



2019_03_22_Japanese Communist Party Showcases Islamic Mass Movement

Official Newspaper of One of the World's Oldest and Largest Non-Governing Communist Parties Highlights the Role of Nahdlatul Ulama in Defending Indonesia's Democracy from Extremists

JAKARTA, Indonesia: On March 22, 2019, *Red Flag* (*Shimbun Akahata*)—the official newspaper of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), with a distribution of 1.2 million copies—published an extensive interview with Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Secretary of the world's largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Entitled “Islam Needs Tenets that Reflect Contemporary Reality,” the article examines the role of the NU in defending Indonesia's pluralistic, tolerant and multi-religious nation state from Islamist extremists motivated by obsolete and problematic elements of Islamic orthodoxy. The last in a 5-part series on Indonesia's April 2019 presidential and legislative elections, the interview with Mr. Staquf underscores rising concern among traditional leftist political movements about the weaponization of ethnic, religious and political identities worldwide.

Like Nahdlatul Ulama (est. 1926), JCP traces its heritage to the anti-colonialist struggle of the 1920s, and has a history of fighting for the principles of popular sovereignty, anti-sectarianism and self-determination. One of the oldest and largest non-governing Communist parties in the world, it was founded in 1922 and claims a membership of over 300,000. Anti-imperialist and anti-militarist, JCP was the only Japanese political party to actively oppose Imperial Japan's invasion of China and its entry into World War II, and seeks to turn Japan into a non-aligned nation. The pacifist international order to which the party aspires, however, is increasingly threatened by a rising tide of ethnic and religious hatred, discrimination and violence, fueled in large part by widespread perceptions that Islam threatens non-Muslims, and is synonymous with terrorism.

The positive coverage of Nahdlatul Ulama in *Red Flag* has been mirrored across the political spectrum, with endorsements from a broad cross-section of European media outlets and [political parties](#); U.S. Vice President [Michael Pence](#); and even controversial website *Jihad Watch*, which [praised](#) Mr. Staquf for having “the courage to identify jihadist violence as stemming from Islamic tradition and teachings.”

Whilst the JCP—a member of the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, which includes the governing parties of China, Cuba, Laos and Vietnam—vehemently opposes the political weaponization of ethnic and religious identity, many left wing institutions and politicians in the West have established a functional alliance with Muslim supremacists and weaponized Islam as means to marginalize and discredit their opponents with blanket charges of racism and Islamophobia.

From the perspective of the Nahdlatul Ulama's General Secretary, this alliance between Islamists and influential political activists on the left has blocked the emergence of societal consensus in the West regarding the nature of *jihadi* terrorism and its relationship to obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy. This, in turn, has exacerbated the polarization of Western societies and contributed to the re-emergence of white supremacism and other forms

of ultra-nationalism in Europe and around the world (e.g., India and Myanmar), which also weaponize Islam and propagate anti-Muslim narratives to maintain or acquire political power.

Recognizing the threat posed by *all* forms of extremism, in October of 2018 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor—the 5-million-member NU young adults movement—and Bayt ar-Rahmah issued the *Nusantara Statement*, which “call[s] upon people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join in building a global consensus to prevent the political weaponization of Islam, whether by Muslims or non-Muslims, and to curtail the spread of communal hatred by fostering the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.”