# The Role of Labor Law in Settling Industrial Relations Disputes: A Normative Juridical Perspective on the Rights of Workers and the Obligations of Employers in Indonesia

Diah Ayu Rahmawati<sup>1</sup>, Haryono<sup>2</sup>, Budi Endarto<sup>3</sup>, Indi Nuroini<sup>4</sup>, Hananto<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Bhayangkara Surabaya

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Bhayangkara Surabaya

<sup>3</sup>Universitas Wijaya Putra Surabaya

<sup>4</sup>Universitas Bhayangkara Surabaya

<sup>5</sup>Universitas Bhayangkara Surabaya

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research reviews labor law's role in the settlement of disputes in industrial relations within a normative juridical perspective in Indonesia. The research focuses on workers' rights and employers' obligations under Indonesia's labor legislation, mainly Undang-Undang No. 13 Tahun 2003 (the Labor Law). The study examines dispute resolution mechanisms, such as negotiation, mediation, and arbitration through the PHI, their effectiveness in protecting workers' rights, and how well employers adhere to the law. From the results, it is learned that negotiation and mediation are effective at the starting stage, but due to power imbalance and delayed processing in the judicial system, comprehensive settlements could not be achieved. Moreover, inconsistent court decisions, weak enforcement of workers' rights, and lack of adequate union representation remain critical. Concluding, the paper provides recommendations on how Indonesia can better settle labor disputes by strengthening mechanisms for mediation and arbitration, enhancing judicial capacity, and effective enforcement of workers' rights.

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#### Corresponding Author:

Name: Diah Ayu Rahmawati

Institution: Universitas Bhayangkara Surabaya

e-mail: diahayu@ubhara.ac.id

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Like in most other countries, the state of industrial relations in Indonesia plays a very important role in maintaining the relationship between employees and employers as smooth and productive [1], [2]. The labor market, covering issues relating to employment condition, wages, job security, and workplace safety, has become increasingly complex with the economic

development of the country [3], [4]. The legal framework in regard to industrial relations is very relevant for the safeguarding of workers' rights and making it obligatory for the employers to discharge their functions in a way that would guarantee a balanced setting for economic development and social stability [5].

The Indonesian law system, covering labor issues substantially under the

Indonesian Labor Law-UUndang-Undang Nomor 13 Tahun 2003-have undergone major modification in recent years. This law sets the minimum rights of workers, such as the right to receive decent wages, proper working conditions, and the right to unionize and collectively bargain [6], [7]. It also sets the duties of employers, including the responsibility to provide decent working conditions, timely payment of wages, and adherence to occupational health and safety standards [8], [9], [10].

Although labour laws in Indonesia are very comprehensive, there are still a number of disputes between workers and employers, particularly in issues relating to wrongful dismissal, wage disputes, and violations of workers' rights [11], [12]. Most of the industrial relations break down due to such conflicts which further escalate into legal battles, strikes, or other forms of protests [2], [13]. First, the effectiveness of the labor law in dispute resolution impacts the social and economic welfare of both employees and employers [4], [14].

Industrial relations disputes inevitable in the dynamic relationship between workers and employers. This is more pronounced in Indonesia, where the increase in the pace of economic growth and labor market expansion has introduced new levels of complexity to workplace relations [6], [11]. It is, therefore, very important that these disputes be resolved amicably to retain industrial harmony, protect workers' rights, and contribute toward economic stability [9], [15], [16]. Despite Indonesia having quite comprehensive labor laws, such as Undang-Undang No. 13 Tahun 2003, a number of challenges still remain in their application, including delays in dispute resolution, enforcement, and inconsistent power imbalances between employers employees. These are pressing issues that need to be addressed if a just and fair labor environment is to be established, and also to prevent disruptions in the workforce and Indonesia's commitment international labor standards.

While there are legal frameworks for resolving industrial disputes in Indonesia, such as negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and the Industrial Relations Court (PHI), these mechanisms very often face significant inefficiencies, such as extended processing times and inconsistent rulings, ultimately which undermine their effectiveness. Poor implementation of labor laws and limited access to legal aid make it difficult for workers to exercise their rights related to fair wages, workplace safety, and job security. Employers themselves also do not always fulfill their legally required commitments, leading to disputes on contract terms and conditions, wage payments, and working conditions that further escalate tensions in industrial relations. Added to these profound are more structural inequalities of resources, bargaining power, and legal knowledge in the way workers attempt to resolve their disputes equitably. These various, enduring difficulties underpin urgent needs for both legal and institutional reform aimed at increasing effectiveness, equity, and accessibility in how industrial dispute resolution mechanisms work out in Indonesia.

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- Assess the effectiveness of resolving industrial relations disputes in Indonesia under the existing Indonesian labor law, specifically Undang-Undang No. 13 Tahun 2003.
- Examine workers' rights under Indonesian labor law and discuss how these are or are not enforced in the context of industrial dispute cases.
- 3) Discuss an employer's liability and adherence to labour law provisions in relation to the assessment of its role in preventing or mitigating industrial dispute situations.
- 4) To determine how effectively dispute resolution machinery such as negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and the PHI has been working to

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- ensure impartial dispute resolution between workers and employers.
- 5) To identify impediments and lacunae in the prevailing labor law framework which obstruct the successful resolution of industrial disputes in Indonesia.
- 6) To recommend ways in which labor laws and dispute resolution procedures can be strengthened to ensure fair industrial relations in Indonesia.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Labor Law and Industrial Relations

Labor law in Indonesia, primarily governed by the Labor Law (Undang-Undang No. 13 Tahun 2003), serves as a cornerstone for balancing the rights and obligations of workers and employers, fostering economic stability and productivity. Recent amendments through the Job Creation Law introduced changes affecting employment agreements and outsourcing, sparking concerns over workers' rights [6], [9]. This legal framework offers comprehensive protections, promotes workplace safety aligned with international standards, and ensures industrial harmony through effective dispute resolution mechanisms [4], [6], [17].

# 2.2. Rights of Workers under Indonesian Labor Law

Workers' rights in Indonesia are upheld through labor laws that ensure fair wages, safe working conditions, and social security benefits, yet enforcement remains inconsistent, particularly in sectors with weak labor unions, leaving many, especially vulnerable groups, exposed to exploitation. Indonesian labor laws provide a normative framework for rights such as organizing and collective bargaining [18] and include specific protections for vulnerable groups like women and migrant workers, in alignment with ILO conventions [16]. However, enforcement challenges persist, with workers in the MSME sector often facing inadequate protections due to financial constraints and understanding of regulations.

Additionally, the Job Creation Law has raised concerns about potential violations of workers' rights, particularly related to outsourcing and job security [9]. Female workers frequently encounter inadequate safety measures and unequal access to legal protections [18], while informal sector workers remain entirely excluded from legal safeguards, underscoring significant gaps in Indonesia's labor rights framework [19].

# 2.3. Obligations of Employers

In Indonesia, employers are required to uphold workers' rights through fair wages, occupational health and safety, and social security benefits; however, implementation, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), often falls short, leading to discrepancies between law and practice. Many workers in the MSME sector face inadequate wages due to financial constraints and a lack of awareness of labor laws, despite Government Regulation Number 36 of 2021 aimed at protecting wages, with weak in regions enforcement with limited oversight. The Indonesian Social Security Administration Body (BPJS) provides job loss insurance, but its inconsistent implementation leaves some workers without benefits [20]. In sectors like tourism, legal protections highlight the need for better claim processes and employer accountability. Additionally, female workers often face inadequate safety and health protections, hindered by societal and employer biases, while the Omnibus Law on Job Creation raises concerns about potential violations workers' rights [18].

# 2.4. Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Effective dispute resolution mechanisms are crucial for industrial harmony in Indonesia, with options like negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and labor courts outlined in the Labor Law. The Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration plays a key role in mediation, though many disputes escalate to litigation due to initial failures and challenges like limited resources and procedural inefficiencies. Mediation, under Law No. 30 of 1999, aims for faster, cost-effective resolutions [21], but its success

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depends on public awareness, mediator quality, and party cooperation [21]. The lack of local mediators can delay resolutions [22]. ADR mechanisms, including mediation and conciliation, offer quicker solutions [21], but require skilled mediators and active cooperation, which is often absent [21], [23]. A stronger regulatory framework, including national mediator standards and enforceable agreements, is needed to enhance mediation outcomes [24].

#### 3. METHODS

### 3.1. Aproach

This descriptive and analytic research design is used to clearly spell out the role of labor law in resolving disputes within industrial relations. Precisely, the focus of this study will be the identification of legal provisions governing industrial disputes, an analysis of their application at work in resolving such conflicts, and an evaluation of their outcomes in terms of the protection of workers' rights and compliance by employers. This study adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on normative legal analysis, which will examine and interpret the existing laws, regulations, and legal practices concerning industrial relations in Indonesia.

This study examines the adequacy of the role of labor law in industrial relations disputes, with the use of both primary and secondary data, including legislation, case law, government reports, and scholarly articles. In furtherance of that, the research will also seek the relevant legal principles of contract law, employment law, and dispute resolution mechanisms with a view to measuring the extent to which Indonesia's labor law contributes towards industrial harmony.

### 3.2. Methods of Data Collection

This study employs both doctrinal and empirical research methods, with the purpose of discussing the document analysis of relevant legal documents and secondary data. Doctrinal research will review primary legal materials, including the Indonesian Labor Law (UU No. 13/2003), other statutes,

and government regulations, besides a review of secondary sources such as academic articles and books to understand the context and implications of the laws. These key areas concern workers' rights, employers' duties, and means of dispute resolution: negotiation, mediation, and labor courts. Moreover, the research discusses how case law develops as the judiciary decides labor laws in specific industrial disputes related to issues like wrongful dismissal and wage disputes.

It also reviews government reports, policy documents, and legal commentaries emanating from agencies like the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration, trade unions, and labor rights organizations. These afford a background on how the labor laws come into play, indicating the lacuna in the legal system. Other scholarly articles and books on the subject of labor law and industrial relations will be put into context to make a comparative study of the results of this research about the role played by labor laws in dispute resolution.

### 3.3. Data Analysis Techniques

Qualitative methods such as legal text analysis, case law analysis, comparative analysis, and thematic analysis will be done in analyzing the data for this study. Legal text analysis will be done to study the Indonesian Labor Law and other related regulations to trace the legal norm and analyze the effectiveness of dispute resolution mechanisms. Case law analysis will also be focused on judicial interpretations of labor laws when resolving disputes like issues on the contract and wrongful termination. A comparative analysis will compare Indonesia's labor law with that of other countries to identify potential reforms. Thematic analysis will explore recurring patterns in literature, case law, and reports, focusing on dispute resolution effectiveness, worker protections, employer compliance, and enforcement challenges.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

# 4.1. Legal Framework

Indonesian labor law is primarily governed by Undang-Undang No. 13 Tahun 2003 (Labor Law), which outlines the rights of workers and the obligations of employers across various aspects of employment, including wages, work hours, safety, and dispute resolution mechanisms. The law provides several methods for resolving industrial disputes, such as negotiations, mediation by the Dinas Tenaga Kerja (Labor Department), and arbitration through the Industrial Relations Court (PHI). These mechanisms are intended to offer workers a platform to address their grievances while employers ensuring that meet responsibilities.

Workers' rights under the Labor Law include the right to receive fair wages, protection against discrimination, freedom to join or form labor unions, and access to social security benefits. On the other hand, employers are required to meet obligations such as paying appropriate occupational ensuring wages, safety, respecting workers' rights to associate, and fulfilling contractual duties. The law provides a broad framework to ensure that these rights and obligations are upheld, with the goal of maintaining balance and fairness in the labor market.

Despite its comprehensive nature, the effectiveness of the Labor Law in resolving industrial disputes has been subject to ongoing debate. While the law provides mechanisms like negotiation, mediation, and arbitration to resolve conflicts, its practical application is often hindered by various challenges. Negotiation processes are often ineffective due to the power imbalance between workers and employers, leading to disputes [25]. unresolved Similarly, mediation facilitated by the Dinas Tenaga Kerja faces limitations due to resource shortages and insufficient training, which impacts its success [26].

Arbitration, through the Industrial Relations Court (PHI), offers a formal option

for dispute resolution, yet many workers are unaware of this process [27]. Furthermore, significant barriers to effective implementation remain, such as workers' lack of awareness of their legal rights and protections [27], power dynamics where employers often disregard legal obligations [25], and the limited legal recognition for certain groups, including domestic workers, which complicates their access to dispute resolution mechanisms [28]. These challenges underscore the need for better awareness, resources, and enforcement to ensure that labor rights are effectively protected in practice.

# 4.2. Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

# 4.2.1. Negotiation and Mediation

In Indonesia, negotiation and mediation are the typical first steps in the resolution of industrial relations disputes. The Labor Law encourages workers and employers to resolve disputes amicably through negotiation or with the intervention of a third-party mediator, such as the Dinas Tenaga Kerja. In practice, these mechanisms are often utilized in resolving wage disputes, issues related to working hours, and disputes concerning termination.

The results from the case law analysis show that, in general, negotiation and mediation at the early stages are effective in disposing of a dispute without having to escalate the proceedings to more formal ones. Indeed, Indonesia's Ministry of Manpower has reported that over 60% of industrial disputes are settled through these informal processes. However, mediation is often limited by power imbalances between workers and employers, especially in cases involving large corporations or where workers lack sufficient legal knowledge or representation. This limitation reduces the overall efficacy of the mediation process, particularly in complex disputes regarding termination or workers' rights.

## 4.2.2. Industrial Relations Court

If negotiation and mediation fail, disputes are taken further to arbitration in the Industrial Relations Court of the PHI. In essence, the PHI serves as the centerpiece for

resolving disputes on employment contracts, cases of unfair dismissal, and violations of workers' rights. However, case law analysis indicates that effectiveness in dispute resolution through this court is circumscribed by a number of factors.

One of the major bottlenecks observed is that of cases accumulating in the PHI, delaying the process of dispute resolution. Among very broad issues in the Indonesian judiciary, including the labor courts, is inefficiency; such inefficiency leads to delay, thus heightening the conflict of disputing parties. This is so with wrongful termination or disputes involving large groups of workers, where such delay may be financially and emotionally burdensome to employees.

Another issue that has been pointed out is judicial inconsistency. While some judges of the PHI have demonstrated considerable familiarity with labor legislation and have often handed down decisions supportive of workers, others have been criticized for their lack of familiarity with the law on industrial relations, which led to inconsistent outcomes. Where access to legal counsel by workers is limited, the inconsistent decisions of the courts erode confidence in the system.

Despite this, the PHI has been able to perform well in a few fields, such as proactively working on the recognition of workers' right to unionize and contesting employer policies that apply labor laws. In reality, the effectiveness of the PHI in resolving disputes involving industrial relations depends on three aspects: whether judges possess good legal knowledge, workers enjoy legal representation, and courts function efficiently.

# 4.3. Workers' Rights and Employers' Obligations

## 4.3.1. Workers' Rights to Fair Compensation

While the Labour Law guarantees workers' rights to appropriate wages, supposed to be central to the resolution of disputes on compensation, from an analysis of case law, it would appear that disputes over wages remain one of the most frequent causes

of industrial relations conflicts in Indonesia. Most of the time, there is a claim by workers that employers either do not pay the full wages due or adopt practices that rob workers of their statutory rights, such as paying for overtime work or even offering bonuses.

While the law requires employers to comply with minimum wage standards and ensure timely payment of wages, violations of these provisions are still frequent, especially in SMEs. One of the major challenges for Indonesian labor authorities has been enforcing the wage-related provisions. For example, workers in the informal sector or those employed in SMEs often cannot claim their rights due to the lack of documentation, labor contracts, or union representation.

# 4.3.2. Obligations of Employers for Safe Working Conditions

Employers are obliged under the Labor Law to also provide safety at work to their workers, including occupational health and safety. Case law demonstrates a continuing trend of employees filing cases over unsafe workplaces, especially in industries such as manufacturing, construction, and mining, where workplace accidents are quite common.

However, workplace safety law enforcement is still very poor in Indonesia. Most employers have still been reported to prioritize their business profits over the safety of workers. In addition, safety standards violations were often ignored by government agencies tasked with overseeing them. The compensation claims presented by the workers were often rejected or delayed due to which more disputes were developed.

# 4.3.3. Collective Bargaining and Union Representation

The Labor Law gives workers the right to organize their representations and bargain collectively with employers in order to improve their working conditions and obtain better remuneration. However, according to case law analysis, most of the workers do practically experience difficulties in forming unions or negotiating with employers due to the fear of retaliation or job loss.

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While the legislation favors collective bargaining, the poor practice of antiretaliation provisions has translated into the intimidating practices against efforts by workers to organize. Indonesian trade unions, while very powerful in certain industries, have scant presence in others, notably among SMEs and in employment in the informal sectors. Such an imbalance is clearly detrimental to workers asserting their rights without the presence of collective bargaining mechanisms.

### 4.4. Recommendations for Improvement

# 4.4.1. Empowering Mediation and Arbitration Mechanisms

The government should be encouraged to further enhance the dispute resolution effectiveness of mechanisms by investing in mediation and arbitration systems, for instance, through increasing resources for the training of mediators, making legal services more available both to workers and employers, and enhancing the capacity of the Dinas Tenaga Kerja to efficiently handle disputes. Setting up special labor dispute resolution centers would also help to overcome the backlog of cases in the Industrial Relations Court.

# 4.4.2. Strengthening Judicial Capacity and Efficiency

The capacity and efficiency of labour courts should be upgraded. This could include specialist training for judges in labour law and industrial relations, increasing the number of judges sitting in labour courts, and streamlining case management processes to minimize delays. In addition, increased access of workers to legal representation could reduce information gaps and ensure fair case outcomes.

# 4.4.3. Improvement in the mechanism for Workers' Right

Enforcement would definitely protect workers' rights properly, and here the emphasis has to be placed upon laws relating to wages, safety, and unionization. It could mean better mechanisms of inspection, stricter penalties for errant employers, and publicity regarding workers' rights. The labour inspectors can also be empowered, and

serious protection provided for whistleblowers in cases of violation.

# 4.4.4. Encouraging Collective Bargaining and Unionization

The government should affirmative action to encourage unionization bargaining, and collective including enhancing legal protection for workers' rights to organize and negotiate with employers. Protection for workers against retaliation, along with access of union representatives to employer negotiations, would significantly enhance the role and function of labor law in settling disputes and improving conditions at work.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Labor law plays an indispensable role in settling disputes in industrial relations, and a good balance in the relationship between workers and employers needs to be attained. Although the legal framework has been set, inefficiency in the practical implementation often leads to problems with enforcing workers' rights. The study shows that while negotiation and mediation processes are successful during the initial stages of dispute settlement, some major difficulties arise, which include judicial inefficiency, inconsistent judgments, and inadequate availability of legal resources for workers. Moreover, incomplete adherence employers to legal obligations, especially with respect to appropriate wages and workplace safety, adds to the conflict. The Industrial Relations Court, although important, is usually characterized by a backlog of cases, hence delays in dispositional time, increasing the cost of litigation. This therefore, points to a series of recommendations aimed at better mechanisms for resolving labor disputes by improving mediation and arbitration processes, judicial labor courts, access to legal representation for workers, and increased stringency in the protection of labor laws. Addressing these issues should enable Indonesia to develop a more effective legal regime for resolving industrial disputes, that workers' rights guaranteeing

balanced against employers' responsibilities in a fair and reasonable manner.

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