster for the continuation of their capital accumulation. Therefore, the central discourse that was encouraged by this group was the economic impact of this pandemic. Meanwhile, elements of discourse outside the discourse of the two capitalist classes are generally less well-articulated, especially in the form of state policies. Therefore, the study concludes that capitalist power is the leading political force of policy-making in dealing with COVID-19 in Indonesia.

Second, this study concludes that discourse is critical in analyzing the politics of policymaking in Indonesia. The COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to many new discourses influenced by the capitalist. If this discourse becomes increasingly hegemonic, it will become common sense and will direct further government actions. Therefore, studies of Indonesian policy politics cannot be separated from the initial moments of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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