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THE LONDON DAWN RAID AND ITS EFFECT ON MALAYSIAN PLANTATION WORKERS

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Abstract

The London Dawn Raid was a significant event in the history of the rubber plantation industry in Malaya. It was a strike by the workers of the rubber plantations in Malaya, which was the first of its kind. The strike was led by the workers of the rubber plantations in Malaya, who were demanding better working conditions and higher wages. The strike was successful, and the workers were granted their demands. This article examines how the change in management affected plantation workers.

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workers, especially Indian labourers and the predicament faced by the latter from the early 1980s until early 2000s.

Notes

*The author would like to thank Professor Emeritus Rajeswary Ampalavanar Brown for her comments on drafts of this article.

¹'The Guthrie takeover was therefore, regarded as retaliation for this Scrooge-like British government action' (Shakila and White 2010: 19).

²Abdul Khalid Ibrahim, General Manager, Permodalan Nasional Bhd., 'Business investments and growth', <<http://mgv.mim.edu.my/MMR/8508/85805.htm>> Accessed 10 June 2010.

³Lit. son(s) of the soil, referring to the indigenous people of Malay stock and the native communities of the country.

⁴The 1948 Federation proposal denied automatic citizenship and made strict provision for acquisition of citizenship by non-Malays such as language requirement i.e. an adequate knowledge of Malay or English.

⁵Malaysian Indian Congress ([1974](#): 15, 26–8). Government allocation for the rural sector in all its categories was to be of. According to the Second Malaysia Plan. In the next five years, the government planned to spend MYR7.86 billion (1974–79) on rural development (Second Malaysia Plans). The government also planned to utilise specific funds for rural development.

⁶FELDA was established to settle and provide land to landless Malaysians. FELDA land was fragmented into small plots of land.

⁷The termination of Indian plantation workforce for the purpose of employing foreign workers is against Section 60M Employment Act 1955 which states that an employer cannot terminate the services of a local worker for the purpose of employing a foreign worker. This Act which was enacted during colonial days was intended to protect local workers. Unfortunately after independence, especially in the 1980s, mostly Indonesian foreigners, were recruited on the grounds that there was not enough labour and this move affected the wages of Indian plantation workers. The displacement that has taken place since the the 1980s to the present time is against this Act. The Act, which applies only to the private sector also regulates the hours of work, including overtime work, payment of wages, advances on and deductions from wages. It provides for the priority of wages over other debts, and the liability of principals and contractors, as well as employers, to pay wages. It also provides for a rest day, public holidays, annual leave, sick leave, maternity leave, maternity allowance, and termination and lay-off benefits. It could be concluded that the colonial laws had the welfare of the workers at heart compared to what was seen after independence (Part XII B – Employment of Foreign Employees, Section 60 M, Laws of Malaysia, Act 265, Employment Act, 1955). The Act has continuously been cited by the Labour Ministers in the Malaysian Cabinet whenever workers were made redundant by the plantation agencies in the early 2000s.

⁸Member System was introduced in April 1951 to provide self-governance. It had nine members of different communities responsible for various departments and functions of government.

⁹When the NEP was introduced, 60% of the plantations were owned by foreign companies (Kallals [1990](#): 214).

¹⁰In 194... foreign owned. ... the total area, and by 1...

¹¹Int... on 18 Ju... dian dilemma

¹²Eviden... out between



¹³The paternalistic attitude of NUPW is discussed in INSAN ([1989](#): 33-4). To quote the editor, 'In the absence of a spirit of service and sacrifice, as well as genuine community involvement, and due to the overwhelming influence of materialistic values and corruption in Malaysian society, a significant number of office holders in these three big institutions [MIC, NUPW and NLFCS] work mainly, if not solely to benefit themselves – a sad state of affairs, to say the least' (INSAN [1989](#): 34). See also, Ramasamy ([1983](#): 57).

¹⁴No date of the event was provided by the author.

¹⁵No date was cited.

¹⁶For details of the Bukit Jelutong incident, see Aliran Monthly 22(10), 2002 quoted from Tate ([2008](#): 219).

¹⁷According to Manickam (2009: 203) the government had previously allocated MYR2.9 million to provide such facilities but the estate management did not apply for the grant.

¹⁸ 'Pengusiran paksa dan pencerobohan paksa tempat tinggal bekas pekerja ladang Bukit Jelutong Rasak: tiga generasi berkorban untuk syarikat, kini dilayan macam sampah' (Forced eviction and demolition of former Bukit Jelutong Rasak Estate workers' houses: treated like dirt despite sacrificing for the company for three generations), memorandum submitted by the Bukit Jelutong Rasak Estate Residents to Kumpulan Guthrie Bhd Chairman, Musa Hitam, on 6 March 2003 (quoted in Nagarajan [2007](#): 132).

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