



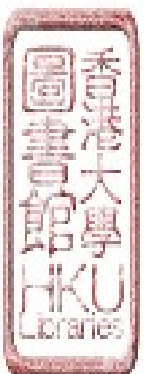
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UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

A Thesis
LABOUR UNREST IN MALAYA 1934-1941

Submitted by
Tai Yuen
In Partial Fulfillment for the
Degree of Master of Philosophy

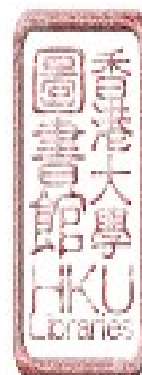
May 1973



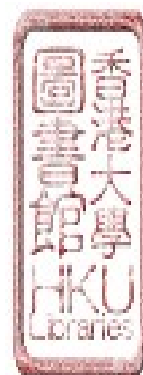
ABSTRACT of thesis entitled "Labour Unrest in Malaya 1934-1941" submitted by Tai Yuen for the degree of Master of Philosophy at the University of Hong Kong in May 1973.

* * * * *

The period 1934-41 witnessed a tremendous upsurge of labour unrest in Malaya. Beginning with the skilled artisans in 1934, large numbers of labourers in almost all industries throughout Malaya were swept into the vortex of industrial conflict in the following years. Both the Chinese and the Indian labourers had learnt to combine against their employers for higher wages and better working conditions, and the strike weapon was constantly used to enforce their demands. As a result the workers managed to rise from the depths of the Great Depression and secure hitherto unknown improvement in working conditions. This was accompanied by an enormous growth in the strength of organized labour. In 1941 at least 178 workers' associations were in existence in Malaya, and over two-thirds of these were formed during 1934-41. The illegal leftist General Labour Union also grew in strength in addition to a number of political associations which included labourers in their membership. The labour organizations had assumed the functions of trade unions to all intents and purposes although trade union status was not recognized by law until 1940-41. The widespread collective bargainings in conjunction with



the remarkable growth of labour unions suggest that the period under review was the formative years of trade unionism in Malaya. Labour at this stage had not yet entered into the field of legislation, but they came to acquire a wealth of experience in political conflict through industrial conflict and the anti-Japanese campaign. Through these and the politico-ideological influence of China and India, the political consciousness of the labourers was enhanced. The main body of the thesis is devoted to a detailed treatment of the course of labour unrest in Malaya in 1934-41 in chronological order. In the conclusion an assessment is made of the achievements and shortcomings of labour. The inadequacies of collective bargaining consisted in the fact that it was not equally effective in all industries and at all times, the gains had not fallen equally on the Indian and the Chinese labourers, the machinery of collective bargaining was incomplete, and it had not succeeded in removing the basic causes of labour discontent. The main weakness of labour organization lay in the paucity of labour associations in the all-important rubber and tin industries and among Indian labourers. These weaknesses, however, did not detract from the significant achievements of the Malayan labourers in collective bargaining, labour organization and political action in those turbulent years.



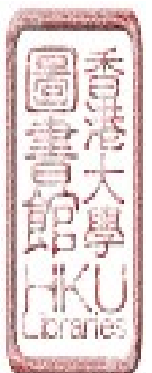
PREFACE

The object of this study is to delineate the course of labour unrest and, more particularly, to assess the advance of labour through collective bargaining, labour organization and political action in Malaya during the period 1934-41. Several prominent scholars have already made important contributions in the field. J.N. Parmer ^{has} ~~have~~ written case studies on the attempts at labour organization by the Chinese workers in certain industries in the 1930's and the Chinese rubber estate workers' strikes in Malaya in March, 1937. Virginia Thompson and W.L. Blythe have discussed the problems of labour unrest in their scholarly works. The more recent contribution has been made by M.R. Stenson. He has included a brief and useful review of labour unrest before the war in his work on industrial conflict in Malaya. Some other scholars, though not writing directly on the subject, have thrown light on some aspects of it in their own works. Important as these contributions are, the subject seems to justify a more coherent and detailed treatment than it has hitherto received, and herein lies the motive for undertaking the present study.

While official reports or English-language source materials constitute the most important source for almost all previous works on the subject, this study draws heavily on Chinese-language source materials. There are two main types of Chinese-language materials which are useful for the study of

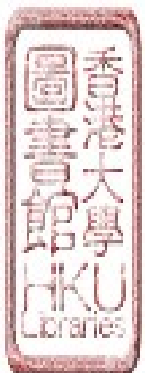


Malayan labour history: the Chinese newspapers and trade union publications. The Chinese newspapers tended to give a fuller coverage to industrial disputes. The causes of a dispute, the labourers' claims, the events associated with the dispute and the terms of settlement were usually reported in full, and hence not only a case but also the course of labour unrest extending over a period of time can be reconstructed. The merits of the Chinese newspapers as a source of information also lie in their better understanding of the problems of the Chinese labourers, who played a prominent role in the history of labour agitation in Malaya. There are several Chinese newspapers which cover the period under review, but only one of them, viz. Sin Chew Jit Poh is consistently used in this study to avoid duplication. Trade union publications include union souvenir magazines and union organs. Nearly all of them were published by trade unions in the post-war period. Pre-war publications by labour associations, if there were any, probably have all been lost. The union publications occasionally contain articles on union history, which in some cases could be dated back to the pre-war period. These publications are, unfortunately, widely scattered, and there is a danger of their being permanently lost to the student of history if no systematic attempt is made to collect and preserve them. A few of these publications are used in this study as most of them are not readily available.



Next to Chinese-language source materials, this study also draws on official reports and English-language newspapers. The Straits Times and the Malaya Tribune are used as a supplement to and a check on Chinese newspaper reports. The official annual reports are the most important official source used in this study. The unpublished official records, including the Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs and the files of the Labour Department, have not been consulted because they are not within the immediate reach of the writer.

The difficulty in the treatment of the subject lies in the paucity of information regarding extra-legal labour organizations and political movement. The structure, leadership, and much of the activities of the General Labour Union, for example, remain obscure. Since much of the labour unrest in the period cannot be properly understood without reference to them, this lacuna could be a source of weakness in the exposition and interpretation of the subject. Another difficulty is the lack of adequate statistics. No official strike statistics were compiled before the war, and such records on industrial disputes as contained in the Labour Department annual reports are inadequate. Official data on wage rates in all industries except the rubber industry are so ambiguous that they defy any attempt at presenting the wage structure as a whole or quantifying the wave movement over the whole period. An attempt is made in this study to compile the man-days lost through strikes. This compilation claims no exactitude and it is intended primarily



to illustrate the broad fluctuations of industrial unrest in the period.

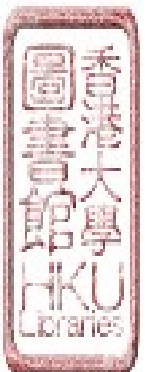
It is hoped that by drawing on hitherto unused Chinese-language source materials this study may throw light on some obscure aspects of the subject and thereby contribute to a better understanding of Malayan labour history before the war. It is suggested for future study that the memories of those who have gone through or witnessed industrial disputes during the period be tapped as one of the vital sources of information in order to enlarge our knowledge of the subject.

This study is an academic thesis written for the degree of Master of Philosophy at the History Department, University of Hong Kong, during 1972-73. My heartfelt thanks are due to Professor L.K. Young, whose concern for the progress of my work is a constant source of encouragement. I wish to express my deep gratitude in particular to Dr. W.E. Cheong, my supervisor. His vigorous criticism, invaluable advice and unfailing guidance have steered me through the course of this research. I also wish to thank the staff of the University of Hong Kong Library for their assistance. Mr. T.Y. Yong, secretary of the History Department, has been most helpful in typing out the whole manuscript proficiently and speedily to enable me to submit the thesis ahead of the deadline. To him and to all my friends who have given me encouragement and assistance I owe a debt of gratitude.

University of Hong Kong

Y. Tai

May, 1973



ABBREVIATIONS

A.C.F.T.U.	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
A.E.B.U.A.	Anti-Enemy Backing Up Association
C.C.P.	Chinese Communist Party
C.I.A.M.	Central Indian Association of Malaya
F.M.S.	Federated Malay States
G.L.U.	General Labour Union
M.C.P.	Malayan Communist Party
N.C.G.R.A.	Nanyang Chinese General Relief Association
R.G.A.	Rubber Growers' Association
S.H.B.	Singapore Harbour Board
S.T.C.	Singapore Traction Company
U.P.A.M.	United Planting Association of Malaya
<u>JSEAH</u>	<u>Journal of Southeast Asian History</u>
<u>JMBRAS</u>	<u>Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society</u>
<u>SCJP</u>	<u>Sin Chew Jit Poh</u>

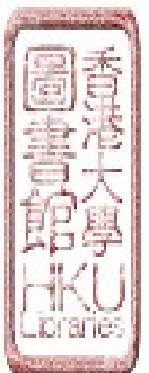
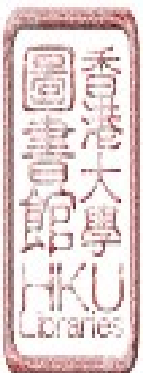


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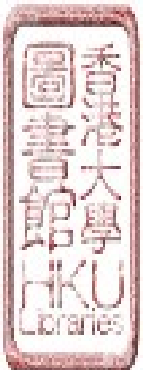
INTRODUCTION

1. The Socio-economic Context

Malayan labour history began with the advent of modern capitalist enterprise in Malaya in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹ Before the ascendancy of the British the mercantilist money economy introduced first by the Portuguese and then by the Dutch in Malacca was a mere enclave in a predominantly mediaeval economy based on subsistence farming, cottage handicraft industry, and fishing. In Malacca itself the Portuguese and the Dutch, who were merchant adventurers par excellence, introduced very little in the way of modern enterprise. Whatever sporadic wage-earning craftsmen there were in Malacca, they were greatly outnumbered by slaves imported to work in households, estates or workshops.² In the jungle-clad, sparsely populated hinterland, which was divided into a number of virtually independent princely states, the Malay peasants, craftsmen, and fishermen were bound to their overlords in bonded relationship. The exaction of corvée and tithes and the almost unlimited power of the Raja over the villagers were the regular features

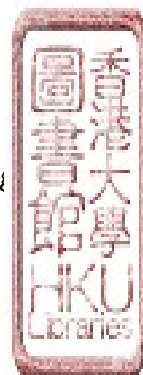
1. For the purpose of this study Malaya included the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Penang, and Malacca, the Federated Malay States of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang, and the Unfederated Malay States, which comprised Kelantan, Kedah, Trengganu, Perlis, and Johore. Labuan and Christmas Island and the Cocos-Keeling Islands, which were administratively part of the Straits Settlements, are not included in the present study.

2. M.J. Bremner (tr.), "Report of Governor Balthasar Bort on Malacca", JMBRAS, V, I, August, 1927, 39-44, 93.



of this relationship except in Negri Sembilan, where the matriarchal Minangkabau immigrants had evolved a primitive egalitarian community. Money was seldom used because barter was the dominant form of exchange among the villagers. Modern wage labour, which is based on a developed money economy and a free contractual relationship, could hardly have emerged in these circumstances.

The coming of the British changed the picture drastically. When the English East India Company founded Penang in 1786, Singapore in 1819, and finally took over Malacca from the Dutch in 1824, its primary concern was no less one of trading interests than the Dutch. However, the Industrial Revolution which was turning Britain into the 'workshop of the world' also marked the coming of the British as the beginning of a new epoch in the economic history of Malaya. The Manchester School of Thought could not have failed to exert its influence on the British economic policies in the colonial dependencies. Free trade was first introduced in Penang, and it was followed up by Stamford Raffles in Singapore. The absence of tariff, heavy dues and complicated harbour regulations contributed to the spectacular rise of Singapore as an emporium. Capital accumulated by the European and Chinese traders came to be channelled in the course of time into productive enterprises. Nutmeg, clove, tapioca, sago, sugar, and coffee were the more important cash crops cultivated before the introduction of rubber at the end of the nineteenth century. Modern tin mining financed by Straits Chinese traders was developed in the west coast Malay states. The extension of British rule to the



Malay States after the conclusion of the Pangkor Treaty in 1874 encouraged European investment on a considerable scale. By the turn of the century the modern capitalist sector had come into being side by side with the traditional indigenous sector of the economy.

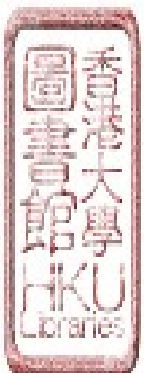
The modern economy of Malaya was characterized by one-sided dependence on the export of rubber and tin and the domination of British capital. The extent to which traditional paddy planting had been eclipsed by the encroachment of rubber can be gauged from the fact that 2,896,000 acres were under rubber and only 687,100 acres under rice in 1929.³ The greater part of the wealth of Malaya was derived from rubber and tin.⁴ In 1929 European companies accounted for 75 per cent of the total rubber estate acreage and 55 per cent of the Malayan rubber output.⁵ In the same year the European mines began to replace the Chinese mines as the largest producer of tin, and there were 105 European-owned dredges with a total issued capital of £13,099,432.⁶ British companies

3. Lennox A. Mills, British Rule in Eastern Asia (London, 1942), p. 553.

4. No accurate estimate of Malaya's national income before World War II is available. P.T. Baur made a rough calculation which showed that the gross value of agriculture and mining output in 1929 totalled 430⁺20 million Straits dollars and 138 millions respectively, to which rubber contributed 344 millions and tin 122 millions. See P.T. Baur, "Some Aspects of the Malayan Rubber Slump, 1929-1933" in T.H. Silcock (ed.), Readings in Malayan Economics (Singapore, 1961), pp. 186-187.

5. P.T. Baur, The Rubber Industry: A Study of Competition and Monopoly (Cambridge, 1948), pp. 5, 97.

6. E.M. Gull, British Economic Interests in the Far East (London, 1943), p. 127; Yip Yat Hoong, The Development of the Tin Mining Industry of Malaya (Kuala Lumpur, 1969), p. 20.

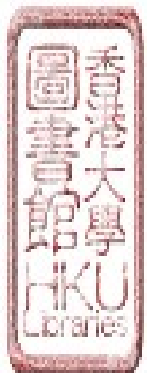


also dominated banking, insurance, import and export trade, quite apart from their interests in tin-smelting, breweries, electricity and power companies. H.G. Callis estimated that British interests surpassed 70 per cent of the total business investment in British Malaya.⁷

The rise of modern capitalist enterprise would not have been possible without an abundant supply of labour. For various reasons the traditional Malay community could not provide a sufficient pool of wage labour. A series of reforms initiated by the British, including the abolition of seigniorial privileges, the suppression of slavery, and land settlement on the English legal concept of private landed property, introduced far-reaching changes in the Malay society. The immediate result of these changes was the creation of a class of peasant proprietors rather than wage labourers. Therefore, when rubber planting and tin mining began to demand a large labour force at the turn of the century, the entrepreneurs found it well-nigh impossible to induce Malay villagers to work for wages. A rural landless class came into being only very slowly in the process of land fragmentation, rural indebtedness, land mortgages and alienation, and the emergence of landlordism.⁸ The Malay villagers who had lost their lands

7. Gull, British Economic Interests, p. 128.

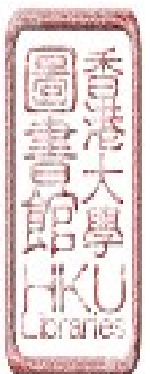
8. For the economic conditions of the Malay paddy cultivators see Mills, British Rule in Eastern Asia, pp. 250-290; Virginia Thompson, Postmortem on Malaya (New York, 1941), p. 306; E.H.G. Dobby, Agricultural Questions of Malaya (Cambridge, 1949) pp. 6-10, 26-27.



either became tenants, part-time wage earners, or drifted into estates or towns to become full-time wage labourers. However, the process was too slow and the Malay population was too sparse to generate sufficient labour for the industries.

China and India, on the other hand, became labour-export countries on account of their vast surplus population. The Chinese peasantry, who possessed no land or very little land of their own, were impoverished under the heavy burden of rent, taxes, and usury, and the depredations of war and natural disasters. The pressure on land increased with the growth of population, and in the course of time a class of dispossessed and unemployed villagers emerged. The flooding of western merchandise in the Chinese market after the opening of the Treaty Ports in 1842 led to the decline of traditional Chinese industries and unemployment of craftsmen. A rather similar process was at work in India. The ryot were subjected to the exaction of the revenue farmers, the eviction of absentee landlords, and the exploitation of usurers, and they suffered from the recurring famines which ravaged India. The traditional Indian industries, including weaving and shipping, declined under the British Raj. A reverse flow of population from the urban centres to the villages occurred as a result of unemployment of craftsmen, which aggravated the pressure of population on land.⁹ Those unemployed or underemployed,

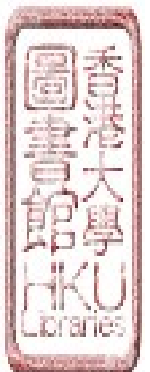
9. For the causes of modern Indian emigration, see K.S. Sandhu, Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement, 1786-1957 (Cambridge, 1969), p. 81; C. Kondapi, Indians Overseas, 1838-1949 (New Delhi, 1951), pp. 2-5.



poverty-stricken Chinese and Indian rural masses came to be tapped as the vital sources of labour for newly developed countries.

A system of recruitment of Chinese and Indian indentured labourers was soon evolved. The salient feature of this system was that the recruited labourer was bound to his employer by indenture from which he could not free himself unless the cost of passage and other debts were paid off. Employers obtained their sin kheh (new Chinese immigrants) either by sending their own overseers to China or through the agents of the recruiting firms in the coastal Chinese ports. Those recruiters managed to collect a band of labourers through persuasion, misrepresentation, fraud, and even kidnapping. The labourers were usually penniless, and the cost of passage was advanced by the recruiters. As each emigrant labourer had a ticket which specified his destination and other particulars, this system of recruitment came to be known as the credit-ticket system. The coolie was bound to work for a specified period of time, say one year or three years, on a meagre wage, which was not actually paid to him but went to defray the food, lodging, and clothing provided by the employer and to pay off his debt. The sin kheh was usually unable to pay off his debt in the specified period because the employer had every interest and convenience to prolong his bonded status. The Chinese indentured labourer came to be known as the 'piglet', whose lot was reminiscent of but not exactly similar to the American Negro slave.¹⁰

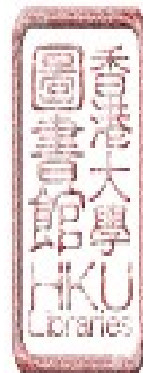
10. For Chinese indentured labour, see Persia Crawford Campbell, Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire (London, 1971 ed.), pp. 1-25; W.L. Blythe, Historical Sketch of Chinese Labour in Malaya (Singapore, 1953 reprint), pp. 4-9.



However, the majority of Chinese immigrants paid their own passages, only a small proportion of them were under indenture.¹¹ Indian indentured labourers were recruited on a similar line. The Malayan employers and their agents, the professional recruiters, the merchants and shipowners were all involved in the population traffic. The Indian labourers had their travelling expenses from their villages to their places of employment in Malaya paid by the recruiters, who received a sum of money plus a commission for their recruits. The labourers were bound to work for a period of one to two years, and the advances were to be deducted from their wages. The Indian labourers were not only bound by indenture but they were also made responsible for each other's default under the 'joint and several' contract, which made a labourer liable to work out the obligations of any absconded labourer in the same gang. They were punishable with three months' hard labour for breaches of contract or neglect of duty under the Indian Act No. XIII of 1859.¹² Among the Indian immigrants, some labourers paid their own passages and were not bound by

11. During the period 1881-1915, there was one 'unpaid' passenger in every nine Chinese emigrants to Singapore and one in every six Chinese emigrants to Penang. For the entire Straits Settlements, the proportion of 'unpaid' passengers to the Chinese adult male passengers in 1910 reached 12.9 per cent, the highest figure for the period 1905-1914. See Chen Ta, Chinese Migrations: With Special Reference to Labour Conditions (Washington, 1923), pp. 84-85.

12. R.N. Jackson, Immigrant Labour and the Development of Malaya, 1786-1920 (Kuala Lumpur, 1961), p. 58.



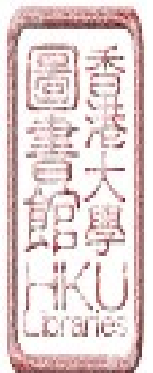
indenture to any employer. Java was another source of labour, which provided Malayan plantations with indentured labour as early as 1880's and continued to meet a smaller part of the labour demand in Malaya after the termination of Javanese indentured labour in 1932.

Indian indentured labour was terminated in 1911.¹³ The Indian Immigration Fund was instituted in 1907, and the sophisticated machinery involving dual control by the Indian Government and the Malayan Governments enabled the Indian immigrant labourers to be free from the clutches of professional recruiters.¹⁴ Officially assisted emigration came to replace the private recruitment of indentured labourers. The Malayan employer sent his kangany¹⁵ to recruit Indian villagers in the Madras Presidency. The kangany had to obtain a license from the Deputy Controller of Labour at Penang, who maintained over-all control on the number of immigrants through the issue of licenses. While the expense of recruitment was paid out of the Fund, the

13. The number of Indian indentured labourers entering Malaya in the period 1844-1911, the life span of Indian indentured labour, is estimated at 250,000 persons. See Sandhu, Indians in Malaya, p. 81.

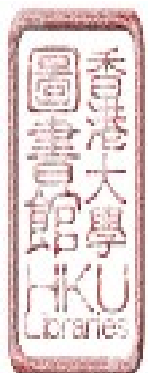
14. The Indian Immigration Fund was in the charge of the Indian Immigration Committee, which consisted of government officials and planters' representatives. An assessment based on the number of days worked by the Indian labourers was to be paid to the Fund by European planters. The Fund was used to pay the travelling expenses of Indian labourers from their villages to their places of employment in Malaya, quarantine charge, and repatriation to India. The Emigration Commissioner for Malaya was stationed in Madras, and the Assistant Emigration Commissioner was at Negapatam.

15. A kangany is a labour recruiting agent. 'Kangany' is a Tamil word meaning 'overseer' or 'foreman'. It was used in this sense in Malaya.



kangany received a commission from his employer. This system came to be known as the kangany system of recruitment. Another category of immigrant labourers consisted of the unrecruited assisted immigrants. A labourer who was physically fit and willing to emigrate to Malaya applied at either of the emigration depots at Madras and Negapatam, and he was given a free passage to Malaya after the bona fide of his identity and intention had been ascertained. The Fund started large-scale assisted Indian immigration, which successfully met the heavy demands of the Malayan rubber industry.

Chinese indentured labour was officially terminated under the 1912 Labour Code in June, 1914, according to the instruction of the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The legislation had very little effect on the actual conditions of Chinese indentured labour beyond the fact that they were no longer required to enter written contracts in the Colony as was the former practice. The credit-ticket system lingered on to all intents and purposes because there was no machinery comparable to the Indian Immigration Fund to free the labourers from population traffic. However, the Chinese indentured labourers must have dwindled to an even more insignificant proportion owing to such economic factors as higher cost of recruitment, losses arising from desertions, and the greater efficiency of free labourer as a producer. In contrast to Indian immigration, which had become an officially controlled and highly organized operation, Chinese labour immigration remained in private hands. Inter-



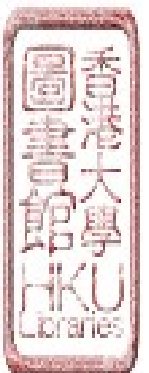
governmental machinery for the movement of Chinese labour had been mooted mainly by European employers.¹⁶ The Imperial Government and later the Republican Government was not likely to cooperate in the scheme unless it provided for consular supervision over the Chinese emigrants, which was quite unacceptable to the Malayan Governments.¹⁷ Moreover, the privately organized Chinese immigration had succeeded in providing a sufficiently large and continuous flow of labour to Malaya. An additional reason for the reluctance of the Malayan Governments to take on responsibility in the recruitment and importation of Chinese labourers was the restiveness of the Chinese population, which became increasingly difficult to handle.¹⁸

The immigrant labourers came to Malaya under economic compulsion and hence did not envisage Malaya as their permanent home. Their attachment to their country of origin found expression in remittances and return to their native

16. The Commission of 1890 recommended active government participation in the recruitment of Chinese labourers but the recommendation had not been accepted. See Blythe, Chinese Labour in Malaya, p. 15; N.J. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy and Administration: A History of Labor in the Rubber Plantation Industry in Malaya, c. 1910-1941 (New York, 1960), pp. 88-92.

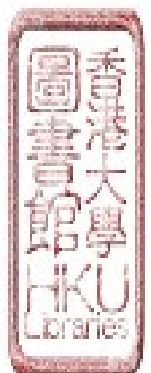
17. In 1904, for example, an Anglo-Chinese Convention regulating the employment of Chinese labourers in the British colonies and protectorates was signed as a result of the need of Chinese labour in South Africa. The Convention did not extend to the Straits Settlements because the colonial government refused to accept consular supervision over the emigrants as provided for by Article VI of the Convention. See Chen, Chinese Migrations, p. 19; Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 33-34.

18. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 88-89.



villages after a temporary sojourn in Malaya. The Indian labourer normally expected to return home after two or three years in Malaya, and the Chinese labourer was no less eager to return if he managed to pay off his debt or save a little money. Hence the unsettled character and the high rate of turnover of the individual elements of the labour population. Sex disproportion was common to both the Indian and Chinese immigrant population. In 1931 the sex ratio for the Chinese population in Malaya was 513 females per thousand males, and for the Indian population 482 females per thousand males.¹⁹ The preference of recruiters for male immigrants and rural conservatism both contributed to this result. Most of the male immigrants either were unmarried or left their dependents in their native villages. The movement of labour was furthermore dictated by economic fluctuations in Malaya. Employers were in a position to take advantage of international labour migration to obtain an almost unlimited supply of labour in times of prosperity, and, conversely, get rid of the undesirable consequences of mass unemployment by repatriation in times of recession. These characteristics associated with immigrant labour militated against the stability, cohesion, and advancement of the labouring class. It was not until the thirties that changes in the direction of stabilization of labour population began to occur.

19. M.V. Del Tufo, A Report on the 1947 Census of Population (London, 1949), pp. 57-58.

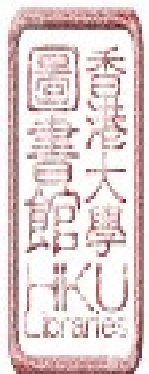


A large proportion of the Malayan labour force was in the primary sector. In 1929 there were 258,000 estate labourers, of which 205,000 were Indians, 42,000 Chinese, 6,000 Javanese and 5,000 others in the F.M.S. and the Straits Settlements.²⁰ The official figures seriously under-estimate the number of Chinese labourers in the rubber industry, but they are indicative of the weight of the rubber estate labourers in the whole labour force. A large number of labourers were also employed in the tin mining industry. Modern tin mining started as the largest employer of labour force until its importance was eclipsed by the rubber industry in the twentieth century. Important changes in the industry occurred in the first half of the present century owing chiefly to large-scale European investment. Technical innovations, the most important of which was the introduction of gravel-pump and bucket dredge, reduced the demand for human labour. The number of labourers employed in the industry in the F.M.S. declined from 231,000 in 1907 to 104,500 in 1929.²¹ This trend was accelerated from 1930 onwards until in 1938 only a total of 57,600 was registered in the F.M.S.²² On Chinese mines the labour force was almost entirely Chinese, but on European mines different races of workers were employed.

20. See Appendix A, Table I, p. 314.

21. Yip, Tin Mining Industry, Table II-3, Table III-6, pp. 138, 213.

22. Ibid., Table III-18, p. 261.

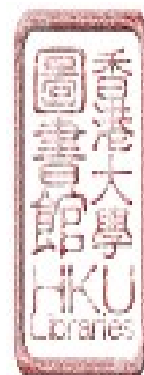


There were less workers in factories than in the primary sector.²³ This was because the overriding concern of the metropolitan country in the exploitation of raw materials and the export of manufactured articles militated against the rise of an integrated industrial complex in Malaya. The secondary industries generally owed their growth against competition of imported goods to such natural barriers as transport costs and proximity to local produce and consumption rather than tariff protection. Most of the manufacturing industries were concentrated in the Straits Settlements. A very wide range of articles of daily use, such as textiles, iron wares, tinned milk, cigarettes, matches, kerosene oil, etc., had to be imported. However, large numbers of workers were employed at very small manufacturing firms and workshops. These included the goldsmiths and silversmiths, shoemakers, weavers, carpenters, rattan workers, engineering mechanics, etc. They comprised both wage-earning labourers and own-account workers.²⁴

Malaya had an excellent transport and communications system. Singapore was an international port of call served by a large number of waterfront and inland transport workers. Penang and Port Swettenham were two other important ports in

23. In 1938, for example, there were only 10,446 workers in factories with ten or more workers. See Charles Gamba, The Origins of Trade Unionism in Malaya: A Study in Colonial Labour Unrest (Singapore, 1962), Table 19, p. 256.

24. See Appendix A, Table IV, pp. 316-322.



the Straits of Malacca. The F.M.S. Railways linked the Singapore Island in the south with the Siamese Railway in the north, with an extension to the east coast completed in 1931. The F.M.S. Railways maintained a central workshop at Sentul, Selangor, and a number of wharfs at minor ports in Malaya. The railways employed a large labour force, who were predominantly Indians. Other forms of road transport, including buses and lorries, also involved a considerable number of workers. The number of workers engaged in transport and communications, excluding the rickshaw pullers, is estimated at 89,000 in 1931.²⁵

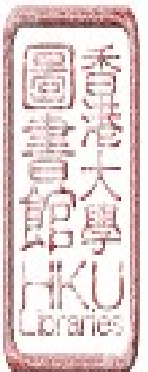
Trade was the foundation on which the Straits Settlements was built up and remained its raison d'etre. An elaborate commercial network comprising the European agency houses, importers and exporters, insurance companies, banks, commercial firms, down to the retailer shops and the street peddlers was evolved. This network called for an enormous staff and work force. The large and small population centres also required a host of personal services. According to a calculation based on the 1931 Census there were some 81,000 workers engaged in commerce, finance, and personal services.²⁶

In 1931 Malaya had a total population of 4,353,715, in which 2,176,481 were gainfully employed.²⁷ A calculation

25. See Appendix A, Table IV, pp. 316-322.

26. Ibid.

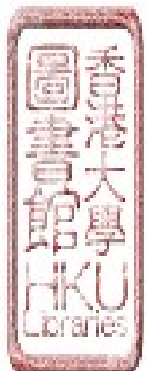
27. See Appendix A, Table IV, p. 323.



based on the 1931 Census yields a total of 724,000 workers in 1931.²⁸ They constituted one-third of the total gainfully employed population in Malaya. Thus Malaya was different from China or India, where wage labourers constituted a fraction of a predominantly agrarian population, and also from highly industrialized countries, say, Great Britain, where wage labourers constituted a very large proportion of the population.

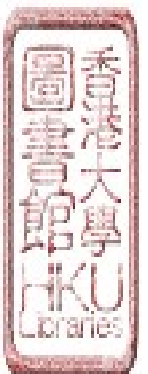
The bulk of the labour population in Malaya resided in the Straits Settlements and the four west coast states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Johore, while the east coast states of Kelantan, Trengganu, and Pahang, and the two northeastern states of Perlis and Kedah were predominantly Malay agrarian states. This was the result of the unbalanced development between the two groups of administrative units. In the first group were concentrated the rubber and tin industries and centres of manufacturing and trading activities, whereas the second group had very little in the way of modern enterprise. Singapore was the largest centre of labour population, and there were lesser urban centres such as Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca town, Ipoh, Klang, etc., but the bulk of labour population on the Malayan mainland were scattered in estates and mines in rural or semi-rural surroundings.

28. For the limitations and result of this calculation, see Appendix A, Table IV, pp. 316-322.



Labour administration in Malaya was divided along racial lines. The Labour Department was formed in 1911 out of the earlier Indian immigration and labour control authorities. Initially it exercised jurisdiction over the Straits Settlements and the F.M.S. It became a pan-Malayan department in 1925, when the Unfederated Malay States came under its jurisdiction. The Labour Department was primarily concerned with the supervision of Indian immigration and conditions of Indian labour, although the smaller number of Javanese and Malay labourers also came under its jurisdiction. The Controller of Labour was the chairman of the Indian Immigration Committee, and the Deputy Controller of Labour at Penang its vice-chairman and secretary. The Indian Immigration Committee was responsible for the affairs of Indian immigration. Officials of the Labour Department conducted regular visits and inspection of rubber estates to see whether housing, water supply, medical and sanitary arrangements complied with the requirements of the labour code. Comments and suggestions were made after each inspection, and serious abuses were expected to be removed by the estate managers. The officials would also listen to the complaints of the labourers and settle disputes industrial or personal.²⁹ Under the provisions of the Labour Code of 1923, the Agent of the Government of India was given the same right of entry and inspection of places of employment. The Indian Government was thus acquainted with the conditions of Indian labour in

29. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 137-140.

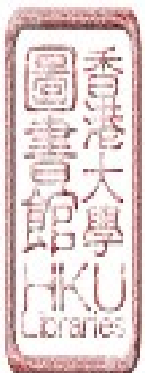


Malaya and was able to exert its influence on Malayan labour policy and administration.

The Chinese labourers came under the administration of the Chinese Protectorate. The direct cause leading to the formation of the Chinese Protectorate in 1877 was the anxiety over the activities of the Chinese secret societies and the abuses in the importation of Chinese indentured labourers.³⁰ The labour administration of the Chinese Protectorate included the supervision of Chinese immigration, inspection of places where Chinese labourers were employed, adjudication of disputes arising from non-payment or late-payment of wages, conciliation in industrial disputes involving Chinese labourers. Officers of the Chinese Protectorate were designated Deputy and Assistant Controller of Labour (Chinese) in regard to their duty over Chinese labourers. The Chinese Protectorate was also concerned with the control and suppression of the Chinese secret societies,³¹

30. The Chinese Protectorate gradually extended its ramifications from the Straits Settlements to the Malay States. The Chinese Protectorates came under the head of the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Straits Settlements and the F.M.S. in 1903. The administration of the Chinese Protectorate was extended to the Unfederated Malay States in 1934, when its head was re-designated Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Malaya.

31. Initially the secret societies were required to submit the names of their headmen, office-bearers, and members to the Protector of Chinese in his capacity as the Registrar of Societies. The suppression of secret societies began with the coming into force of the Societies Ordinance (1889) on January 1, 1890. At the end of 1933 the Chinese Protectorate handed over its secret society records to the police, who thereafter took full responsibility for the suppression of secret societies. See W. Blythe, The Impact of the Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya (London, 1969), pp. 205, 233, 295-296.



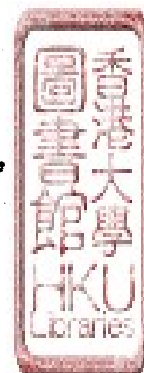
the protection of women and children, control of prostitution,³² arbitration in family quarrels and breach of commercial contracts, and giving general advice to the Governor in regard to Chinese affairs. Its duty was so extended that it could hardly carry out satisfactorily its duty of supervision over the conditions of Chinese labour, and in fact many problems concerning the Chinese labourers were left unattended to.³³

In 1877, simultaneous with the formation of the Chinese Protectorate, the Chinese Imperial Government appointed a Consul to Singapore. As the Imperial Government came to regard overseas Chinese as its subjects, the jurisdiction of the Chinese Consulate seemed to clash with that of the Chinese Protectorate.³⁴ This "overlapping of jurisdiction"

32. The Chinese Protectorate initially required prostitutes to register and undergo medical check. Control over prostitutes came to an end with the instruction from Lord Rippon, Secretary of State for the Colonies, in 1894. See Cheng Hui Ming, "Hua-Min-Cheng-Wu-Szu Shih-Lueh", Nanyang Society Journal, IV, 1, March, 1947, 54-59.

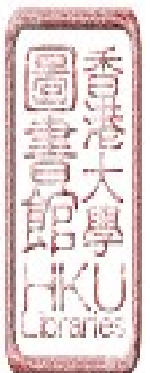
33. For the origin and functions of the Chinese Protectorate, see Ng Siew Yoong, "The Chinese Protectorate in Singapore, 1877-1900", JSEAH, II, 1, March, 1961, 76-97; Cheng, "Hua-Min-Cheng-Wu-Szu Shih-Lueh", 54-59.

34. The initial difficulties between the Chinese Consulate and the Chinese Protectorate were slurred over by the appointment of Ho Ah Kay, a local merchant acceptable to the British, to be the first Chinese Consul in Singapore. The next Consul, Tso Peng Lung, however, was sent over from China, and in his endeavour to remedy much of the inadequacies of his predecessor, came into friction with the British officials in the Straits Settlements. The British officials regarded the Chinese Consul as stepping beyond his proper spheres, while the Imperial Government considered the British officials intent to be difficult. Huang Kung Tu, another Chinese Consul, seems not to have improved relations with G.T. Hare, the Protector of Chinese in Singapore, either. However, this did not prevent Huang Kung Tu from donating a substantial sum of money to Poh Leung Kuk, an act that won the praise of the Protector; see Tan Yeok Seong, "Ch'ing-Mo Chu-Sing Ling-Shih Yü Hua-Min-Hu-Wei-Szu", Nanyang Miscellany, I, 7, May, 1947, 135.



was not as serious as it might seem to be. Neither the Imperial Government nor the subsequent Chinese governments were strong enough to have their ways with the British officials. The professed concern of the Chinese governments for the interests of their overseas subjects were more honoured in words than in deeds. In fact, the measures adopted by the Chinese governments were not necessarily welcomed by the Chinese community. The Chinese Protectorate, although sometimes wary of the encroachment of the Chinese Consulate, was itself inadequately staffed to take all Chinese affairs into its own purview. The intervention of the Chinese Consulate in the affairs of the Chinese community was tolerated in so far as it did not come into conflict with official policies. The Chinese Consulate was not particularly concerned about labour problems, and it had never made any strong representations on behalf of the Chinese labourers to the Malayan Governments. It had never played a role equivalent to the Agent of the Government of India, and its influence on labour affairs in Malaya was at most peripheral. The Chinese Consul or Vice-Consul occasionally appeared as mediator in industrial disputes involving Chinese labourers at the invitation of the government or the parties to the disputes.

The division of labour administration between the Labour Department and the Chinese Protectorate, compounded by the weakness of the Chinese Consulate in comparison with the Agent of the Government of India, left important results in the conditions of labour. The Labour Department was

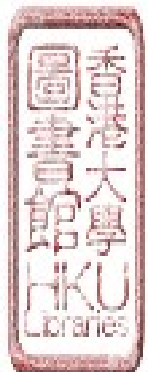


doing a full-time job in labour administration, but the Chinese Protectorate was only partially concerned with labour affairs. The minute regulations in the labour law regarding working conditions were fairly well applied to Indian labourers, whereas the Chinese labourers were largely left to their own devices. Duality of labour administration therefore tended to widen the differences in the conditions of employment between the Indian and the Chinese labourers.

A labour market regulated by the official Indian immigration machinery and saturated by a constant flow of new immigrants tended to keep wages in the rubber industry low. After the abolition of Indian indentured labour in 1910, for example, the large influx of Indian immigrant labourers defeated the tendency of rising wages in the years of rubber boom.³⁵ Moreover, most of the European rubber companies in Malaya came under the control of a limited number of managing agencies and secretarial firms, and interlocking directorship further linked the rubber companies together in a closely knit pattern.³⁶ The integration and concentration of control of the European plantation enterprise, quite apart from the planters' associations, meant that the European planters were able to synchronize

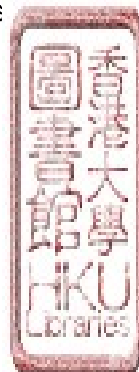
35. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 172-173.

36. For the organization and control of European rubber companies in Malaya, see Baur, The Rubber Industry, p. 11; J.J. Puthuchery, Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy (Singapore, 1960), pp. 23-48. The latter work is concerned with the conditions in 1950s, but the broad features of the organization and control of the European rubber companies described in the book had been well established before World War II.



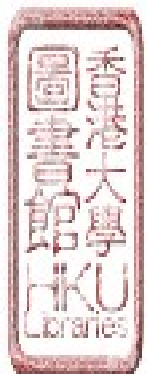
their policies and action vis-à-vis labour. It was virtually impossible for the labourers employed in one single rubber estate to achieve higher wage rates beyond the norm laid down by the planters. To attempt collective bargaining effectively the workers had to go beyond one single estate to join forces with workers in other estates over a sufficiently wide area, and this was not possible for an unstable immigrant labour force until they got themselves organized. Before 1930s wages in the rubber industry were dictated solely by the consideration of maximization of profits because the strength of labour had not yet been brought into play as one of the wage determinants. Wages in the rubber industry was furthermore subjected to the fluctuations in world rubber prices. Wages responded promptly to steeper fall in rubber prices, but in times of prosperity the rise in wage rates was slow and inadequate. Under the pressure of the Government of India, standard rates of wages were introduced by the Malayan Governments in several key districts from 1924 onwards. The standard rates prescribed for male and female Indian labourers in Kuala Kangsar, for example, were 35 cents and 27 cents in 1924 and 50 cents and 40 cents respectively in 1928, but it had been agreed by the planters themselves in 1920 that 77 cents per day would be the adequate cost for the maintenance of an estate labourer, quite apart from expenditures on immigration and facilities on estates.³⁷ Moreover, there was considerable vagueness as to whether the standard rates were in fact minimum wages.

37. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 177-178, 181-182.



Chinese estate labourers generally received higher wages than the Indian estate labourers. The average daily wages of a Chinese rubber tapper in 1929 ranged from 70 cents to \$2.00 as compared with 50-70 cents daily received by the Indian labourers.³⁸ The wage rates of Indian and Chinese estate labourers were however not strictly comparable owing to the difference in the systems of employment and payment of wages. The Indian labourers were directly employed by the rubber companies on daily rates, whereas the Chinese estate labourers were mostly employed through a contractor and paid by task or by result. A task was defined as equivalent to a day's work of nine hours, and consisted of a fixed number of trees for a rubber tapper. Under the system of payment by task a tapper was paid according to the tasks he performed in a month, while under the system of payment by result the labourer was given a task but was paid by the latex he gathered according to piece rates. How far the racial wage differential was due to actual difference in rates, i.e., different pay for the same amount of work, and how far to greater output of the Chinese labourers, cannot be ascertained with precision. It seems higher rates and higher output of the Chinese tappers both contributed to their higher wages. However, the difference in wages was offset to some extent by the better working conditions of the Indian labourers.

38. Ibid., Table 8, p. 277.



The provisions of the Labour Code in regard to conditions of work were applied to the Indian labourers.³⁹ The Labour Code provided that no labourers should be bound to work more than nine hours a day and six days a week. In 1929 the Indian rubber tappers worked $5\frac{1}{2}$ - $6\frac{1}{2}$ hours in the morning on a full day's wages.⁴⁰ The employer was obliged to provide 24 days' full work for his labourers in every month; failing this he must pay 24 days' wages. The Labour Code required the employer to provide house accommodation, sufficient water supply, sanitary arrangements, hospital, medical attendance and treatment in estates.⁴¹ Treatment for an estate labourer and his dependants who remained in the hospital was free of charge within a period of thirty days. Female labourers were entitled to rest for one month each before and after confinement, during which they received maternity allowances instead of wages.⁴² The employer was also required to maintain a nursery and to supply free milk and rice to the infants therein if fifty or more female labourers were employed on the estate.⁴³ Schools were

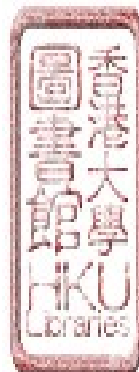
39. The Labour Code, F.M.S., 1923, consolidated all previous labour laws in the F.M.S. Similar laws were enacted in the Straits Settlements and the Unfederated Malay States. The various laws were similar in essential matters, although there were minor differences in detail.

40. Baur, The Rubber Industry, p. 223.

41. "F.M.S. Labour Code and the Rules made thereunder: An Enactment to Consolidate and amend the law relating to labour, April 25, 1933" in J.N. Jackson, Basic Labour Laws, Malaya (MSS, University of Hong Kong Library), p. 27.

42. Ibid., p. 9.

43. Ibid., p. 8.



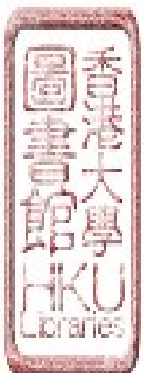
maintained in the estates, although estate schools were generally under-staffed and poorly run.⁴⁴ The cost of immigration and these statutory obligations imposed on the employer was estimated in 1920 at 10-12 cents per day for each labourer.⁴⁵ Chinese labourers, on the other hand, did not receive such benefits as accorded under the Labour Code.

The differences in wages and working conditions between the Chinese and Indian estate labourers had important implications for industrial relations in the rubber industry. These differences presented the possibility of substituting one racial group of labourers for another. Some Chinese labourers were substituted by Indian labourers when Chinese wages rose, and the prospect of Indian labourers being replaced by the Chinese was held out by the employers when Chinese wages dropped more drastically than Indian wages in times of recession.⁴⁶ The Indian and Chinese estate labourers therefore became potential rivals in the labour market and the differences could be made use of to defeat the claim for higher wages advanced by either group of labourers. Moreover, these differences rendered it practically impossible for the Indian and Chinese estate labourers to present common demands or act in conjunction in pursuit of higher wages and better working conditions. They had

44. Sandhu, Indians in Malaya, pp. 259-260.

45. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 177-178.

46. Ibid., pp. 169-170.



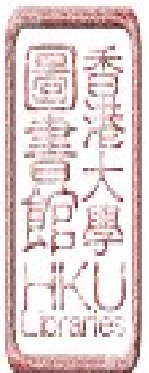
perforce to act sectionally instead of in one common front, thus the potential bargaining power of labour as a whole in the rubber industry was weakened.

Wages in the tin mining industry were determined by much the same factors as in the rubber industry. The large influx of Chinese immigrants and rationalization in the tin mining industry created surplus labour over the long run. The increasing importance of the share of European companies in the industry from 1900 onwards meant that labour was now confronted with much more powerful employers. The European tin companies became as highly integrated, centrally controlled and closely knit as the rubber companies towards the late twenties.⁴⁷ These factors tended to the disadvantage of labour. Fluctuations in tin prices affected wages in much the same manner as price fluctuations in the rubber industry. During the crash of tin prices in World War I, for example, 20-25 per cent wage cuts were imposed.⁴⁸ Labourers on tin mines comprised the daily-rated workers, labourers engaged through the contractors on piece rates, and independent workers.⁴⁹ In the Chinese mines the daily-rated workers received free food and lodging from their employers. Daily-rated workers on European mines received somewhat higher wage rates than in the Chinese mines, but they had to provide

47. Yip, Tin Mining Industry, pp. 160-161, 181-184.

48. Wong Lin Ken, The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914 (Tucson, 1965), p. 206.

49. For different types of labour on tin mines, see Siew Nim Chee, "Labour and Tin-ming in Malaya" in Silcock, Readings in Malayan Economics, pp. 404-437.

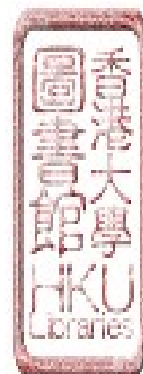


their own food.⁵⁰ Much of the old mining customs remained in the Chinese mines and the European mines, where Chinese contractors were employed. The Labour Code sanctioned the payment of wages up to once every six months for mining labourers, which was the general practice in the Chinese mines in the nineteenth century.⁵¹ The extended pay period compelled the labourers to borrow from the mine owner, the financier, or the contractor, who charged usurious rates on loans. Foodstuffs and other provisions, including opium, were supplied to the labourers at prices much higher than the market rates in lieu of wages. Although the truck system was prohibited by the Labour Code, the law had not been enforced in the mines, where the truck system was more prevalent than in other industries.

Wages in the rubber industry regulated the scale of wages in other industries. They were the linchpin of the wage structure in Malaya. Daily-rated general labourers employed by government departments received about the same wages as the Indian estate labourers or slightly higher. In factories, workshops, and the building industry, most labourers were employed on daily rates or piece rates, and few were monthly-rated workers. Wages for workers in the mining and manufacturing industries were generally higher

50. Report on the methods and conditions of employment of Chinese labourers by W.L. Blythe, 1938, quoted in Victor Purcell, The Chinese in Malaya (London, 1948), p. 201.

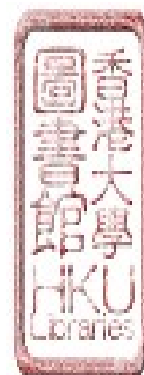
51. "Part III Special Provisions Relating to Labourers Employed in Mines, F.M.S. Labour Code" in Jackson, Basic Labour Laws, pp. 21-23.



than those for estate labourers because of greater exertion of labour and greater skills involved. Skilled artisans as a whole received higher wages than the general labourers, but the differences were not so wide as to create a class of labour aristocracy. Fluctuations in the prices of rubber and tin tended to affect wages in all industries dependent directly or indirectly on the staple exports for their general prosperity.

The contract labour system, in which one or more intermediaries interposed between the principal employer and the labourers, was prevalent in a number of industries.⁵² Almost all Chinese labourers on European estates were employed under the system. It prevailed also in tin mines, iron and coal mines, quarries, sawmills, rubber processing and pineapple canning factories, dockyards and water transport, building and some other trades. The contract labour system in Malaya probably evolved out of the indentured labour system. The Chinese contractors who had been involved in the recruitment of indentured labourers retained their function of labour recruitment even after the Chinese indentured labour ceased to be employed in one industry after another. They turned increasingly to the local lodging houses for the supply of labour. The immigrant labourer would find it quite difficult to find employment

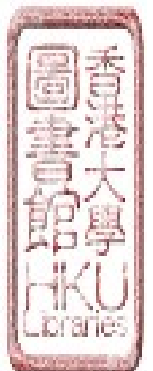
52. The term 'contract labour' has often been confused or used interchangeably with 'indentured labour'. The term 'contract labour' is used herein to refer strictly to free wage labourers employed through 'an intermediary agent between the two main parties of the transaction of (a) money paid out for the performance of a task, and (b) money received for the completion of such a task.' For the definition of 'contract labour', see Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the System of Contract Labour in Singapore (Singapore, 1960), pp. 2-3.



in a strange country unless he attached himself to a contractor, who was usually his kinsman or countryman from the same district. Moreover, the European employers, who were wont to engage Asian compradores in their business transactions, favoured the indirect mode of employment of Chinese labour.

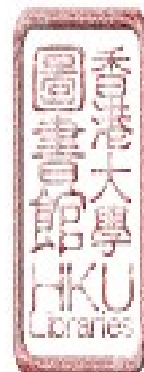
The duty of a labour contractor included the recruitment of labour, payment of wages, maintenance of discipline, supervision of work, punishment and dismissal of labourers. He was in fact and in law an employer. The Indian kanganies, who were rather similar to the Chinese contractors in some respects, had not developed into a class of labour contractors chiefly because the European employers paid their Indian labourers direct and exercised a close control over the Indian labour force. Usually the contractor engaged one or more sub-contractors, and these sub-contractors again had sub-sub-contractors under them, thus a formidable hierarchy of intermediate employers was erected between the labourers and the principal employer, who generally refused to deal directly with his labourers.

The existence of one or more intermediaries between the principal employer and the labourers rendered it more difficult for the labourers to improve their lot. While the principal employer disclaimed responsibilities in regard to the labourers, neither was the contractor willing or able to take responsibility to make provision for the welfare of labourers as required under the Labour Code. Since the labourers generally retained clan or village affinities with



their contractor and were dependent on him in more than one way, they were very reluctant to combine against him. Secure in his power over the labourers, the contractor usually perpetrated very serious abuses. When he had received a lump sum of wages from the principal employer, he retained 10-25 per cent of the labourers' wages as his commission.⁵³ When the sum paid to the contractor was based on the number of labourers required by a project, the contractor was prone to engage less labourers than he was supposed to engage. The principal employer was often not even aware of the number of labourers actually engaged under the contractor. The contractor usually did not keep a clear account of the work done by and the wages due to each labourer, and he was able to take advantage of the labourers' ignorance to make additional squeezes beyond his normal share of commission. Payment of wages was so irregular that the labourers had to ask for frequent advances. The provision of daily necessities to labourers at exorbitant prices was another source of income for the contractor. The contract labour system was therefore generally associated with the truck system. Even more serious was the default in the payment of wages. Error in the original cost estimate or extra expenditure in the course of an undertaking often led to losses and non-payment of wages. Any single link in the chain of intermediaries was capable of blocking the flow of wages from the principal

53. Virginia Thompson, Labour Problems in Southeast Asia (New Haven, 1947), p. 92.

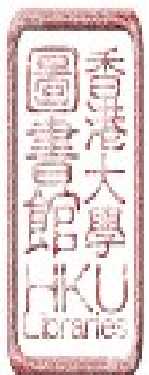


employer to the ultimate recipients. Moreover, the sub-contractor was not required to register and was not regarded as employer under the law. Although the Protector of Chinese was empowered by the Labour Code to hear cases of late payment or non-payment of wages and to make decision and awards, very little protection was afforded the Chinese labourers against absconding contractors or sub-contractors.

There were other ingrained features of the contract labour system which were disadvantageous to the labourers. Whenever a plethora of contractors and sub-contractors obtained in a trade, competition among them was bound to become more intensive. The bidding price for tender would be cut and wages were depressed as a result. Casualization and the consequent insecurity of employment constituted another disadvantage. Contract labour was invariably casual labour. The contract labourer would go unemployed after the completion of an undertaking if ^a new job was not immediately available. In those trades where the demand for labour was irregular and intermittent, the employers found contract labour most suitable. However, even in some trades where labour could be engaged on a permanent basis casual labour was nonetheless employed.⁵⁴

The statutory provisions governing the working conditions of female labour were applied to Indian labourers only, and the Chinese female labourers in estates, mines, and factories generally received no maternity benefits.

54. This situation continued to exist in 1950s in Singapore. See Report on Contract Labour in Singapore, p. 9.

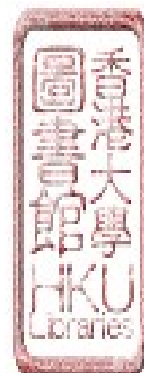


In spite of the unbalanced sex ratio, a sizable number of Indian women labourers were employed on estates. In 1929 there were 61,000 Indian females on estates in the F.M.S.⁵⁵ It was not until the 1930s that Chinese female labourers increased to a marked extent. The Indian female estate labourers were paid at lower rates than those for male labourers even in the same type of work. In 1929 the Indian female labourer was paid 40 cents a day compared with 50 cents a day for male labourers in the key districts and in the inland districts of Pahang the prescribed standard rates were 58 cents for men and 46 cents for women.⁵⁶ Thus the Indian female labourers earned approximately 20 per cent less than the male labourers. Where the Chinese labourers were paid by result the sex differential in wages tended to disappear, but in factories and the building trade lower rates for women were normal. A considerable number of Chinese females were employed as mui tsai, i.e. domestic servants who received no regular wages and were not at liberty to leave their masters. They were usually acquired from China by way of purchase, gift, inheritance, or pledge in settlement of a debt.⁵⁷ Theirs was a position in bondage but they were not actually slave girls. Their number in Singapore was variously estimated at between 6,000 and 10,000 in 1922, while it was thought there were several

55. F.M.S. Annual Report, 1929, p. 56.

56. Ibid.

57. Picton-Turbernill, Edith, Report of Commission on Mui Tsai in Hongkong and Malaya (London, 1937), pp. 22, 67.



thousands in the F.M.S.⁵⁸ No one knew for certain their exact number because many of them remained unregistered even after the enactment of the mui tsai law in 1932.⁵⁹

The F.M.S. Children Enactment, 1922, prohibited the employment of any kind of labour of a child under the age of seven years, employment of a child under 12 in any godown, factory, or workshop, and employment of a child under 10 in any form of domestic service. Similar legislation in the Straits Settlements prohibited the employment of a child under 12 in any industrial undertaking.⁶⁰ The Labour Code allowed children of 10 and above to work in estates, but they were not competent to enter into contract.⁶¹ In 1929 large numbers of Indian children were employed on estates, where they earned 20 cents a day to supplement their parents' income.⁶² The number and conditions of child labour in

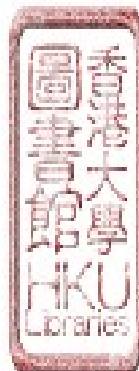
58. Ibid., p. 190.

59. Ibid., pp. 68-69. As a result of the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry of 1936, legislation for the stricter control of existing mui tsai was enacted in 1939-40 in the Straits Settlements. See Purcell, The Chinese in Malaya, pp. 183-184.

60. Picton-Turbernill, Report of Commission on Mui Tsai, p. 208. The law was amended by the Children Ordinance in the Straits Settlements and corresponding enactments in the Malay States in 1939. A child, who was defined as 'a person under the age of fourteen years', was not allowed to work in factory and domestic services. See Annual Report of the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Malaya, 1939, p. 5.

61. "Abstract of Indian Labour Law (Gaz. Not. No. 4665/37)" in Jackson, Basic Labour Laws, unpaginated.

62. F.M.S. Annual Report, 1929, p. 56.

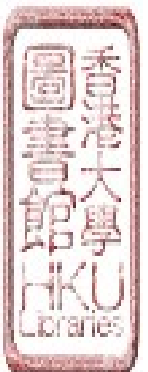


factories and workshops are not known owing to lack of data. Child labour seems to have been usually employed in those trades where apprenticeship prevailed.

The apprenticeship system in Malaya offered vocational training to minors and youths, but on the other hand it was yet another form of exploitation tinged with mediaeval survivals. An apprentice in the Hokchiu hairdressing trade, for example, was bound by a verbal contract to work for a period extending from one to two years in the master's shop. He received free board~~ing~~ and lodging but obtained no wages or very meagre wages. The greater part of their working time was taken up by miscellaneous menial and domestic services rather than in learning skills. On completion of his apprenticeship he had to serve yet another period of six months or one year as semi-skilled hairdresser at half the wage rate of the lowest grade of hairdressers. He was graduated into full workmanship only after this extended period.⁶³

The Labour Code provided that no labourer was bound to work more than six days in a week and more than nine hours of actual labour, but no penal sanction was attached to this provision. This provision was generally applied to the Indian estate labourers, but in tin mines the labourers paid by result tended to work longer than the statutory nine hours. The shopkeepers were the worst offenders in this regard. The hairdressers and shop assistants, both Chinese and Indian,

63. Fu-Chou-Jen Yü Li-Fa-Yeh (MSS, History Department, Nanyang University, Singapore, 1970), pp. 27-29, 46-47.



worked as long as 15-18 hours per day without a weekly holiday.⁶⁴ In factories where workers were paid by piece rates the working hours were generally not less than 10 hours per day. In canned pineapple factories the pineapple cutters spent 18 hours per day in strenuous labour during peak seasons.⁶⁵ The piece-rates were a powerful factor which extended working hours to excessive length. Moreover, no double rates were paid for overtime done by these labourers as required under the Labour Code.

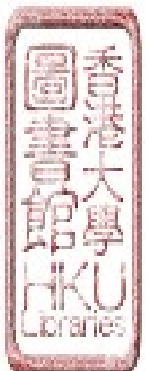
No Factory Act was enacted in Malaya to regulate the safety devices, health and sanitary arrangements, space and ventilation, working hours and rest period, overtime, etc., in factories. With the exception of rubber processing factories in estates, which came under the jurisdiction of the Labour Department, factories were rarely inspected or supervised by the Chinese Protectorate. As late as 1937-38 it was found by Harold Butler from the International Labour Organization that even the most rudimentary safety devices and precaution were lacking in most factories he visited.⁶⁶ The principle of workmen's compensation was first mooted by Lord Passfield in a circular despatch to the Straits Settlements in 1930.⁶⁷ His instruction led to the enactment of the

64. Thompson, Labour Problems, pp. 93-94; SCJP, June 18, 1934.

65. "Huang-Li Kung-Jen Ti Tou-Cheng Ho Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", Chendera Mata Ulang Tahun Ke-25 Kesatuan Pekerja2 Nanas Sa-Malaya (Singapore, 1959), p. 12.

66. Thompson, Labour Problems, p. 97.

67. Circular Despatch by Lord Passfield to Colonies and Protectorates, September 17, 1930, Public Record Office, London.



Workmen's Compensation Law by the Malayan Governments in 1932. The law provided compensation for personal injury by accident incurred in the course of work by labourers who earned not more than \$200 a month.⁶⁸ It was not until 1939 that the Protection of Workers Ordinance, which empowered the Governor-in-Council to make special regulations for workmen's safety and health, was enacted in the Straits Settlements.⁶⁹

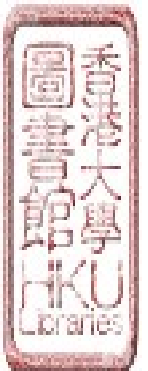
The general lack of job security was yet another disability of the labouring class. It was lawful for an employer to dismiss a labourer at any time for any reason by giving a month's notice or wages in lieu of notice. Although the law afforded the labourer the opportunity to appeal to a Magistrate's Court, ignorance of legal provision and procedure rendered the labourer practically without protection against arbitrary dismissal.⁷⁰ The hand of the employer was strengthened by some of the provisions of the Labour Code. When the Controller of Labour or his subordinate officers received a complaint from an employer against a labourer during his inspection, the Controller or inspecting officers might forthwith remove the labourer from the place of employment, or cause him to be detained, pending inquiry into his alleged misconduct. A labourer, on the other hand, would be fined if his complaint was found to be 'frivolous'.⁷¹

68. SCJP, August 11, 13, 1933.

69. Supplement to the Laws of the Straits Settlements, 1940, (Singapore, 1940), pp. 585-589.

70. "Abstract of Indian Labour Law", unpaginated.

71. "F.M.S. Labour Code", pp. 7-8.



Unemployment was a constant threat hanging over the labourers because of the ease with which a labourer could be replaced and the vulnerability of Malayan industries to economic cycles.

The lower classes bore a large share of taxation, which was conspicuous for the absence of private and corporate income tax. Opium was the greatest single source of revenue in the Straits Settlements in the period 1895-1938.⁷² In the F.M.S. opium and tin were the most important sources of revenue before 1931. Between 1921 and 1930 opium provided an average annual revenue of \$12,000,000.⁷³ Opium was also one of the most important items of revenue in the Unfederated Malay States.⁷⁴ The largest consumer of opium was the Chinese labourers. In the early years of the British rule opium farming and revenue farming led the Chinese opium and revenue farmers, who were often financiers of tin mines and plantations, to encourage opium smoking among labourers in every conceivable way. After opium manufacturing and selling came under the monopoly of the Malayan Governments in 1910-11, opium continued to be an important item in the provisions supplied to the Chinese labourers.⁷⁵ Toddy was to the Indian estate labourers what opium was to the Chinese.⁷⁶ Revenue

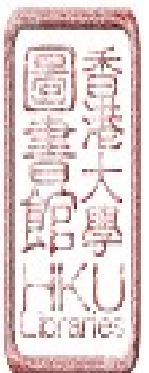
72. Li Dun J., British Malaya: An Economic Analysis (New York, 1955), pp. 28-29.

73. Emerson, Malaysia, p. 189.

74. Li, British Malaya, p. 29.

75. For the government's opium policy, see Chen U Wen, "Opium in the Straits Settlements, 1867-1910", JSEAH, II, 1, March, 1961, 52-75.

76. Toddy is a mildly intoxicating drink distilled from coconut juice.



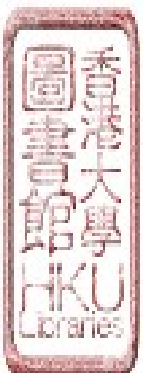
was obtained by the government through the collection of a duty of 4 cents on a bottle of toddy sold at 10 cents.⁷⁷ The toddy shops were run by the rubber companies, which made a profit of \$25 on every 1,000 bottles sold.⁷⁸ The profits were used for the maintenance of temples and schools on estates. Quite apart from the serious economic implication of opium and toddy, the consumption of these articles led to physical and mental debility on the part of labourers. Their baneful consequences could never be gauged in pure statistical terms.

Labour conditions in Malaya during the 1930's could not be properly understood without taking into account the severe impact of the Great Depression of 1929-33. The crash of the American automobile industry and the iron and steel industry sent the prices of rubber and tin tumbling down. The average spot price of ribbed smoked rubber sheet in Singapore dropped from Straits 34.48 cents per lb. in 1929 to 7.01 cents in 1932, and tin prices plunged from \$91.25 per picul in January to 54.12½ per picul in December, 1930, the lowest price level for thirty years.⁷⁹ No single trade was spared from the depression. Weaker economic units were eliminated while the surviving ones resorted to various

77. Toddy revenue increased from 1,817,513 Rupees in 1931 to 2,081,718 Rupees in 1935. See Kondapi, Indians Overseas, pp. 141-143.

78. Ibid.

79. Baur, "The Malayan Rubber Slump", p. 186; Report of the Mines Department and on the Mining Industries, 1930, p. 5.



means, including mass discharges of labourers, to reduce operating cost. The immediate result was soaring unemployment. The number of estate labourers was reduced from 258,000 in 1929 to 145,000 in 1932, and tin mining labourers from 104,000 in 1929 to 43,000 in 1933.⁸⁰ The number of labourers employed on factories and firms was also reduced. Neither were employees of government departments, municipal authorities and statutory bodies spared the fate of large-scale discharges during the depth of the depression in 1932.⁸¹

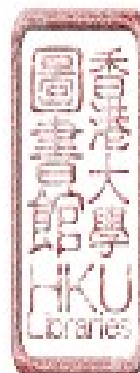
In the tin mining and estate belts stretching from Perak to Negri Sembilan, roving bands of unemployed labourers took to highway brigandage and raiding of provision stores.⁸² Crime rates rose spectacularly throughout Malaya. The number of cases of murder, robbery and gang robbery in the F.M.S. rose from 160 in 1929 to 358 in 1930, 352 in 1931, and 308 in 1932.⁸³ Repatriation of unemployed Indian labourers and decrepit and destitute Chinese labourers was the principal official measure to deal with the unemployment situation. Between 1930 and 1933 a total of 199,000 Indian

80. Baur, The Rubber Industry, p. 225. The drastic reduction in the number of tin mining labourers was the direct result of the imposition of quota restriction under the International Tin Agreement. See Yip, Tin Mining Industry, p. 211.

81. SCJP, November 7, 1932.

82. SCJP, May 16, 1931.

83. Baur, "The Malayan Rubber Slump", p. 191.



labourers were repatriated, and 75,000 Chinese labourers were repatriated during 1930-32.⁸⁴ In addition there was a large number of departures of Indian and Chinese labourers on their own expenses. The general reduction of the labour population was the most expedient and economical means at the government's disposal to rid Malaya of a potentially explosive situation, but whether adequate relief could be given to the repatriated labourers was left entirely to India and China.⁸⁵ In spite of the large reduction of the labour population, unemployment nevertheless remained chronic. Unemployment relief was provided mostly by Chinese public charity, but it did not seem to be on any scale large enough to offset the distress of unemployment.

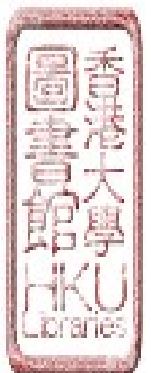
In the rubber industry wage rates of Indian labourers fell between early 1930 and mid-1932 by 50-60 per cent.⁸⁶ The wage-fixing machinery was suspended, and wage rates in the key districts of Kuala Langat, Klang, and Province Wellesley, for example, fell from 50 cents and 40 cents in 1929 to 25 cents and 20 cents in May 1932 for male and female tappers respectively.⁸⁷ The rates were 25-30 per cent

84. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 242, 272.

85. It was reported that the repatriated Indian labourers found it difficult to obtain jobs and received little assistance, and those labourers born in Malaya found it hard to adapt themselves to the pattern of life in India. See SCJP, December 16, 1931.

86. Baur, "The Malayan Rubber Slump", p. 192.

87. Kondapi, Indians Overseas, p. 63.

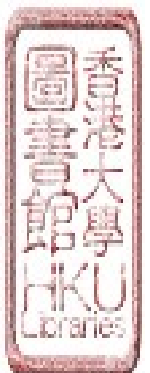


lower than the rates in 1914 and were inadequate to sustain a labourer's family.⁸⁸ Wage rates for Chinese labourers fell even more drastically in proportion until they were level with those of the Indian labourers in 1932. The earning of labourers fell much more than the fall in wage rates because work was provided only four or five days a week, and no work was provided for workers' dependents. Many Chinese tappers worked for practically nothing but food and lodging. While earning was drastically reduced, working hours were extended. By 1929 it had become the custom for most estates to give labourers about 6 hours' work for a full day's wages, but the employers now required their labour force to work the full 8-9 hours. Those who refused to do the extended hours of work was given only three-quarters of the reduced wage rates.⁸⁹ The extension of working hours at reduced rates was the chief means by which reduction of costs was effected. It was estimated that the British rubber companies had reduced their pay-roll by 80 per cent and their total cost by 60-65 per cent between 1929 and the middle of 1932.⁹⁰ The extension of working hours was one of the factors which contributed to the maintenance of rubber output close to the pre-depression level in spite of a greatly reduced labour force and

88. Baur, "The Malayan Rubber Slump", p. 192.

89. Baur, The Rubber Industry, pp. 229-230; SCJP, July 29, 1931; February 2, 1932.

90. Baur, The Rubber Industry, pp. 18, 32-33.



insufficient working days.⁹¹

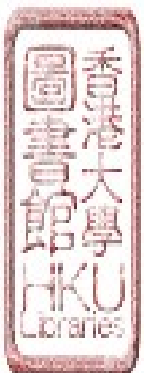
Wage cuts were common to all other industries. On tin mines the wage rates of male labourers were reduced to 10-18 cents per kung, and some labourers worked for boarding and lodging only.⁹² In 1930 wage rates were reduced by 20 per cent in Singapore sawmills, 57 per cent for Penang shoemakers, 10 per cent in Tan Kah Kee Rubber Manufacturing Company, 12 per cent for labourers at the Singapore Naval Base, 37 per cent in Singapore and Johore canned pineapple factories, 12 per cent in the Malayan Collieries.⁹³ More wage cuts, which affected among others government departments, the F.M.S. Railways, Singapore and Penang longshoremen, the Straits Steamship Company, goldsmiths and other craftsmen, were made in the following two years.⁹⁴ As in the case of estate labourers, the earnings of labourers in other industries generally were decreased proportionately more than their wage rates because not sufficient working days were provided.

91. Production of Malayan rubber estates in 1931-1933 was 240,000 tons per year as compared with 246,000 tons in 1929. See Baur, The Rubber Industry, p. 97.

92. Siew, "Labour and Tin Mining in Malaya", p. 427. Kung means a working day of 8 hours.

93. SCJP, July 7, 19, August 18, 20, October 14, 1930; "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 13.

94. SCJP, May 8, 22, June 20, July 8, August 29, November 27, 1931; February 10, May 28, November 7, 1932; June 7, 1933.



The reduction in the prices of foodstuffs and other necessities during the depression lowered the cost of living. The cost of living index for Asians was reduced by about one-third from 1929 to 1933.⁹⁵ The reduction somewhat eased the hardships of the labourers, but it was not sufficient to offset the decline of their living standard. In the Malay States the cost of living would have decreased further had the government not extended tariff to a wide range of imported articles, including sugar, coffee, tea, kerosene oil, textiles, tinned milk, etc., in 1930. Moreover, the tariff rates were raised sharply between the end of 1930 and 1932.⁹⁶ The increased rates and the extended range of indirect taxation, which were meant to be a fiscal measure to replenish the depleted government revenue, added to the already heavy tax burden borne by the lower classes.

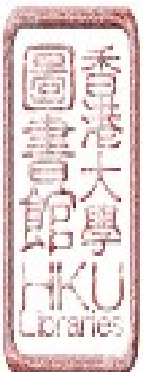
Labour unrest in Malaya was the concomitants of a modern economy in which large scale capital investment in the exploitation of natural resources created a sizable

95. The average weighted index numbers of the Asiatic standard of cost of living in the Straits Settlements were as follows:-

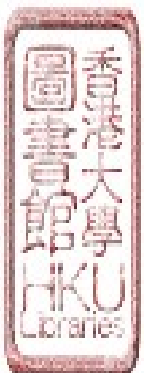
1914	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
100.0	155.6	147.5	125.0	108.6	99.3

See Straits Settlements Annual Report, 1931, pp. 54-55; Straits Settlements Annual Report, 1933, p. 36.

96. Baur, "The Malayan Rubber Slump", p. 190.



class of wage labourers. The dichotomy between labour and capital was set against a social context different from that of highly industrialized countries. Capital was predominantly foreign and labour almost entirely immigrant. The cheapness of labour which made investment so remunerative lay at the bottom of much of labour discontent. Added to this was a whole set of obsolete systems and unsatisfactory conditions, such as the indentured and contract labour systems, truck and apprenticeship, differential treatment of labour on the basis of race and sex, long hours and lack of legislative protection for a large section of the labour force, job insecurity and the heavy incidence of indirect taxation on the lower classes. The sources of discontent, which were as a whole aggravated by the Great Depression, gave rise to vigorous labour unrest in the period 1934-41.

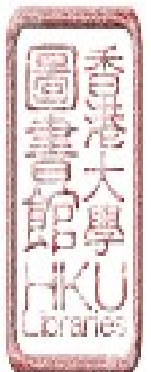


2. Labour Unrest in the Earlier Decades

The earliest and most primitive form of labour unrest in the broadest sense in Malaya was desertion, which occurred on a considerable scale among indentured labourers on mines and estates. Low wages, indebtedness, fines, non-payment of wages, corporal punishments and absence of medical attention constituted the harsh conditions which drove the labourers to abscond. The indentured labourer was no free party to a contract, and he had no right of bargaining either individually or collectively with his employer. Complaints and recalcitrance often invited retaliation from his headman. Industrial action such as strike was generally out of the question for indentured labourers. Desertion seemed to be the only way for them to get away from their harsh conditions. It was a desperate act fraught with danger. Under the discharge ticket system⁹⁷ and labour laws enforced in the 1880s in the Malay States absconding was liable to rigorous punishments. However, desertion involving large numbers of labourers continued unabated. In Perak there were 3,246 desertions in 1888 and 8,608 in 1893.⁹⁸ In Province Wellesley desertions of Indian indentured labourers

97. Under the discharge ticket system an indentured labourer must obtain a discharge ticket from his employer if he wished to leave on completion of his contract. A labourer was liable to arrest by the police and whipping if he failed to comply with the regulation. See Wong, Malayan Tin Industry, pp. 95-98, 106-107, 181.

98. Ibid., pp. 98-99. No percentage of the total is available.



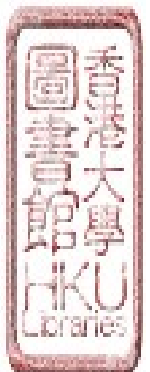
numbered 319 in 1880, or 11.29 per cent of the total.⁹⁹ In Negri Sembilan the number of desertions in 1910 was 1,728, or 19.88 per cent of the labour force. In the Federated Malay States as a whole desertions numbered 43,728 out of a total labour population of 153,662 in 1913.¹⁰⁰ In Perak desertion contributed to strengthening the position of the labourers in a period of labour shortages from 1888 onwards. The labourers obtained higher wages and better conditions, and the employers were more reluctant to enforce wage cuts.¹⁰¹ Desertion inflicted tremendous losses on the employers, who gradually came round to the view that employment of indentured labourers was perhaps less reliable and profitable than the employment of free wage labourers. This view contributed to the gradual replacement of indentured labourers by free wage labourers.

Industrial disputes involving strikes and even rioting occurred as early as the middle of the nineteenth century. These disputes seem to have occurred mainly among free wage labourers, who were in a better position than the indentured labourers to demand higher wages and better working conditions. The strikes were all spontaneous. They usually arose from some immediate grievances, such as the abuses of truck, deductions of pay, etc. The demands were generally very simple and were aimed at the removal

99. Jackson, Immigrant Labour, pp. 66-67.

100. Ibid., pp. 124-125.

101. Wong, Malayan Tin Industry, p. 99.



of the immediate grievances. It was reported in the Selangor Journal in 1895:-

"Strikes among coolies are not uncommon. Sometimes the men strike for mere trifles, such as bad salt fish or inferior quality of rice. A strike, however, would assume serious proportion if the Towkay Labor¹⁰² should reduce the wages, increase the price of provisions, introduce innovations or break his contract with the men. There is of course the usual ringleader, who gathers together his 'coolies' or otherwise create a majority on his side, which the others, however peacefully inclined, dare not resist. Mutual concessions on both sides generally settle matters, but when one party is obdurate the coolies leave the mine..."¹⁰³

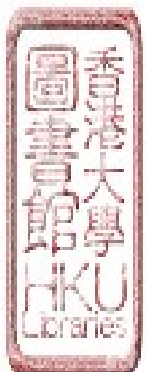
The Tanjong Pagar Dock Company in Singapore was involved in industrial disputes as early as 1865. The labourers were opposed to the introduction of the contract labour system while the management insisted it was best suited to meet the sudden demands for labour at a moment's notice. On February 12, 1895, the dockers went on strike, demanding the abolition of the contract labour system and the introduction of daily rates. The demands were not accepted by the management. In 1905 the daily-rated artisans again went on strike owing to a dispute on overtime. The strike probably ended in some sort of settlement.¹⁰⁴

In 1875 the Chinese tin-mining labourers in Larut refused to work the number of hours required by their employers. They demanded the removal of the worst abuses

102. Towkay Labor was a financier of a Chinese tin mine.

103. "Chinese Tin Mining in Selangor", The Selangor Journal, III, 8, December 27, 1895, 140.

104. G. Boggars, The Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, 1864-1905 (Singapore, 1956), pp. 145-156.



of the truck system. Their action apparently affected the operation of the mines, for their employers considered abandoning the truck system if the labourers could be induced to work longer hours. The action continued well into 1882, when the mines were operating under capacity.¹⁰⁵ In Sungei Ujong the Chinese labourers refused to work more than four hours a day or absconded in protest against low wages.

The State Council of Sungei Ujong, therefore, passed a regulation in 1885 to enforce eight hours' work per day.¹⁰⁶ On February 14, 1887, labourers employed by the Penjom and Sunghi Dua Semantan Mining Company, Ltd. went on strike in protest against irregular payment of wages and bad treatment.¹⁰⁷

The piece-rated naichang labourers¹⁰⁸ had their working day reduced from 7 hours to 5½-6 hours at the turn of the century. When the Malay States Mining Association re-imposed the 7-hour working day on February 19, 1902, in Selangor, it provoked major riots in Rawang and Rasa. When the 7-hour day was enforced throughout the F.M.S. in early 1904, another riot in Rawang and Rasa occurred, and labourers in Negri Sembilan went on a strike, which lasted four to five days. The old working day was finally restored in the course of time.¹⁰⁹

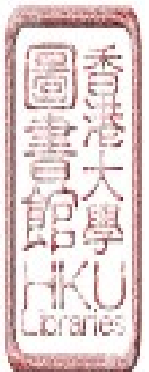
105. Wong, Malayan Tin Industry, p. 95.

106. Ibid., p. 112.

107. Ibid., pp. 128-130.

108. A naichang labourer was employed through a contractor to remove earth in a mine.

109. Wong, Malayan Tin Industry, p. 207.

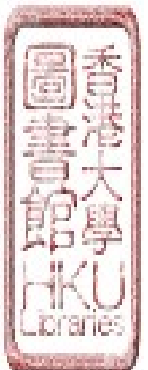


In 1912 a Bill for the consolidation of labour laws in the F.M.S. was introduced in the Federal Council. An unofficial member, referring to strikes in Kuala Lumpur, said during the debate:-

"It is a great disappointment to the whole of the country to see that the European employers in these particular instances have had to give in to the demands of their labourers. That such a thing could be possible in the Federated Malay States nobody would have believed. The matter should have grave consideration if we find that the European has to give in to the dictation of the cooly, who is probably acting under the dictation of some secret society, and I have good grounds to suppose that these strikes were led by some secret society. If we are to give in to coolies like this, then the position of Europeans in the country will become very difficult, and probably there will be further trouble. I therefore draw the attention of Government to the advisability of considering some addition to the Labour Code, to avoid, as much as possible by law, the recurrence of such strikes, whether industrial, on mines or on plantations. We are prepared to look after our labour. We do our very best for them. We treat them almost as well as we would treat our own people, and we must expect the labourers will respect the laws of the country and their employers. I am making a very strong point of this as of late there has been a lot of trouble amongst a certain class of Chinese. The strikes which have taken place in Kuala Lumpur are not the only strikes which have taken place in the country. I can speak feelingly on the matter as I have had to deal with two strikes - one of coolies and the other of workshop hands. I was very fortunate in being able to quell the whole thing and restore working. I cannot say whether in future cases I should be successful, therefore I do not think it is too much to ask Government to consider the matter and decide whether they cannot bring in some legislation to prevent the occurrence of strikes, especially amongst the Chinese and Tamils."¹¹⁰

Civil disobedience involving strikes and closing of shops was known in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

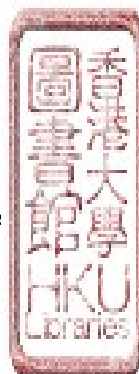
110. Quoted in Blythe, Chinese Labour in Malaya, pp. 25-26.



One notable example was the 'hartal' in Kuala Lumpur and its vicinity in March, 1897. The cause of the 'hartal' was the prosecution by the Sanitary Board against some traders over the verification of the small daching.¹¹¹ All shops were closed, and all vehicles on the streets were withdrawn. The Chinese workers employed at Riley, Hargreaves & Co., Howarth, Erskine and the Factory, as well as some employed on the railway went on strike. The demand of the Chinese community was a review of the cases of the Chinese traders prosecuted for 'false or unjust weights'. Serious disturbance occurred at Sungei Besi, where a rioter was shot dead by the police. Several leading members of the European mercantile community, perturbed by the strike at their own firms and the general disturbance, approached the Resident of Selangor to seek a settlement. The 'hartal' lasted four days, and as a result the British Resident decided that "the cases of the shopkeepers who were fined by the Magistrate for having false or unjust weights are to be retried on appeal before His Honour the Judicial Commissioner" and that no further action would be taken before the term 'false or unjust' under the Weights and Measures Regulation was clarified.¹¹² Lest the concession be taken as a sign of weakness, the government issued a stern warning that persons 'organizing a conspiracy to intimidate government by a show of force' were liable to banishment and long term of

111. "The Disturbance", The Selangor Journal, V, 14, March 19, 1897, 225. A daching is a steelyard.

112. Ibid.



imprisonment, and an example was made of four agitators, who were banished from Malaya.¹¹³

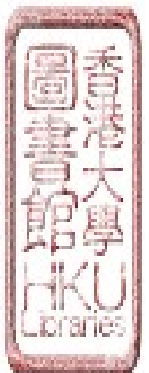
The first collective bargaining in the pineapple canning industry in Singapore and Johore took place in 1920. It was a prosperous time for the industry and there were several thousand workers on the payroll. The workers combined to present claims for higher wage rates to their employers. As no results were achieved in the initial negotiations, the dispute was submitted to the Chinese Protectorate for conciliation. A pineapple cutter was asked to show the elaborate skill of pineapple cutting before the Protector of Chinese. A wage scale was agreed upon and it remained in force until the onset of the Great Depression.¹¹⁴

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Chinese labourers were involved in many of the societies, but few of these were labour organizations. These included the trade guilds, the employees' guilds, district and clan associations, and the secret societies. There were some societies involving Indian labourers but their function was social and cultural rather than the promotion of the economic interests of the labourers. A Malay Seamen's Association was formed in 1916, but little was known about its activities.

The trade guilds in Malaya were the prototype of similar institutions long existent in China, but they were subjected to modifications once they had been transplanted. In a

113. Ibid.

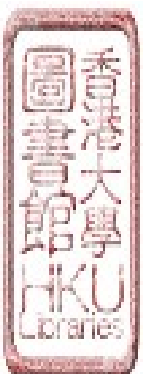
114. "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 13.



market where free competition was in full swing, a guild could not exert its control over trade to the same extent as in mediaeval times. A craftsman or trader was not obliged to be a member of a guild in order to carry on his business. The vital economic functions of a guild, its restrictive and protective aspects, were eroded by the forces of a free market. Moreover, people of different provincial origins tended to form rival guilds for the same trade in a single locality. However, the raison d'etre of the guilds lay not only in its restrictive functions but also in mutual aid, which acquired enhanced significance for the immigrants in a land strange to them.

A trade guild usually included the employers and the employees, who were required to pay a fee and observe the rules and regulations of the guild. The employers formed tong ka, which means the 'east house', and the employees sai ka, which means the 'west house'.¹¹⁵ This division of membership within a guild into bipartite entities had its origin in some indeterminate period in Chinese history. The status of the employers and the employees in the guild was by no means an equal one. The Board of Managers was usually filled by the employers, who controlled the running of the guild. Whenever disputes between the employers and the employees cropped up, the 'west house' would hold meeting in the guild hall, formulate their grievances and demands, and then presented them to the 'east house' for consideration. Joint session

115. Tong ka and sai ka also mean Chinese employers and employees in general.

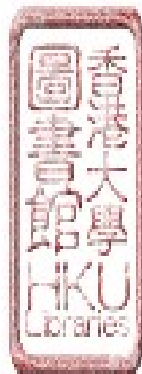


of the members or representatives of the 'east house' and the 'west house' would usually ensue. Customs and regulations generally required the disputes to be submitted for negotiation within the guild. If the negotiation came to an impasse, both sides would refer the case to a third party for conciliation.

Employees' guilds made their appearance in the early nineteenth century. Pak Seng Hong, a guild which catered for Cantonese carpenters, masons, and painters, was formed as early as 1860. Chinese mechanics at Kong Siew Dock, Bagam Dalam, in Province Wellesley built a temple as a meeting place in 1875, and this finally developed into Kee Hee Hong, the guild of engineering mechanics.¹¹⁶ Ku So Shan Keng Tong was the guild organized by waiters in Cantonese-owned eating houses. Its object was to promote friendly relations and a spirit of mutual help, provide benefits including wedding and birthday gifts for members and funeral gifts for the deceased.¹¹⁷ Some employees' guilds had real or imagined historical personages hallowed by myths and traditions as their patron saints. Lo Ban, the patron saint of the Building Hong, is said to be the greatest master of carpentry, masonry and building in China in 500 B.C. The birthday of the patron saint was the occasion for celebration, feast, or commemoration gathering. Although the employees' guilds were not organized for the specific purpose of collective bargaining, they might

116. Gamba, Trade Unionism in Malaya, pp. 3-5.

117. Charles Gamba, "Chinese Associations in Singapore", JMBRAS, XXXIX, 2, 1966, 123-168.

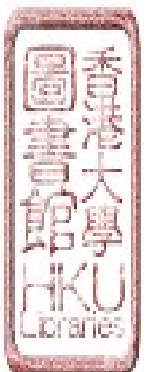


seek to improve the position of labourers when the occasion arose.

The Chinese district and clan associations were formed to promote friendly ties among 'fellow countrymen' on a territorial and clan basis. They built schools, hospitals, and temples, maintained graveyards, and provided accommodation and medical attention to the old and the sick, relief for the unemployed, and assistance for those who wished to return to China. They afforded a source where the Chinese labourers could look for succour in times of distress. However, the parochialism which these associations engendered was accentuated by the maze of pang¹¹⁸ among the Chinese and the identification of a linguistic group with a particular profession.¹¹⁹ This parochialism operated against the emergence of the consciousness of a class sharing broadly similar interests, and it came to be dismantled only gradually and painstakingly in the course of time.

118. Pang means either a group or a faction. The Hokkienese, with people from Chinchiu and Chuanchiu in the dominant position formed the Fukien pang. The Kwong-Fei-Seow pang was formed by the Cantonese from Kwangfu and Seowkeng and the Khehs from Feichiu. The Khehs from Taipu in Kwantung and Yoontin in Fukien united with the Teochius from Hongsoon in Kwantung to form yet another pang, the Hongsoon-Yoontin-Taipu pang. And then the Kwong-Fei-Seow pang and the Hongsoon-Yoontin-Taipu pang joined with the Kahyinchiu Khehs to form a still larger alliance in order to stand up to the Fukien pang. See Tan Yeok Seong, "Sing-Chia-Po Hua-Wen Pi-Ming Chih-Lu Hsu-Yen", Nanyang Siang Pao, January 1, 1972.

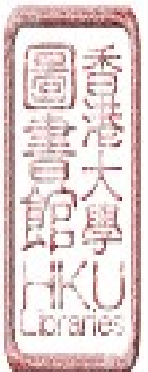
119. The mechanics, for example, were mostly Cantonese, the agriculturist Teochius and Khehs, and the mining labourers mostly Khehs.



Secret societies in Malaya originated in China. The Chinese secret societies, with their occult religion, secret rituals, disciplines, and passwords, became the vehicle by which the lower strata of the population directed their opposition against the established order and foreign domination.¹²⁰ Various upheavals in Chinese history were associated with them. When the Triad societies were transplanted to Malaya by the Chinese, they underwent metamorphosis in the new environments. They emerged as open and lawful societies in the Colony and the Malay States. They changed their name from hoey to kongsi,¹²¹ maintained halls and lodges, and became active in almost every field of the Chinese community. The early British authorities came to terms with them chiefly because of their strength and inadequate machinery for their total suppression. As the name kongsi indicated, the secret societies engaged in trade and finance, the farming of revenue and opium, and investment in agriculture and mining. While secret societies in China catered to the lower strata of society, the secret societies in Malaya became 'vertical' organizations which comprised different strata of the Chinese population from the top to the bottom in their membership. In their ranks were such disparate elements as rich merchants, mine-owners, planters, contractors, farmers, labourers, and fighting men. It was not uncommon

120. Jean Chesneaux, Secret Societies in China in the 18th and 19th Centuries (Hong Kong, 1971), p. 189.

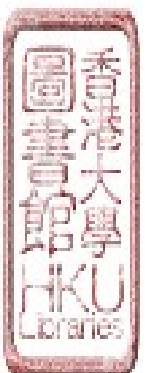
121. Kongsi means a business firm, a partnership, or simply a group of people gathered together for a common objective.



for a secret society headman to appear as a Chinese community leader. In the 'frontier' conditions in the Malay States before the British intervention, secret societies often played the role of civil authorities for the Chinese population.¹²² They maintained close relations or even inter-penetration with other Chinese associations. Concerned primarily with self-interests and divided by pang groupings, the secret societies were constantly engaged in bloody fights with each other. With the coming into force of the Societies Ordinance, 1899, on January 1, 1890, the secret societies became illegal, and they gradually severed their ties with other Chinese associations and became clandestine underworld organizations.

It is difficult to state in general the exact position of the Chinese labourers in regard to the secret societies. Those secret societies which were controlled by the employers served as an instrument to keep the labourers in their place. The Chinese mine owners and planters made use of the secret societies to tighten discipline, enforce rules and regulations, carry out orders, prevent desertions, and mete out punishments for the recalcitrant. There were, of course, secret societies not dominated by the employers. These were somewhat similar to the Freemasons, which cherished the idea of equality and

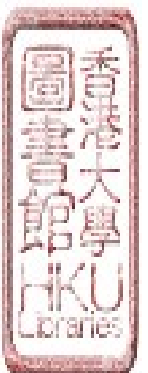
122. For the part of secret societies in Kuala Lumpur and the agricultural districts under the control of the Chinese headmen known as kangchu, see S.M. Middlebrook, "Yap Ah Loy" JMBRAS, XXIV, 11, July, 1951, 8, 89-96; J. Jackson, Planters and Speculators: Chinese and European Agricultural Enterprise in Malaya, 1786-1921 (Kuala Lumpur, 1968), pp. 3-4, 22-23.



brotherhood among members, but they were unable to cope with the complicated problems of industrial relations, and, therefore, failed to play the part of labour organizations vis-à-vis the employers. Secret societies often degenerated into sheer collection of gangsters and hooligans, who extorted 'protection' money, patronized prostitution, engaged in endless vendetta among themselves, and perpetrated various criminal acts. The employers usually had no difficulty in enlisting the service of these secret society hooligans as strike-breakers.

Largely through the medium of secret societies the Chinese labourers came to engage in anti-Manchu activities in the nineteenth century. The Triad societies in Malaya had not entirely forsaken the aim of 'overthrow the Ch'ing and restore the Ming' for which the Triad was originally founded. They played a very prominent role in the insurrections launched by the Small Sword Society in Amoy and Shanghai in 1853.¹²³ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, both the reformist party led by Kang Yu Wei and the republican party led by Sun Yat Sen made use of the Straits Settlements as a base to rally overseas Chinese support, but the two parties carried on interminable polemics among themselves. The chief instrument by which the

123. A provisional government was set up by the insurrectionists in a district in Shanghai on September 5, 1853, under the name of 'Ghee Hin Kongsi', the name given to the Triad societies in Malaya. See Shang-Hai Hsiao-Tao-Hui Ch'ih-i Shih-Liao Hui-Pien (Shanghai, 1958), pp. 28-30; Chesneaux, Secret Societies, pp. 86-87.



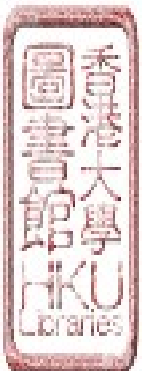
republican party extended its influence among the Chinese labourers was Chung Woh Tong, an association whose membership was predominantly from the lower strata of the Chinese population.¹²⁴ In the course of time the Chinese labourers were won over for the republican cause. A number of Chinese labourers were enlisted to take part in revolutionary activities in China.¹²⁵

Neither was strike over specific political issue unknown in the earlier decades. In 1905 a movement against the Chinese Exclusion Act imposed by the United States spread from major cities in China to the Straits Settlements. On June 20 a meeting chaired by Lim Boon Keng was held at a Chinese hospital to protest against the Act. The meeting unanimously passed a resolution, which was moved by Chan Teow Lam, that "the Chinese traders in Singapore stop all trading in American goods."¹²⁶ A cable was sent to the

124. Chung Woh Tong was originally a Cantonese seamen's lodging house in Yokohama. It was remoulded by Yau Lit, a follower of Sun Yat Sen, into a political association sympathetic to the republican cause. Yau Lit arrived in Singapore in 1910 and formed Chung Woh Tong in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States. See Fung Chih Yu, Hua-Ch'iao Ke-Ming Kai-Kuo Shih (Chungking, 1946), pp. 44-45; Blythe, Chinese Secret Societies, pp. 27, 279-280.

125. A Manchu general was assassinated by a Chinese labourer recruited in Kuala Lumpur, and among the seventy-two insurrectionists who sacrificed their lives in the Canton Uprising in March, 1911, there were two mechanics from Singapore. See Ch'en Chung San, "Nan-Yang Hua-Ch'iao Yü Ke-Ming Chung Chi Nu-Li", Nan Yang Yen Chiu, III, 1, 1930, 13.

126. Song Ong Siang, One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore (London, 1932), pp. 374-376.

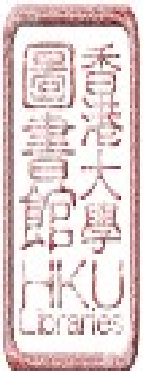


Chinese Government in Peking. The boycott movement soon spread to Penang and the Malay States. The Chinese in Singapore boycotted the Singapore Tramways Company, which had just started its service, under the wrong impression that it was owned by the Americans. In December, when the boycott movement was still in full swing, a dockers' strike occurred at the Tanjong Pagar Dock. Acme, an American full-rigged sailing ship loaded with goods ordered by the Government of the Straits Settlements, went into the dock for repair. The Chinese dockers refused to unload the goods or repair the ship. The Chinese Protectorate sent for Chan Teow Lam and another community leader, who made an appeal to the labourers, and work was resumed in the afternoon.¹²⁷

The rise of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921 initiated a period of Marxist influence on the Chinese in Malaya. Literature on the fundamentals of Marxism began to be imported and circulated. The First National Congress of Labour, held in Canton on May 1, 1922, passed resolutions on eight-hour day, labour legislation, improvement of living conditions, protection of labour organizations, and the principle of mutual aid in strikes.¹²⁸ These concepts of modern trade unionism came to be introduced in the course of time to Malaya.

127. Ibid.; Fung, Hua-Ch'iao Ke-Ming Kai-Kuo Shih, pp. 76-77.

128. Ti-I-Ch'ih Kuo-Nei Ke-Ming Chan-Cheng Shih-Chih Ti Kung-Jen Yun-Tung (Peking, 1954), pp. 49-53.



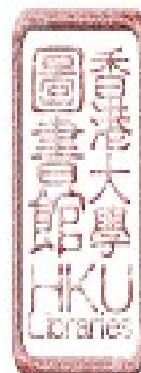
The political orientation of Indian labourers was less apparent in the earlier years. Indian migration was a closely supervised affair. On the Indian side, efforts were made to discourage certain types of emigrants, including political agitators. On the Malayan side, the Special Branch took care to screen off immigrants that would prove to be dangerous to the colonial regime.¹²⁹

The Indian labourers, drawn generally from the down-trodden castes in India, were deprived of political articulation by the dead weight of age-old oppression and social prejudice. Ignorance, illiteracy, the discipline and isolated life in the estates further reinforced their inertia. Moreover, the Indian nationalists were late in extending their ramifications to Malaya.¹³⁰ The initiation of the Indian labourers to the political arena thus seemed to be a rather arduous and painstaking process.

A more intense period of labour agitation, organization, and political proselytism began in Malaya from 1925. In the previous year the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat under the Profintern (Communist Trade Union International)

129. Sandhu, Indians in Malaya, p. 45.

130. It was not until 1928 that the first All-Malayan Indian Conference was convened in Kuala Lumpur. The second Conference was held in Ipoh in 1928 and the third in Singapore in 1929. The enthusiasm lapsed after the fourth annual session in 1931. See Usha Mahajani, The Role of Indian Minorities in India and Malaya (Bombay, 1960), p.60.



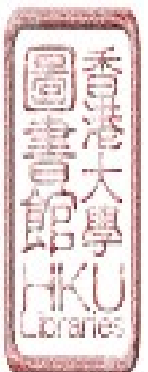
was formed in Shanghai.¹³¹ The All-China Federation of Trade Unions emerged from the Second National Congress of Labour, held in Canton in May, 1925. It passed resolutions to set up trade unions in various provinces of China and the Nanyang territories.¹³² Under the efforts of the Profintern and the A.C.F.T.U., the Nanyang Federation of Labour was formed in Singapore in 1926. It sought to organize labourers of different races and co-ordinate the revolutionary unions in the Southeast Asia region. The British authorities initially adopted a cautious policy and tolerated the operation of the Federation in the British territories. The Federation actually held two annual conferences in Singapore. However, in 1928 the Federation and other revolutionary unions were outlawed.¹³³ In May, 1927, the Pan-Pacific Labour Congress was held in Harkow. The Congress endorsed a programme for labourers in the colonial territories. The programme included eight-hour day, weekly restday, labour insurance, maternity benefits, prohibition of child labour, equal pay for equal work, removal of truck, fines, and corporal punishments.¹³⁴

131. Gene Z. Hanrahan, The Communist Struggle in Malaya (New York, 1954), p. 10.

132. Kung-Jen Yun-Tung, pp. 49-53, 548.

133. B.C. Roberts, Labour in the Tropical Territories of the Commonwealth (North Carolina, 1964), pp. 24-25.

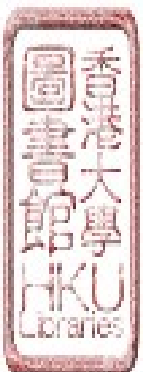
134. Kung-Jen Yun-Tung, pp. 540-544.



Meanwhile, some of the employces' associations took a more active part in collective bargaining. In 1926, for example, the Yit Chuen Chinese Printing Association in Singapore began to campaign for the '3-8 system', i.e., eight hours' work, eight hours' rest, and eight hours' sleep. They were apparently aware of the general trend of trade unionism in other countries, and were in fact demanding the reduction of working day from well over ten hours to eight hours. The Association conducted some hard bargaining with the employers, who finally gave in to the workers' demands.¹³⁵ This was probably the first instance of the eight-hour day being achieved through collective bargaining.

After the Chinese Communist Party was seriously checked by the break with Chiang Kai Shek in 1927, its influence continued to grow in Malaya. Large numbers of Communist revolutionaries fled to Malaya. They were active in trade union activities, in schools, and in some other fields. In 1928 they formed the Nanyang Communist Party, which came under the direction of the Comintern (Communist International) and covered the Southeast Asia region. Their agitation among labourers produced some of the more militant strikes. In March, 1928, some 2,000 labourers struck for 40 per cent wage increase and staged demonstration in the streets of Singapore. They were reported to have

135. "Pen-Hui Chih Yen-Ke", Singapore General Printing Workers' Union Golden Jubilee Commemoration and Printers' Day Souvenir Magazine (Singapore, 1962), p. 20.



used 'fire and bombs' in the clashes with the police.¹³⁶
The growth of Communist influence in the labour field,
however, was curbed by rigorous police action in 1929-30.

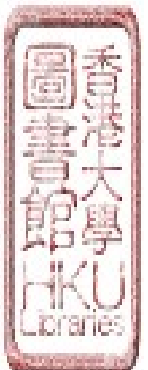
The Nanyang Communist Party was dissolved in its
Third Representative Congress in April, 1930, and in its
stead were formed the Malayan Communist Party and the
Indochinese Communist Party.¹³⁷ No sooner had the M.C.P.
been formed than it was seriously disrupted.¹³⁸ It was not
until the following year that a meeting was held to rebuild
the Party. The meeting passed the resolution "to carry on
the struggle for national liberation, formulate a military
programme for the overthrow of imperialism and feudal
aristocracy, and to establish the Soviet Republic of Malaya
by the co-ordinated efforts of the proletariat and the
peasantry". The meeting also decided on organizing labour
for 'widespread economic struggle'.¹³⁹ Meanwhile, the
Nanyang Federation of Labour was reorganized into the Malayan
Federation of Labour, which was affiliated to the Pan-Pacific

136. Hanrahan, The Communist Struggle in Malaya, p. 10.

137. Ibid., p. 12.

138. Joseph Ducroux, a French Communist agent, was arrested
by the Singapore police in April, 1930. On the information
he revealed to the police, the top-ranking M.C.P. leaders
were arrested, the Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern and
the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat in Shanghai were
raided by the Chinese police, and a number of top Communists,
including Ho Chi Min, were arrested in Hong Kong. See
ibid., pp. 12-13.

139. Ibid., p. 12.

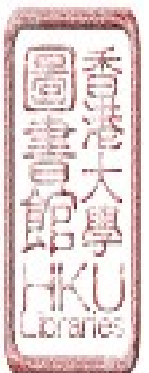


Trade Union Secretariat in Shanghai.¹⁴⁰

In spite of the existence of labour organizations and the occurrence of industrial disputes, there were no laws regulating trade unions and industrial disputes in Malaya. Labour organizations, as any other societies, were required to apply for registration or exemption under the Societies Ordinance. There was no practical distinction between registration and exemption, although exemption was generally considered a mark of prestige. Labour organization was not accorded the rights and privileges which a trade union must enjoy if it was to discharge its duty successfully as the representative body of labour. Neither were the rights and immunities in regard to collective bargaining enshrined in law. There was no law that prohibited strike as such, but the labour code laid down that "any person, whether alone or in combination with others, hinders or molests by words, gesture or act any labourer in the performance of his agreement or contract, shall be liable to a fine of two hundred dollars or to imprisonment for six months."¹⁴¹ Every strike, even the primitive and spontaneous one, often involved one or more persons who took the lead to get the rest of the men to lay down tools. Such person or persons, once identified, would be liable to prosecution under the law. This law was supplemented by the Banishment Ordinance, which was originally framed for the purpose of suppressing secret

140. Ibid.

141. "F.M.S. Labour Code", p. 44.



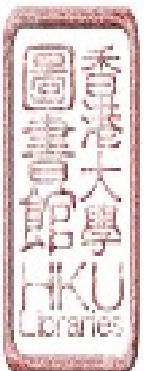
societies but could be used as a potent weapon against labour.

In 1930 Lord Passfield, Secretary of State for the Colonies, sent a despatch to all colonial governments on the question of labour organization. The despatch was to the effect that the time might come for the colonial governments to recognize the existence of trade unions and to smooth their passage into constitutional channels.¹⁴² However, with the change of government in England and the onset of the Great Depression, this instruction was shelved by the Malayan Governments. In contrast, a law to regulate trade disputes and trade unions was passed in Hong Kong in 1927 largely as a result of the Hong Kong General Strike.¹⁴³ Similar law was not enacted in Malaya until 1940-41. Malaya was therefore more than a decade behind Hong Kong in this aspect of labour legislation.

During the Great Depression the labourers were completely helpless in the face of serious deterioration in labour conditions. The enormous scale of unemployment rendered any defensive action on their part futile. As a whole the employers' measures met with very little resistance from the labourers. Very few strikes were reported throughout the depression period. The more notable were the strike of 2,000 Indian labourers at the Singapore Naval Base and the disturbances at the Tan Kah Kee Manufacturing Company and

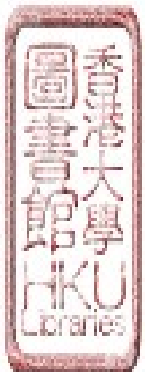
142. Roberts, Labour in the Tropical Territories, pp. xv, 177-179.

143. Mills, British Rule in Eastern Asia, pp. 465-466.



a Malacca rubber estate in August, 1930.¹⁴⁴ These were isolated acts of protest and invariably ended in defeat. The experiences of labour were almost traumatic, but they were bound to fight back on the first sign of an economic recovery.

144. SCJP, August 18, 20, 22, 1930.

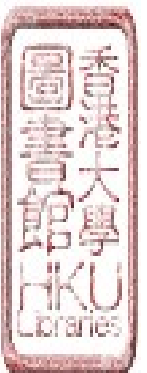


Chapter I

NEW WAVE OF UNREST, 1934-1935

The first wave of industrial unrest after the Great Depression began in 1934, the year of economic recovery. The Great Depression had thrown labour into the depth of economic degradation: wages had been reduced to a pittance, working conditions had deteriorated, and large numbers of labourers had been laid off or put on short time. Labour had become the victims of economic vagaries which were completely beyond their control. When they finally emerged from the depression, still a little dazzled, they found themselves in conditions even worse in some aspects than what their forbears had experienced. The fundamental problem confronting them was first of all to pull themselves up from the depression conditions and in the long run to remove the basic causes of their discontent. To achieve this end, they had no alternative but to combine and assert themselves.

The economic recovery afforded them the first opportunity to fight for higher wages and better working conditions. The Great Depression started with the Wall Street crash in November, 1929, and by 1934 the nadir of the depression had passed. The industrialized countries were on the way of economic recovery, and colonial dependencies shared in the general economic upswing owing to greater demands for primary products in the world markets. The Malayan rubber and tin industries reacted sensitively to better world market conditions.



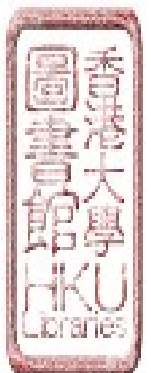
The average price per lb. of standard smoked sheet in Singapore rose from 10.21 cents in 1933 to 20.63 cents in 1934.¹ Production of tin rose to 37,700 tons in 1934 and 42,400 tons in 1935 as compared with 24,900 tons in 1933.² The improvement in the rubber and tin industries was substantially fostered by international restriction schemes. The International Rubber Regulation Scheme came into effect on June 1, 1934. It avoided the earlier mistakes of the Stevenson plan by including all the major rubber producing countries as participants.³ The scheme sought to achieve satisfactory price levels through the restriction of the output of the rubber producing countries. The International Rubber Regulation Committee assigned basic production quota to each producing country and announced the quarterly percentage of the basic quota from time to time.⁴ The operation of the

1. Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, Straits Settlements & the F.M.S., 1934, p. 2.

2. K.E. Knorr, Tin Under Control (California, 1945), Appendix, Table II, p. 298.

3. The Stevenson plan, 1922-1928, was aimed at stabilizing rubber prices through the restriction of the rubber output of producing countries. The plan included only Malaya and Ceylon, which together produced 70 per cent of world rubber. The Netherlands East Indies, which remained outside the plan, took advantage of the high rubber prices brought about by the plan to increase their share of world rubber production from 25.5 per cent in 1922 to over 40 per cent in 1927. The objective of the plan was thereby largely defeated. See Mills, British Rule in Eastern Asia, pp. 189-197.

4. The basic quotas assigned to Malaya in 1934 and 1935, for example, were 504,000 tons and 538,000 tons whilst the export quotas were about 87 per cent and 67 per cent of the basic quotas respectively. See K.E. Knorr, World Rubber and Its Regulation (California, 1945), Appendix, Table VII, VIII, p. 252.



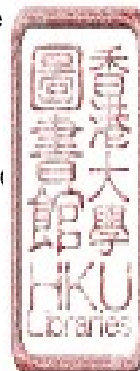
rubber restriction scheme had a direct effect on wages in the rubber industry. Quota releases were usually reduced when prices fell and increased when prices rose, and hence the combined effect of low prices and low quota in bad times was to cut into the profits of the rubber companies and induce them to reduce wages. The International Tin Restriction Scheme,⁵ which came into force on March 1, 1931, helped to raise tin prices to over £200 per ton,⁶ but it operated to the disadvantage of the small Chinese mines and was one of the causes of the drastic reduction of labour force in the tin industry.

The improvement in the prices of rubber and tin was reflected in a general recovery of economic conditions in Malaya. Revenues rose, imports and exports increased, services and industries dependent directly and indirectly on rubber and tin revived.⁷ Lest too rosy a picture is painted of the

5. The International Tin Restriction Scheme included Malaya, Bolivia, the Netherlands East Indies, Nigeria, and some other minor producing countries. The annual standard tonnage of Malaya in the period 1934-1937 was fixed at 71,940 tons. A quarterly percentage of the standard tonnage was announced from time to time by the International Tin Committee. See Yip, Tin Mining Industry, pp. 187-261; Knorr, Tin Under Control, Appendix, Table XII, p. 306.

6. Tin prices averaged £230.4 per ton in 1934 and £225.7 per ton in 1935 as compared with £194.6 per ton in 1933. See Major G. St. J. Orde Browne, Labour Conditions in Ceylon, Mauritius, and Malaya, Cmd. 6423, 1943, Appendix II, p. 113.

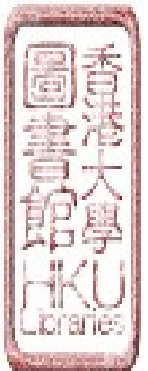
7. The average weighted index of commodity prices, represented by 17 principal commodities increased by 40.5% in 1934 as compared with 1933. The index of average retailed food prices increased by 2.6 per cent, and the general cost-of-living index for Asiatics increased by 8.6 per cent in 1934 as compared with 1933. Total value of imports and exports rose from \$723,669,000 in 1933 to \$1,004,469,000 in 1934. See F.M.S. Report of the Chief Secretary to Government, 1934, pp. 54-56; Mills, British Rule in Eastern Asia, Appendix, pp. 118-119.



recovery, the reader is reminded of some chronically depressed spots. The Tan Kah Kee Rubber Manufacturing Company, which had grown from less than 50 hands in 1921 to over 4,000 employees on its pay-roll, was liquidated in 1934. The vast conglomerate owned by Tan Kah Kee, one of the leading Chinese entrepreneurs in Malaya, also went into gradual liquidation.⁸ It was symptomatic of the fate of the Chinese manufacturers in Malaya in general. Hardly had they emerged from the tremendous losses incurred during the depression than they were confronted with new predicaments. Their enterprises became extremely vulnerable under the competition of imported goods, increased tariff of foreign markets,⁹ the

8. Tan Kah Kee (1874-1961) was one of the pioneers of pineapple canning and rubber planting in Malaya. In the mid-twenties his total assets were estimated at \$15,000,000 (Straits dollar). Included in his vast family business were 15,000 acres of rubber estates, a string of rubber processing and rubber goods factories, biscuit and soap factories, rice mills and sawmills. In August, 1931, the Tan Kah Kee Rubber Manufacturing Company was reorganized into a public liability company with the participation of the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation in its management. The Company was liquidated in 1934 owing to continued losses. See Tan Kah Kee, Nan-Ch'iao Hui-I-Lu (Singapore, 1946), pp. 395-422; Song, The Chinese in Singapore, p. 430.

9. A number of countries in Asia, including China, Philippines, Indo-China, India, and Java had erected higher tariff barriers against manufactured articles from Malaya. The reduction of export markets was not compensated by benefits accorded under the Ottawa Agreement, under which application had to be made by the Home Government before preference could be granted to goods of Colonial origin. See Report of Trade Commission, 1933-1934 (Singapore, 1934), I, pp. 147, 161-162.

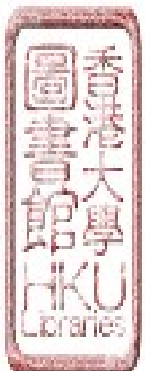


control of shipping by the Conference lines,¹⁰ and the lack of tariff protection in the Straits Settlements.

Rubber estates which had been closed and areas out of tapping were brought into production again in response to rising prices. There was an all-round demand for labour in the rubber industry, but the large number of departures during the depression left the local reservoir of labour inadequate to meet the sudden expansion of the industry. Negotiations were undertaken by the Malayan Governments with the Indian Government towards the end of 1933 for the reopening of assisted Indian immigration, which had been suspended since 1931, and as a result it was resumed on a quota basis in May, 1934.¹¹ In spite of low wages in Malaya, large crowds presented themselves at the depots in Negapatam and Madras under the pressure of rural poverty and drought in South India, and many of the applicants had to be turned down.

10. The Conference system of shipping in Malaya began with the Straits Homeward Conference in 1897. The more important Conferences during the period included the Straits Homeward Conference, the Straits and Java Outward Conferences, the Straits New York and Straits Pacific Conferences, and the Indian Conferences. Evidences of how the Conference system had affected local manufactures were given in the hearings of the Trade Commission, 1933-34, in the Colony. The freight on manufactured rubber shoes from Japan to Europe, for example, was the same as the freight from Singapore, though the distance is some 3,000 miles more. See Walter Makepeace, et. al., One Hundred Years of Singapore (London, 1921), II, p. 43; Report of the Trade Commission, I, pp. 71-95, 149.

11. Labour Department Annual Report, 1934, p. 7.



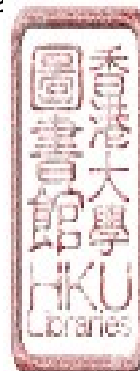
In 1934 and 1935 there were altogether 155,000 Indian arrivals, of which 66,000 were assisted immigrants.¹² The supply met the demands of those estates which used to employ Indian labour.

The pattern of Indian immigration was changed after the Great Depression. From the initiation of the Indian Immigration Fund in 1907 down to 1929, the kangany-recruited labourers constituted the bulk of the Indian immigrants. After the Great Depression, the kangany-recruited immigrants dwindled to an insignificant proportion,¹³ and the bulk of the immigrants consisted of non-recruited assisted labourers and non-assisted immigrants. The rubber planters issued thitti surat, a certificate of identity, for Indians who had worked in their estates before to come back; another kind of letter, puthal surat, was sent to friends and relatives of labourers already on the estates, offering them employment in Malaya. Kangany licences were issued only in a limited number, chiefly to tea and palm plantations which had no established connection with India.¹⁴ The medium of the kangany was thus largely dispensed with, and much of the kangany's power over the labourers disappeared with the loss of their recruiting function.

12. Ibid., p. 11; Labour Department Annual Report, 1935, p. 12

13. From 1934 to 1938 there were only some 10,000 kangany-recruited Indian immigrants among a total of some 364,000 Indian immigrants. See Sandhu, Indians in Malaya, Appendix 2, p. 309.

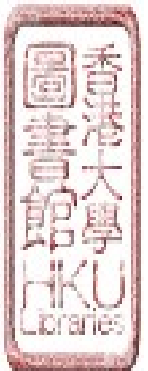
14. Ibid., pp. 106-107.



Labour shortage on tin mines and rubber estates which used to employ Chinese labour was not easily solved owing to restrictions on Chinese immigration. Chinese immigration was temporarily suspended in 1930, and when resumed in 1931 it came under the control of the Immigration Restriction Ordinance. The Aliens Ordinance, which was intended 'to regulate the admission of aliens in accordance with the political, social, and economic needs for the moment of the various administrations of Malaya', came into force in 1933. A monthly quota, initially set at 1,000 but later varied between 500 and 6,000, was fixed for Chinese deck passengers.¹⁵ In Johore, where the majority of rubber tappers were Chinese, the shortage was particularly acute. The estates could not switch to Indian labour without a major re-organization of estate management owing to different methods of employment of Chinese and Indian labour. Largely on the urge of the rubber planters, amendments to the Aliens Ordinance were made in 1934. Employers were allowed to import Chinese labour outside the quota if they could satisfy the Colonial Secretary that the additional labour was required in the Straits Settlements or the Malay States, and a special permit was issued to the employers and the shipping companies for the importation of these labourers.¹⁶ There were 223,892

15. Blythe, Chinese Labour in Malaya, pp. 28-29. Females and former residents who held a certificate of admission were exempted from the quota restriction.

16. SCJP, March 4, 1934.



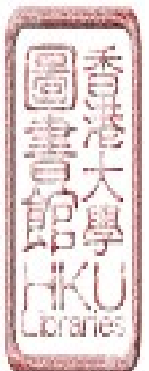
Chinese immigrants in 1934 and 278,168 in 1935, which had considerably eased the labour market by the end of 1935.¹⁷

As the number of Chinese immigrants who fell within the quota was strictly limited, competition for available tickets and the price-rigging practices of the shipping companies sent ticket prices to tremendous height. A ticket from Hong Kong to Singapore, for example, increased from \$10 a head to about \$70.¹⁸ Employers were unwilling to make advances for immigrants within the quota because of the increased amount of money involved. On the other hand, the special provision for the recruitment of Chinese labour outside the quota restriction induced the employers to attempt organized recruitment. Leong Sin Nam, tin-miner and President of the Perak Chinese Chamber of Commerce, proposed the formation of a Chinese Labour Recruitment Kongsì to meet the demands of tin mines and rubber estates.¹⁹ The plan came into operation in mid-1934 under the auspices of the Perak Chinese General Association of Mining, Agriculture and Commerce. An employer who wished to obtain additional Chinese labour placed his order with the Kongsì and paid a sum of money which would cover the whole expense of recruitment. The Kongsì sent its recruiting agent to China to collect the required number of Chinese labourers. The cost of recruiting one Chinese labourer amounted to

17. See Appendix A, Table VIII, p. 326.

18. Report of the Trade Commission, I, p. 152.

19. SGJP, June 19, 1934.



\$30-\$40, almost half the price of a quota ticket.²⁰

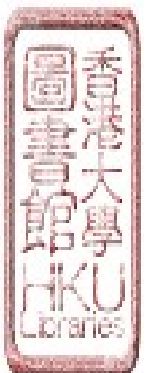
Passage was paid by the Kongsì but the labourer had to enter into a written contract that his debt would be paid off by deduction from his wages.²¹ In essentials the recruitment was done on the old line of the credit-ticket system except for the fact that it was organized by an employers' corporation. Should the plan prove a success, it would have considerably extended the credit-ticket system. By November, 1934, 7,000-8,000 Chinese labourers had been recruited by the Kongsì.²² However, most of the recruited labourers absconded on arrival or after a short stay at the places of employment, and the employers had no means of enforcing the repayment of debt. By April, 1935, the method of recruitment was admitted to be unsatisfactory, and no more was heard about it thereafter.²³ Thus the combination of economic forces and the refusal of the labourer to remain in bonded position put an effective end to indentured labour, which had lingered on in spite of the ban in 1914. Thereafter all Chinese immigrant labourers either paid their own passages or had their passages paid by their friends or relatives.

20. SCJP, June 22, August 18, 1934.

21. Ibid.

22. SCJP, November 20, 1934.

23. SCJP, April 19, 1935.



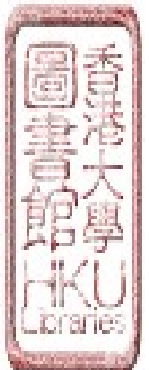
An unexpected result of the Aliens Ordinance was the large inflow of Chinese women. As Chinese women were outside the quota restriction, large numbers of Cantonese women came to Malaya from the Shun Tak and Tung Kwun Districts of Kwangtung, where the failure of the silk industry added a compelling reason for emigration.²⁴ Tickets were not bought direct from shipping companies but through ticket brokers and lodging houses, who encouraged as many women to take up the cheaper non-quota tickets as possible. This practice also tended to stimulate women emigration.²⁵ The majority of the women immigrants became labourers in rubber estates, tin mines, factories and the building industry.

The lodging houses came to play a crucial part as employment exchanges for Chinese labour. In earlier times these lodging houses in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States catered mainly for the Chinese sin kheh. Now both local unemployed labourers and new immigrants stayed at the lodging houses waiting for job opportunities. The labour contractor came to offer his terms of employment and recruited the required number of labourers. He paid a commission of 30 cents for each labourer he engaged to the lodging house owner, and made advances to the labourers to repay all expenses incurred at the lodging house.²⁶ The

24. Blythe, Chinese Labour in Malaya, pp. 29-30.

25. Ibid.; K.G. Tregonning, Home Port Singapore: A History of Straits Steamship Company Limited, 1890-1965 (Singapore, 1967), p. 151.

26. SCJP, February 24, 1934.

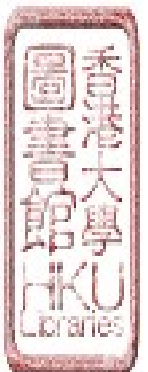


labourers thus began their employment with a debt to the contractor.

Unemployment nevertheless continued to exist in spite of the shortage of labour. It was recognized that there were considerable numbers of unemployed Chinese in Penang and Singapore in 1934.²⁷ The co-existence of labour shortage and unemployment was primarily due to the different rate of growth between various industries. Less labour was re-absorbed into industries whose recovery was weak, and new unemployment was created by a decayed branch of industry. Unemployed labourers in one industry were not readily absorbed into another industry because of the unique physical and technical requirements of each industry. A pineapple cutter, for example, would rather await employment in a pineapple factory than become a rubber tapper. Moreover, some of the unemployed labourers were sick and decrepit, and, therefore, unemployable.

Although economic conditions as a whole were conducive to the rise of labour unrest, the prevailing political climate was less favourable to labour. The Aliens Ordinance, 1933, was not merely a device for immigration control but was politically motivated. It was applied to any person who was not a British subject nor a subject of a British protected or mandated territory, and it affected mainly the Chinese community in practice. A new alien immigrant was

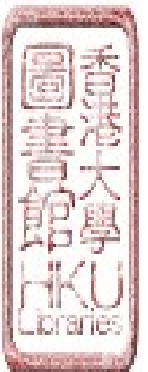
27. Report of the Trade Commission, I, p. 152.



required to obtain a certificate of admission or of residence, and an old alien resident was also required to obtain one if the government deemed it necessary. A register of the Chinese population in Malaya could thus be eventually built up. The implication of the Aliens Ordinance was that the Chinese were supposed neither to transplant Chinese politics to Malaya nor to engage in local politics and that the part reserved for them was pure acquisition of money or earning of wages. It was clearly not calculated to encourage a sense of Malayan identity among the immigrant population. Closely allied to the political considerations underlying the Aliens Ordinance was the ban on the Kuomintang,²⁸ decentralization,²⁹

28. In 1930 the Kuomintang in Malaya was banned by Cecil Clementi because the party's activities were deemed to be destructive of the allegiance of the Chinese population to the local government. As a result of subsequent diplomatic exchanges between the Chinese Government and the British Government, individuals were allowed to retain their membership in the Kuomintang, but the organized activities of the party in Malaya were banned. See Png Poh Seng, "The Kuomintang in Malaya", JSEAH, II, 1, March, 1961, 1-30.

29. It was suggested as early as 1923 that the administration of the F.M.S. had been too much concentrated in the hands of the Chief Secretary and that the Sultans had been relegated to an insignificant position; therefore, more administrative functions should be returned to the states in order to maintain the authority, prestige and influence of the Sultans. On the recommendations of Samuel Wilson, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, in 1932, steps in the direction of decentralization were taken. These steps included the demotion of the post of the Chief Secretary to the Federal Secretary, the transfer of a number of departments to the state, and the increase of the jurisdiction of the State Councils. See Mills, British Rule in Eastern Asia, pp. 51-74; Emerson, Malaysia, pp. 159-175, 325-343; James de V. Allen, The Malayan Union (Yale, 1967), pp. 2-8.



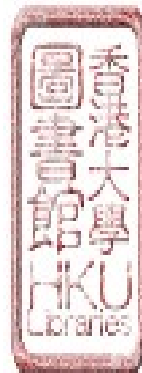
tighter control over Chinese schools and societies, and the increasing use of the Banishment Ordinance.³⁰

At the beginning of 1934 the organized strength of labour compared very unfavourably with that of the employers. As far as registered labour associations were concerned, they included only a tiny section of the Malayan labour force and most of them were guilds of Chinese craftsmen organized for the purpose of mutual benefits. Trade union in the strict legal sense did not exist because there was no law which provided for the formation and functioning of trade unions. Almost all the existing labour associations had become inactive since the onset of the Great Depression owing to dwindling membership and lack of funds.

In contrast the European planters had the Planters' Association of Malaya and the Rubber Growers' Association, which jointly formed the United Planting Association of Malaya in 1934. The U.P.A.M. included rubber companies, agency houses and rubber planters both in Malaya and London.³¹ It was a powerful combination of employers whose primary concern was to keep labour supply abundant and the cost of operation low. The European tin companies had their Chamber of Mines and the European firms in the Straits Settlements had their Chamber of Commerce. They made representations from time to time on important issues affecting

30. Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, The Left Wing in Southeast Asia (New York, 1950), pp. 128-129.

31. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 12-15.

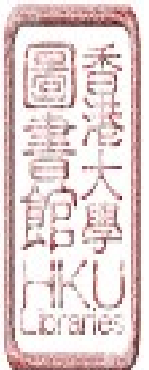


their interests, and their spokesmen sat in the Federal Council in the F.M.S. and the Legislative Council in the Straits Settlements. Their views always commanded a respectful hearing, and their influence was enormous. The Chinese employers' associations were much less powerful in comparison. The Chinese Chambers of Commerce, which included various groups of Chinese traders and entrepreneurs, preferred to play the part of general spokesman of the Chinese community rather than the employers' combination.

Weak and unorganized as the labouring class was, a new drive began in 1934 for the organization of labour. The effort was undertaken by three different groups: the illegal unions directed by the M.C.P., groups of hitherto unorganized workers who attempted to form unions, and the old craftsmen's guilds. In 1934 the Malayan General Labour Union emerged out of the defunct Malayan Federation of Labour. The M.C.P. had by this time recovered from the initial losses which it suffered in 1930,³² and assistance was received from the re-established Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern.³³ The M.C.P. was thus in a position to direct new efforts in the field of organized labour through the vehicle of the G.L.U. The G.L.U. being an illegal underground organization, no evidence is available to throw light on its structure and leadership, and much of its activities remain unknown. Its modus operandi, however,

32. Vide supra., p. 62.

33. Hanrahan, The Communist Struggle in Malaya, pp. 18-22.

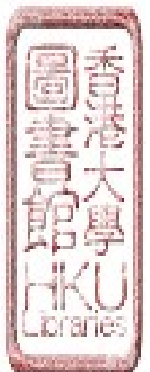


can be surmised. It may have been engaged in training cadre, propaganda, and organizational work among labourers, calling or supporting some of the strikes. The groundwork thus laid contributed to its enormous influence in subsequent years. Among hitherto unorganized workers the Singapore building labourers and pineapple factory workers took the lead to prepare for the formation of their own associations.³⁴ Some of the craftsmen's guilds which had lain dormant during the depression began a membership drive as part of the programme of revival.³⁵

The first wave of industrial unrest after the Great Depression began with craftsmen in the F.M.S., Penang, and Malacca. Claims for wage increase and reduction of hours were raised by shoemakers, tailors, mechanics, rattan workers, washermen, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and hairdressers. In the first four months of 1934 there were widespread wage negotiations which affected tailors and shoemakers in Selangor, Perak, Negri Sembilan, Penang, Kedah, and Johore. Strikes were called in a number of cases. At the end of April the unrest affected the F.M.S. Railways Central Workshops in Selangor, where 1,500 workers called a strike. The strike spread to railway stations as far as Perak in the north and Singapore in the south. Thereafter unrest

34. SCJP, March 11, 19, 1935; "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 13.

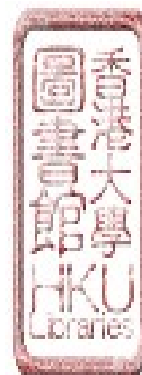
35. SCJP, November 19, 1934; January 7, 1935.



among the craftsmen continued unabated. Signs of disquiet were also present among rubber estate labourers, who called a number of strikes over specific grievances.

The craftsmen spearheaded the industrial unrest because they were placed in more advantageous position than other workers. Unemployment among craftsmen had not been as serious as unskilled or semi-skilled labourers. Their skill began to acquire a scarcity value in the economic recovery, and they were not easily replaceable. They were virtually the only group of workers who were well covered by guilds and associations. Although these guilds and associations might not take the lead in collective bargaining, they afforded a focal point where the men could get together and formulate their demands. They had an established tradition of bargaining with the employers and a whole set of rules, customs, and precedents to go by. Moreover, the small Chinese masters or shopkeepers had not the means to withstand a strike for any considerable period of time, and they were probably the weakest link in the employers' front. In short, the craftsmen had the best bargaining position and they were quick to take advantage of it.

The majority of the craftsmen belonged to very small units of production which did not employ more than 10 workers. The technical basis of these trades remained in pre-industrial phase of manufacture where little machinery was used. They served a localized market, either a town or a district, which in turn was dependent on the rubber and tin industries for its general prosperity. The workers were employed on piece



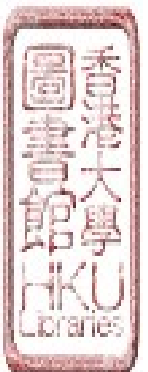
rates, daily rates, monthly wages, or on tribute, in which earnings were divided between the employee and his employer according to a fixed scale. Some craftsmen were cottage handicraftsmen, who possessed some independent means but worked on the materials supplied by a trader or a contractor on piece rates. By 1929 wage rates had been fixed in these trades by custom and agreement. The tailors and goldsmiths, for example, were paid according to an agreement reached in 1925 as a result of negotiations between employers and employees.³⁶ During the depression the wage rates were severely reduced and earnings were decreased even more drastically because of general underemployment among the craftsmen.

The aim of the craftsmen was to regain what they had lost during the Great Depression. Their wage claims were generally formulated according to the wage scales before the depression. The tailors, for example, claimed wages which were equivalent to 70-90 per cent of the 1925 wage rates.³⁷ Usually the workers claimed 30-40 per cent wage increase, but in special cases the claim might be as high as 100 per cent increase.³⁸ The wage claims were in fact moderate when the drastic reduction of wages during the

36. SCJP, February 1, 24, March 2, 6, April 18, December 13, 1934.

37. SCJP, February 1, March 2, 1934.

38. SCJP, May 18, 1934.

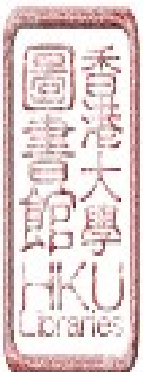


depression is taken into account.³⁹ In some cases conversion of piece rates to monthly rates had occurred during the depression, and now those workers affected demanded a return to piece rates, which put a premium on individual industry and skill.⁴⁰

The craftsmen as a whole were steady and methodical in their approach to collective bargaining. They endeavoured to resolve wage disputes through direct negotiation with their employers before contemplating any alternative steps. Hardly was a strike called before means for an amicable settlement were exhausted. The craftsmen could always be sure that their grievances would receive a hearing from their employers because of the unwritten code of conduct among confrere which had the force of time-honoured traditions and guild regulations behind it. Problems were thrashed out in direct negotiations, and when they had failed to produce result, the case was referred to the Chinese Protectorate. The Protector of Chinese would summon both parties to his office and offer to arbitrate in further negotiation. The Protector's recommendation or advice was not binding on both parties, and negotiation sometimes ended in deadlock, in which case strike would ensue.

39. Shoemakers in Kuala Lumpur had their piece rate reduced to 70 cents for a pair of shoes compared with \$2.20 in 1929, and now they demanded the rate of \$1.30 a pair; tin-plate workers at Klang demanded 30 per cent increase in monthly wages, which ranged from \$8.00 to \$13.00 as compared with \$13.00-\$30.00 before the depression. See SCJP, January 6, May 4, 1934.

40. SCJP, January 11, December 17, 1934.

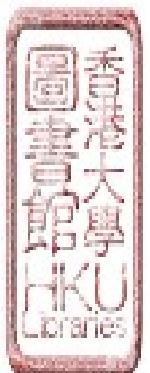


The Chinese trade guild which comprised the employers' 'east house' and the employees' 'west house' afforded a ready organizational framework for negotiation.⁴¹ Usually a letter which stated the workers' claims was sent to the 'east house', which would call a meeting of employers on receipt of the letter. A joint session of the 'east house' and the 'west house' would be held on an agreed date at the guild hall. The session was attended either by all the employers and employees or by their representatives. The joint session of the Tailoring Hong in Kuala Lumpur, for example, was attended by 20 employers and 90 employees, and the Perak Tailoring Hong called a general meeting of conferes in Ipoh, Kampar and Anson to discuss readjustment of wage rates.⁴² Questions other than wage claims were also discussed in the joint session. Dispute over tips was the subject of negotiation between the 'east house' and the 'west house' in the Singapore Hairdressing Hong, which finally resolved that tips belong entirely to the employees.⁴³ It often took several sessions before both parties came to a settlement. The agreement might be a written one signed by both parties or an oral one, and the terms of agreement were usually published in Chinese newspapers. It was considered a matter of honour and commercial ethics to abide by one's commitment, and the agreement generally remained

41. Vide supra., pp. 51-52.

42. SCJP, January 12, 27, 1934.

43. SCJP, November 1, 1934.



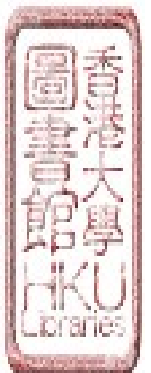
effective until changed circumstances impelled either party to demand a revision.

In spite of the convenience afforded by the trade guild as a vehicle for the articulation of the employees' grievances, the 'west house' was not an independent labour association but a subordinate section in the trade guild, whose officers were invariably members of the 'east house'. In comparison the craftsmen's guild was less circumscribed and more independent, but they tended to be conservative and concerned purely with mutual benefits or the immediate grievances of the members. Some craftsmen's guilds took an active interest in the improvement of the conditions of employees, while others refused to be involved in wage disputes. The goldsmiths' guilds and the mechanics' guilds were more active than the rest. In 1934 Man Wah Hong represented the goldsmiths in Kuala Lumpur in a wage dispute. The main grievance of the men was the practice of the employers to engage casual goldsmiths outside Kuala Lumpur, who received much cheaper rates. The practice began during the depression and the men's wages were further depressed as a result.⁴⁴ Man Wah Hong managed to secure an agreement, which provided for the abolition of the practice and a new scale of piece rates for all the workers.⁴⁵ The Kee Hee Hong in Singapore likewise managed to secure a revision of workshop rules and regulations after several sessions with the employers.⁴⁶

44. SCJP, December 17, 1934; January 7, 1935.

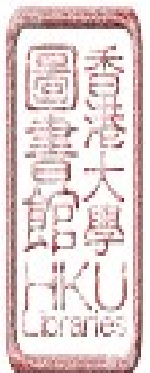
45. SCJP, January 21, 1935.

46. SCJP, October 17, 1935.



Theoretically, collective bargaining is ineffective unless both the employers and the employees are organized in associations, because the employers could not deal with a mob of labourers any more than the employees could with a mob of employers. In reality, collective bargaining was conducted between unorganized groups of employers and employees and produced results. Take the tailors in Muar, Johore, for example. They did not belong to any guild before a wage dispute occurred in April, 1934, but they proceeded to negotiate with their employers in much the same manner as in a guild. A letter was sent to the employers, presenting their claims for 30-50 per cent wage increase. The employers came to a common understanding in regard to the men's claims in their own meeting, and a written reply was given. Thereafter a joint session between the employers and the employees was called. Spokesmen from both parties stated their respective position, and after some inevitable haggling an agreement was concluded. The men were given a 20-40 per cent wage increase, an eight-hour day, a specified number of public holidays, and an assurance that no unjust dismissal would occur within six months. The outcome of the negotiation led both parties to start the formation of a tailoring trade guild in Muar.⁴⁷ It appears from this and other similar examples that collective bargaining could be effectively conducted between unorganized groups of employers and employees, provided a uniform position

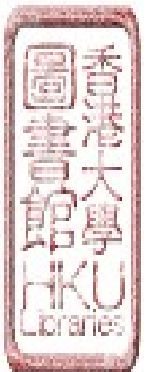
47. SCJP, April 4, 1934.



was taken by the employees regarding their claims and the expected result, a likewise uniform position was taken by the employers in their response, and both parties were prepared to abide by the agreement concluded.

The strikes called by the craftsmen had certain features in common. A strike usually involved all the craftsmen in one trade in a town, and rarely was a strike confined to a single firm or workshop. Only by combining as one single bargaining unit could they exert sufficient coercion on the employers to change the prevailing rates of pay. Claims put forward by craftsmen in a town often encouraged craftsmen in other towns to raise similar claims, and therefore the unrest was infectious and strike tended to spread from one town to another. The strikes as a whole were very quiet and peaceful. The employers did not attempt to break the strikes by the employment of blacklegs because additional skilled workers could hardly be recruited among the unemployed, and hence the strikers were saved the trouble of picketing. Neither did the government take an unduly alarmed view of these strikes, which were usually allowed to run their course without police intervention. Wage settlement was invariably achieved after a strike.

One of the weapons used by the craftsmen to back up their claims was the device of 'general resignation'. A trade would be paralyzed if all the craftsmen in a locality decided to resign en masse. The craftsmen knew their skill was irreplaceable in times of economic recovery, and they adopted the tactics for the purpose of resumption of



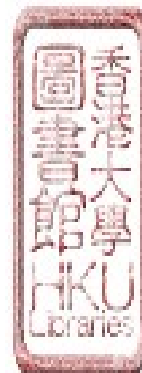
work on better terms of employment. In April, 1934, some 100 Kheh blacksmiths in Penang coupled their wage claims with a warning of 'general resignation', and they managed to obtain a 20 per cent wage increase without even a work stoppage.⁴⁸ In December 1935, the mechanics employed at a Chinese-owned foundry in Kuala Lumpur tendered their resignation because of inadequate concession from their employer. The rest of the foundry owners, apprehensive of a general resignation in the trade, declared a temporary suspension of work. The foundries were reopened after some 300 mechanics put up a petition at the Chinese Protectorate. The mechanics who had tendered their resignation resumed work on a 8-34 per cent wage increase, and the mechanics in other foundries also obtained improved terms of employment.⁴⁹

The Chinese craftsmen were the first group of workers to obtain substantial increase of wages after the Great Depression. The increase generally ranged from 15 per cent to 40 per cent, but it was not yet adequate to recover the 1929 wage levels. Continued efforts were necessary and more collective bargainings seemed inevitable. The wage gains

48. SCJP, April 27, 1934.

49. SCJP, December 16, 17, 19, 23, 1935.

50. For example, wage rate for a pair of leather shoes in Kuala Lumpur remained at \$1.20 after two successive wage increases as compared with \$2.20 in 1929; the piece rates in the tailoring trade were still 10-30 per cent less than in 1929. See SCJP, January 2, 22, February 1, March 6, October 18, 1934.

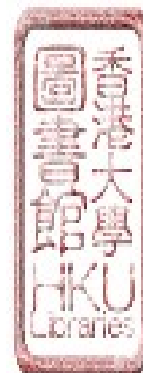


obtained by the craftsmen were bound to affect workers in other industries and start the snowball of industrial disputes rolling.

The F.M.S. Railways strike stands in contrast to the wage disputes involving the Chinese craftsmen. The strike first started at the Central Workshops at Sentul near Kuala Lumpur, where the erection of new stock and repairs to locomotives, carriages, wagons, etc., were done. Workers at the Central Workshops were mostly skilled artisans of different races, with Indians in the larger proportion. They were similar to the Chinese craftsmen in other trades in that they were not easily replaceable, but they faced the government as employer rather than the small property owners. The traditions of mutual accommodation as then existed between the Chinese craftsmen and their employers were apparently lacking in a government-owned enterprise. Neither was there a ready form of organization comparable to the Chinese guilds which afforded a channel of communication between the workers and the management. In the F.M.S. Railways strike the scarcity of the men's skill was not the all-important factor shaping the course and outcome of the dispute because it was offset by countervailing factors.

During the Great Depression half the labour force at the Central Workshops were discharged, and of the 1,500 remaining workers wages were reduced by 15 per cent.⁵¹

51. SCJP, April 28, 1934.



In 1934 the daily wage rates for the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers were \$1.31, 91 cents and 45 cents respectively.⁵² The main grievance of the men was the 15 per cent wage cut, which had not yet been restored, but the F.M.S. Government was not yet prepared to make either full or partial restoration of wage cuts in the Railways Department as in all other departments under Federal control by reason of the state of government revenues.⁵³ Wage policy in government departments may have been influenced by the consideration of the general wage levels prevailing in the rubber industry because a wage increase in government departments would precipitate the vast Indian estate labour force to ask for a similar increase.

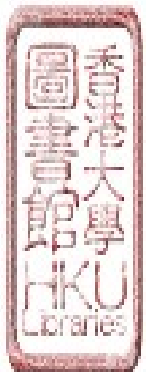
The claims of the Central Workshops employees were presented to the management two months before the strike on the grounds that the cost of living had increased. The claims did not receive a favourable reply from the management, who considered the claims unjustified since the cost of living had increased but slightly.⁵⁴ The matter was apparently stalled until April, when a marked increase of rubber prices prompted the workers to renew their claims. The following were the claims endorsed by a general meeting of workers on April 27:-⁵⁵

52. SCJP, May 23, 1934.

53. The F.M.S. Railways made a very large surplus in the half century preceding the Great Depression, but a total deficit of \$3,855,988 was shown from 1931 to 1933. In 1934 profits were shown again. See Mills, British Rule in Eastern Asia, pp. 96-99.

54. SCJP, April 28, 1934.

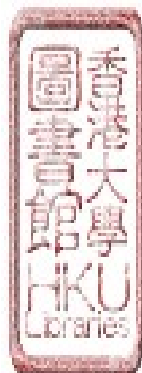
55. SCJP, April 29, 1934.



1. As the workers have experienced tremendous hardships, the 15 per cent wage cut should not be continued.
2. The total amount of wage cut should be repaid to the workers.
3. The two hours' extra pay on Saturday and Sunday, which has been suspended, should be restored.⁵⁶
4. Provision for annual increment of wages.
5. Wages should be paid in full to workers who are admitted to hospital owing to industrial accident.
6. The workers should be entitled to three holidays each month without having to apply for permission in advance.
7. Priority should be given to workers' children in the recruitment of new workers.
8. Workers who receive \$2.00 and above per day should be entitled to free second class railway ticket.
9. Repeal the regulation that workers who have been absent for over six months on leave in India are not to be given job.
10. The period of apprenticeship should be taken into account in paying the apprentices.
11. The apprentices should be given wage increase every six months as was the former practice.
12. The apprentices must be given job on completion of their apprenticeship.
13. Rent for the workers' quarters should be abolished.⁵⁷
14. Stop the practice of replacing workers who have been on the job for seven or eight years by temporary workers.

56. The working day from Monday to Friday was eight hours, but on Saturday and Sunday it was six hours, which was nonetheless paid on the rates for eight hours before the Great Depression. The practice was stopped in 1932. See SCJP, April 29, 1934.

57. Housing had been provided free of charge, but in 1934 a rent of \$1.00 per month was introduced. The management later explained that it was applicable to new workers only. See SCJP, May 6, 1934.



The government's reply was conveyed to the workers on April 24. The reply was to the effect that "the Hon. the Chief Secretary to Government had made very careful inquiry into the subject and regretted that the present financial position of the government did not permit the restoration of the cut in wages in the railway department or in any other department of government."⁵⁸ On April 26, 1,500 workshop employees went on strike. The strike came to involve the Kuala Lumpur locomotive sheds and most of the daily-rated railway workers in Kuala Lumpur in the following day. Demonstrations were staged and pickets organized.⁵⁹ By April 30 the strike had spread rapidly along the railway line to Tanjong Malim, Perak, in the north and Singapore in the south. The official notification from the F.M.S. Railways stated that all areas except Kelantan and Kedah were affected.⁶⁰

The government moved determinedly against the strike. To maintain the train services, the Volunteer Corps was sent to replace the strikers.⁶¹ They were assisted by a group of civilians, who came forward to help the railways by filling coal on to locomotives and in other capacities.⁶²

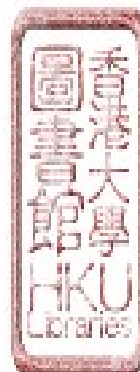
58. Malaya Tribune, April 28, 1934.

59. Ibid.; SCJP, April 28, 1934.

60. Malaya Tribune, April 30, May 1, 1934; SCJP, April 28, 29, 30, May 2, 1934.

61. SCJP, April 29, 1934.

62. Malaya Tribune, May 1, 1934.



Meanwhile, efforts to persuade the workers to return to work were made. The Standing Labour Sub-Committee of the Railway Department met six delegates of the workers in a discussion, which produced no agreement. The service of the Agent of the Government of India, the Chinese Consul in Kuala Lumpur, and a local Chinese community leader was also enlisted. They went to the Central Workshops to address the strikers, but the latter were determined to carry on the strike until their demands were met. The men were reported to have funds sufficient to last them a month.⁶³ Their spokesmen, however, offered resumption of work on condition of payment of wages for the period on strike and reconsideration of their claims. The offer was turned down by the Standing Labour Sub-Committee of the Railway Department.⁶⁴

The F.M.S. Railways issued the following notice on Tuesday, April 30:-

"An opportunity is now given you to resume work by 7 a.m. on Wednesday. Failing resumption of work your services will be automatically terminated and the following further action will be taken:

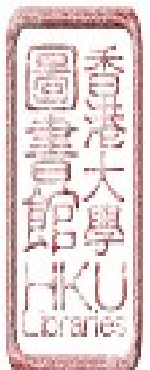
1. Wages equivalent to 24 days' pay for work performed during the month of April will be withheld from any man then on strike.
2. Notices will be issued to those workmen on strike who are in occupation of railway quarters to vacate the same within 14 days."⁶⁵

A unanimous resolution was passed in a general meeting on general resignation and payment of 24 days' wages. The

63. Ibid.

64. SCJP, May 3, 1934.

65. Malaya Tribune, May 1, 1934.



Deputy Controller of Labour, the Agent of the Government of India and the Chinese Consul assured the employees that their claims were under consideration and in fact some demands were acceptable to the government. On this assurance the workshop employees resumed work on May 2.⁶⁶ The Railway Department despatched telegrams to all stations affected by strike, urging the strikers to resume work now that the workshop strike was over. Strikes all along the line were effectively ended on the following day.⁶⁷

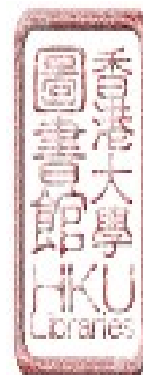
The management's full reply to the men's claims was given two days after the strike ended. All the most important demands, including restoration of wage cut, repayment of the total amount of wage cut, restoration of two hours' extra pay on Saturday and Sunday, were rejected, whereas concession was made only on a few minor points.⁶⁸ The railway strike thus turned out to be a contest of strength between the workers and the state. However determined the workers were, they were no match for the power of the state, and herein lay the basic cause of the defeat of the strike. In the following year, strike was again attempted among the workers at the Central Workshops, but the attempt was apparently nipped in the bud by the dismissal of the 'ringleaders'.⁶⁹

66. Malaya Tribune, May 2, 1934; SCJP, May 3, 1934.

67. SCJP, May 4, 1934.

68. SCJP, May 6, 1934.

69. F.M.S. Annual Report on the State of Crime and the Administration of the Police Force, 1935, p. 16.

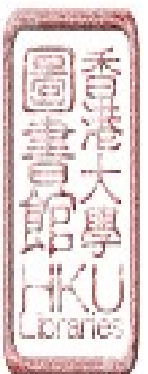


Industrial disputes in the rubber industry also presented a number of contrasts with those involving the Chinese craftsmen. The most conspicuous feature in the rubber industry was the lack of communication between the management and the labourers. The Chinese estate labourers, who were generally engaged by contractors, had no direct access to the management. Neither was there any channel of communication between the Indian labourers and the European management. Direct negotiation between the European management and the Asiatic coolies to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution in regard to terms of employment had never occurred in the rubber industry. This was the reason why strikes in the rubber industry were called almost invariably without prior negotiation. The estate labourers had not yet learned to combine their strength over a sufficiently large number of estates, and the strikes were sporadic and disconnected with each other.

In 1934 the daily earnings of Chinese rubber tappers rose to 40-65 cents on the piece rates of 2.5-4 cents per lb. of dried latex.⁷⁰ The shortage of Chinese labour materially assisted the rise in wage rates, which were reported to have risen above the prevailing rates in some districts in Johore.⁷¹ Indian estate labourers' wages stood at 28 cents for man and 24 cents for woman for a morning work of 6-6½ hours. On the proposal of the Controller of Labour, the rates were raised to 35 cents and 28 cents respectively in

70. F.M.S. Annual Report, 1934, p. 56; SCJP, February 24, 1934.

71. SCJP, January 14, 1935.



May, 1934. In areas where higher standard rates had been prescribed, the corresponding rates rose to 40 cents and 32 cents.⁷² The trend of rising wages was checked in 1935 owing to the operation of the rubber restriction scheme.⁷³ In certain areas where rates of 40 cents and 32 cents had been obtained there was a tendency to reduce wage rates to 35 cents and 28 cents.⁷⁴ Surplus of Indian labour occurred in some districts, where work was spread and earnings reduced.⁷⁵ In sum, wages of both the Indian and Chinese estate labourers in 1934-35 had risen but still remained considerably less than in 1929.⁷⁶

Both the Chinese and Indian labourers were involved in sporadic strikes in the rubber industry. There was disturbance in the Muar district of Johore in connection with the Chinese rubber tappers' strike in November, 1935. Some 500 Chinese rubber tappers on several rubber estates called a strike after their wage claim had been rejected. Hundreds of labourers marched in procession to Muar in order to lay their grievances before the Chinese Protectorate.

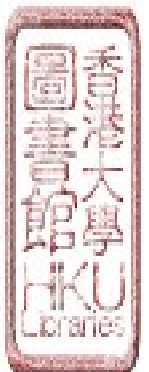
72. F.M.S. Annual Report, 1934, pp. 54-56.

73. The annual average of export quotas in 1935 was about 20 per cent less than that in 1934.

74. Labour Department Annual Report, 1935, p. 29.

75. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, p. 208.

76. In 1929 the general wage rates for Indian estate labourers were 50 cents a day for males and 40 cents a day for females, while the earnings of Chinese rubber tappers ranged from 70 cents to \$2.00 a day.



They were surrounded and arrested en masse by the police, and nineteen labourers were subsequently banished.⁷⁷

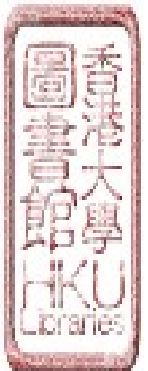
Although the strikes involving Indian labourers were mostly concerned with such specific grievances as stricter discipline or discharges, the strikes on Serapoh Estate and Behrang River Estate in Perak were called notably because the Indian labourers were 'jealous of the higher earnings of the Chinese'.⁷⁸

At this stage the main pressure for increasing Indian estate labourers' wages did not come from the labourers themselves, but from the Government of India. When the Malayan deputation went to India in October, 1933, to discuss the resumption of Indian emigration to Malaya, the Government of India insisted wage cuts be restored before the resumption of emigration.⁷⁹ But the Indian Government did not carry this view consistently to the logical conclusion. Emigration on a quota basis was permitted. In 1935 the Indian Government indicated that continued labour emigration would hinge on the restoration of wage cuts made during the depression. In October 1935 a despatch was sent to the Malayan Governments, demanding the restoration of half the amount of wage cut in 1930, i.e., raising the wage rates to 45 cents and 36 cents

77. SCJP, November 6, 8, 22, 1935; January 6, 1936.

78. Labour Department Annual Report, 1935, p. 40.

79. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, p. 74.

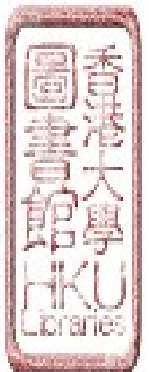


for male and female labourers.⁸⁰ The positions of the Indian Government and the Malayan Governments seemed difficult to reconcile. The final cessation of Indian emigration was anticipated by the Controller of Labour, and steps were taken to prepare for the eventuality.⁸¹ On the one hand, the Controller of Labour tried to restrain the tendency of the rubber planters to cut wages in order to avoid retaliation from India. On the other hand, he assured the Indian Government that wages would be restored when rubber prices rose above certain levels, and an invitation was meanwhile extended to the Indian Government to send a deputation to Malaya to investigate Indian labour conditions.⁸² The whole purpose was to gain time for the continuous inflow of Indian immigrant labourers and to build up a sufficient reservoir of local labour which could withstand the effect of an eventual cessation of Indian immigration. Although the Indian Government was ultimately directed from London, it could not afford to ignore the nationalist opinions regarding the positions of Indians overseas. Criticisms of the mode of recruitment and employment of Indians in Malaya began at the turn of the century, and had continued unabated ever since. The plight of the Indians overseas had been a constant theme of Indian nationalist agitation, and the

80. Ibid., p. 209.

81. Ibid., p. 207.

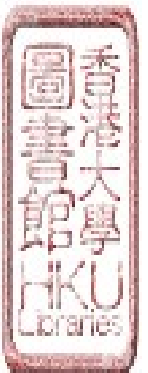
82. Ibid., pp. 207-209. This invitation was accepted, and a deputation led by Srinivasa Sastri came to Malaya in 1936.



fight on their behalf was part of the Indian nationalist movement.⁸³ The posture adopted by the Indian Government over the issue of Indian labour in Malaya, therefore, had to reconcile Imperial interests on the one hand and Indian nationalist sentiments on the other, and the result was constant pressure on the Malayan Governments.

The ground-swell of labour discontent pent up throughout the depression period was brought into the open in 1934-35 by an important section of the labour force, chiefly the skilled workmen on the Chinese-owned workshops and the F.M.S. Railways. It is notable that the Indians no less than the Chinese were the first to make this break-through. The specific aim which they set themselves to achieve was a limited one, i.e., a return to the wage rates and working conditions before the depression. The success of the Chinese craftsmen with their guild organization and tradition stands in sharp contrast with the failure of the unorganized F.M.S. Railways workers and plantation labourers fighting against more powerful employers. In spite of the mixed records, the important thing is that in the long and difficult ascent out of the depression conditions the first decisive step had been taken by Malayan labour, not as an organized body but in their own disparate ways for their own limited sectorial interests.

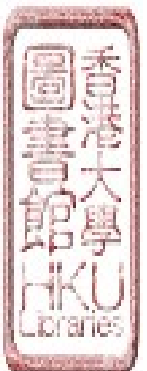
83. Sandhu, Indians in Malaya, pp. 108-110.



Chapter II
THE RISING TIDE, 1936

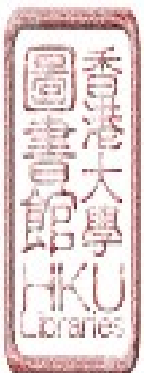
Labour unrest developed from a limited scale in 1934-35 to an unprecedented dimension which encompassed all grades of workers in a wide range of industries throughout Malaya in 1936. Improving economic conditions without a corresponding improvement of wages and working conditions no doubt contributed to the rising incidence of labour unrest.¹ Only a small section of the labour force, namely, the Chinese craftsmen, had improved their position through collective bargaining in 1934-35, but the overwhelming majority still remained in depression conditions. The overriding issue, therefore, was still the recovery of the pre-depression wages rates, but a host of other issues, including hours, the contract labour system, etc., also came to the fore. Experiences in the previous two years had underlined the importance of organization in advancing the interests of labour, and therefore a determined effort at unionization was made as broad sections of Malayan labour pressed for their claims.

1. The average price of rubber (standard smoked sheet) in Singapore for the year 1936 was 27.04 cents as compared with 20.25 cents in 1935. Total tin export rose from 40,749 tons in 1935 to 64,719 tons in 1936 in the F.M.S., although there was no increase in tin prices. See F.M.S. Annual Report, 1936, pp. 3, 5.



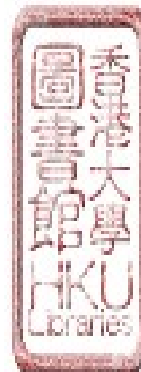
More assertive the Malayan workers had become in exercising the right to strike and the right to organize. Beginning with the engineering mechanics' strike in Perak, which spread from Ipoh to Taiping, Kampar, and Anson, industrial conflict gathered in intensity towards the latter part of the year. The strikes in the building industry and the pineapple canning industry in Singapore took place almost simultaneously in September, and for the first time in history the right of labour organization was openly asserted. They were followed immediately by the Singapore Traction Company employees' strike, which was conspicuous for its multi-racial character. In the Malayan Collieries strike in November, the coal miners put the mines under the control of their 'Soviet' for several days. Labour unrest spread to several large tin mines and culminated in the major strike by 13,000 Indian labourers in Singapore in December.

The drive for union organization among the Singapore building and pineapple canning workers began in 1934-35 and was brought into the open in 1936. They represented a new departure in the history of labour organization in Malaya in two important ways. The unions they proposed to organize were different from the old employees' guilds in that they sought to organize workers on an industrial basis and irrespective of clans or dialects and they were intent on leading the workers in collective bargaining; they were also different from such organization as the G.L.U. in that they sought open legal existence under the Societies



Ordinance as distinct from the clandestine mode of operation. This new departure in labour organization posed a challenge to the existing legal set-up in two aspects. Firstly, no satisfactory legal foundation was provided for trade union in the strict legal sense of the term, and no labour organization with the aims of trade unionism stridently written on its banner could hope to obtain registration under the Societies Ordinance. Secondly, the Registrar of Societies, who usually required the office-bearers to submit their particulars, were reluctant to grant registration to labour association different from the traditional craftsmen's guild in a time of rising labour unrest.

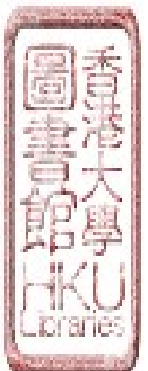
It is interesting to note that the workers sought to overcome the first impediment, namely, the inadequacy of the existing legal framework, not by a frontal attack on legislation. They did not, as they might have done in a different social context, seek to change the Societies Ordinance nor initiate new legislation in order to acquire ample scope for trade unionism. This was not done because there was no popular franchise and representative institution to give expression to their will and to enable them to bring their influence to bear on labour legislation. Both the Legislative Council in the Straits Settlements and the Federal Council in the F.M.S. were dominated by ex officio members, and the non-official members were invariably



spokesmen for rubber, tin, and commercial interests.² Their solution to the problem, therefore, was to circumvent the legal constraint rather than remove it. They tried to register their unions as mutual benefit associations, akin to the old craftsmen's guilds, while attempting to assert the rights of trade unionism in their day-to-day activities.

In order to overcome official opposition to registration, the building and pineapple canning workers adopted rather similar tactics. A publicity campaign was conducted to arouse the workers' interest and to win the sympathy of the public. Issues of wages and working conditions were advanced and strikes were called simultaneously with the application for union registration as a means to get the workers united under the union. Demonstration was held at the Chinese Protectorate in an attempt to exert pressure on the government to grant registration. The building and pineapple canning workers rendered support to each other and their campaigns were closely co-ordinated both in timing and execution.

2. The Legislative Council was composed of the Governor as president, thirteen official and thirteen unofficial members who were British subjects. The Governor had an original and a casting vote to ensure an official majority. The Legislative Council was an advisory body, which could be overruled by the Governor if necessary. The Federal Council was composed of sixteen official and twelve nominated unofficial members. The High Commissioner, the four Residents, and the Federal Secretary were among the official members. See Mills, British Rule in Eastern Asia, pp. 28-30, 54.



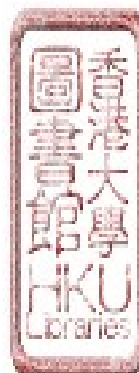
In August, 1936, application for the registration of the Singapore Chinese Building Workers' Union was submitted to the Registrar of Societies by its Preparatory Committee. A delegation comprising three Hokkienese, three Cantonese, and three Shanghainese was formed for the purpose.³ The union started operation while its registration was still pending. The objectives of the Singapore Chinese Building Workers' Union were stated as follows:

"Firstly, to foster fraternal bonds among thousands of building workers, enable all of us to become dear brethren, and eliminate tragic fighting and killing among ourselves; secondly, to relieve those brethren who are unemployed, provide them with boarding and lodging, so that they will not roam the streets for want of a shelter, suffering from cold, hunger, and abuses; thirdly, to help those who are sick, provide them with medical fees and treatment, so that they will not be tortured by sickness to death; fourthly, to help those who are infirm with age, incapable of working and lacking means to return to China, provide each one of them with sixty dollars to enable them to go back to their native country; fifthly, to safeguard all the other interests of the building workers."⁴

The union constitution provided for a union structure which comprised a general meeting, an executive committee, a standing committee, and eight officers in charge of the day-to-day running of the union. Every member was required to pay an initiation fee of two dollars and monthly dues of thirty cents. The first three months' dues should be paid upon entrance, thereafter dues were to be paid monthly. In case of financial straits, special exigencies, or accidents among members, a special contribution would be raised by

3. SCJP, August 12, 1936.

4. Ibid.

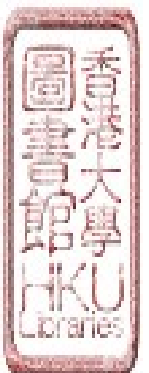


order of the executive committee. Assistance in regard to the aged, sickness, accidents, unemployment, birth, death, and repatriation to China was regulated in detail.

Celebration would be held each year on June 13 of the lunar calendar, the birthday of Lo Ban, the patron saint of the building labourers. The constitution prohibited gambling, opium-smoking, womanizing and lottery, notorious among a number of Chinese associations, in the union premises.⁵

The union was intended to include all labourers in the building industry irrespective of dialect or craft. The old Building Hong and Pak Seng Hong, owing to their narrow dialect and craft restriction, had included only a very small number of building workers and they had largely lapsed into inactivity. Thus the industry was virtually unorganized and the new union was entering the field without rival. The success of the union in bringing together different dialect groups testified to the fact that the pang grouping and sectarian division among the Chinese labourers were on the way of being dismantled. The emphasis on mutual benefits, apart from the consideration for registration, implied that one important aspect of the guild traditions was continued. Whether the craft guild was the precursor of modern trade union has been the subject of discussion among labour historians. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, based on the English experience, held that the modern trade union

5. Ibid.



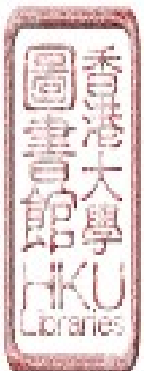
represented a complete break from the old craft guild, but others tended to consider the modern trade union the lineal descendant of the old craft guild.⁶ In the Malayan context the unions formed after the Great Depression, exemplified by the Singapore Chinese Building Workers' Union, represented both a continuity of and an important departure from the guild traditions.

Barely had the Building Workers' Union been formed than it was engaged in active collective bargaining in the industry. Time was indeed opportune because a building boom had begun on the island owing to the construction of the Naval Base and other government projects and the general upswing of the economy. The contract labour system was most deeply entrenched and evil-ridden in the industry. Wages used to go through the hands of a hierarchy of contractors and sub-contractors, who made it a point to sponge on the workers' meagre income. A case was known in which wages passed through the hands of eleven intermediaries before they reached the workers.⁷ Irregular payment of wages was general and default in wage payment frequent. Wages averaged from 70 cents to \$1.20 a day, and working day generally exceeded nine hours.⁸ The workers suffered from insecurity of employment because of the casual nature of their employment, which ended with the completion of a

6. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The History of Trade Unionism (London, 1920 ed.), pp. 1-22; Roberts, Labour in the Tropical Territories, pp. 5-8.

7. SCJP, September 22, 1936.

8. Ibid.



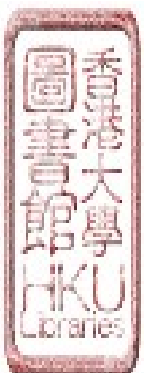
construction project. Industrial accidents were numerous in a trade in which safety precautions were almost non-existent. Provisions in the way of paid holidays, weekly rest-days, sick leave and maternity benefits were unknown. Furthermore, the contractors and sub-contractors were formidable opponent of labour combination.

Military and civil construction projects were the initial target hit by the wave of strikes in mid-September, which involved 900 workers at the Changi Air Base and Seletar Air Base, 100 workers at the Kallang Civil Airport, 800 workers at the Pasir Panjang Barracks, and 300 workers in Johore.⁹ Since the constructions were undertaken by a number of contractors and sub-contractors, the civil and military authorities were not directly involved in the disputes as employer. The workers' claims were largely similar. These included an eight-hour day, increase of daily wage rates, regular payment of wages, improvement of food, contractor to be responsible for late-payment, insufficient payment or non-payment of wages by sub-contractors, and no dismissal of workers without good reason.¹⁰ Some of the strikes were rapidly settled after the claims had been accepted.

Once the workers were aroused and saw the effect of collective action, they could be convinced of the need of unionization and their energies could be directed towards

9. SCJP, September 15, 16, 1936.

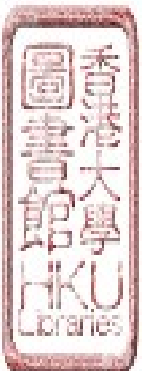
10. Ibid.



that purpose. On September 17, amidst unrest in the building industry, the Singapore Chinese Building Workers' Union organized a demonstration in front of the Chinese Protectorate. The main purpose of the demonstration was to press for the registration of the union, but claims which were the issues in dispute in the industry were simultaneously put forward. Significantly, the demand for the abolition of the contract labour system was added to the original demands, which until then had been confined to the removal of some of its abuses.¹¹

Some two thousand building workers in Singapore and Johore joined in the demonstration. On hearing the news that some of the Johore workers on their way to Singapore were intercepted and arrested by the police, emotion ran high and a new demand for the release of the arrested workers was added. The crowd defied all attempts to persuade them to disperse, and in an emergency meeting on the spot they took the decision to stay on until their demands were met. The demonstration received support from the pineapple canning workers, who had held demonstration in a similar way three days before and who were also engaged in strikes at the time, and from other trades. A letter from the pineapple canning workers expressing their solidarity with the building workers was read out to the meeting, and mooncakes donated by other supporters were distributed. The demonstration was peaceful and well-disciplined.

11. Ibid.



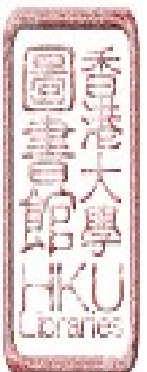
Pickets were formed to maintain order, ropes were lined from one end of the street to another to facilitate the flow of traffic; loud hailers, brushes, writing boxes, tea-pots, etc. were placed on the pavements. Meanwhile, workers' representatives were sent to approach the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, inviting the latter to intercede, but the Chamber officials told the workers to appeal to the Chinese Consul in Singapore instead.¹² At 5:00 a.m. the following day the workers were forcibly dispersed by the police with firehoses. Some workers attempted to withstand the powerful jet, and a scuffle ensued between the police and the workers. When the compound had been cleared, some thirty workers were arrested and a few injured.¹³

The incident in front of the Chinese Protectorate made a powerful impact on the rest of the workers. It touched off a strike by over 4,000 building workers on the island.¹⁴ The Chinese Consul in Singapore accepted the role of mediation, and a new turn appeared in the negotiations between the workers and their contractors. On September 21 a group of managers of European and Chinese construction firms met at the Chinese Protectorate. They admitted that

12. SCJP, September 18, 1936.

13. Ibid.

14. SCJP, September 18, 1936; J. Norman Parmer, "Attempts at Labor Organization by Chinese Workers in Certain Industries in the 1930's" in K.G. Tregonning (ed.), Papers on Malayan History (Singapore, 1961), p. 251.



sub-contracting was open to various abuses, and agreed that a clause prohibiting unreasonable deduction from wages should be included in the contract with the sub-contractors, and charges for food should not exceed 25 cents each day.¹⁵ By the end of the month most contractors had made some sort of concession to the workers, and the various construction sites had returned to normal, except at the Naval Base and the Air Bases, where sporadic strikes continued to occur.¹⁶

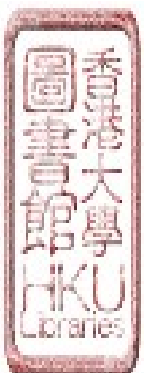
The agreement between the workers at the Pasir Panjang Barracks and their Hokkienese contractors was indicative of the general outcome of the negotiations. The strike started on September 15 and ended on the 28th. The Hokkienese contractors accepted the following terms: an eight-hour working day, a 10 per cent wage increase; when the sub-contractors incurred unexpected losses, the contractors should bear the losses; wages to be paid on the 2nd and the 16th of each month; the contractor to be responsible for the payment of wages should sub-contractors abscond with money; no dismissal of workers without good reason.¹⁷ A major European firm decided to offer better terms and to engage workers directly as a result of the strike.¹⁸

15. SCJP, September 22, 1936.

16. SCJP, October 2, 3, 6, December 10, 1936.

17. SCJP, September 30, 1936.

18. Parmer, "Labor Organization by Chinese Workers", p. 252.

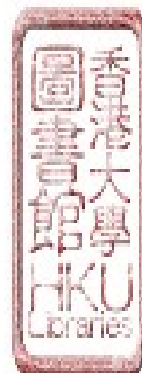


The Labour Department commented on the September strikes of the building workers: "Partly as a result of this strike and partly from ordinary economic causes, wages have increased throughout the industry. The majority of the labourers now working only eight hours a day, and the employers appear to be taking steps to prevent the evils which result from extensive sub-contracting and the consequent introduction of too many intermediaries between the labourer and the employer..."¹⁹ However, the eight-hour day and economic gains were unstable as later events were to prove. The basic features of the contract labour system remained unaltered, although its abuses were checked to some extent. The real significance of the building strikes in 1936 lies in the workers' success in overcoming their provincialism and pang groupings and coming together as a coherent force.

The application of the Singapore Chinese Building Workers' Union was rejected by the Registrar of Societies because it was alleged that the union was 'a Communist organization led by undesirable persons'.²⁰ The refusal to grant registration seems to have driven the union into semi-legal existence. "Registered or not, some form of organization continued to exist among Singapore building workers. In 1937, for example, a Building Labourers Mutual Aid Society was operating from the same premises that had

19. Labour Department Annual Report, 1936, p. 44.

20. Parmer, "Labor Organization by Chinese Workers", pp. 250-251.



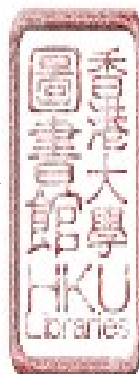
been occupied by the former union. The Society applied for registration in October of that year and, after investigation, was refused in May 1938. The same organization was still functioning, however, in July 1939 when its leaders called a successful one-day strike at a Singapore Improvement Trust Project."²¹ Union registration in the building industry thus remained an issue which was to crop up over and over again.

Strikes in the pineapple canning industry in Singapore and Johore were conducted simultaneously with those in the building industry. The underlying issues were again union organization and economic grievances. The pineapple factory workers had formed an association, the 'Hock Teo Keng' (which means the Hokkiense, the Teochius, and the Hailams, the three dialect groups of which the bulk of the workers were composed) as early as 1908. The Society seemed to have involved in secret society activities and was subsequently de-registered.²² However, the workers carried on the tradition of mutual aid among themselves; each worker would contribute twenty cents to a mutual aid fund regularly to help the family of any deceased worker.²³ In 1932 the Kheh workers in the can-making section of the pineapple factories formed the Kheh Pineapple Can-makers' Association, but the association

21. Ibid., p. 252.

22. "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 13; Blythe, Chinese Secret Societies, pp. 287-288.

23. "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 13.



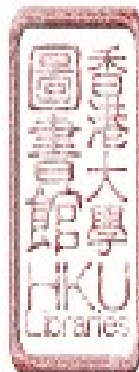
languished in the next few years.²⁴ The need to form a trade union for the protection of their own interests was keenly felt under the circumstances. In 1935 a letter signed by the representatives of the workers, three from each factory, applying for the registration of the Pineapple Workers Mutual Aid Association, was sent to the government.²⁵ While the organization drive was under way, the workers started collective bargaining with their employers over wages and working conditions.

Malaya was the largest producer of canned pineapples next to Hawaii. There were fourteen pineapple factories in the three pineapple-producing areas of Singapore, Johore, and Selangor.²⁶ All the factories were owned by the Chinese. Low wages explain certain special features of the Malayan pineapple industry. There were two methods of wage payment in the factories. The pineapple cutters, whose job was to remove the rind and eyes of pineapples, were paid by the piece, while the can-makers and some other workers were paid by the month. According to the 1920 collective agreement in the

24. SCJP, November 19, 1934; January 7, 1935.

25. 'Pineapple Workers Mutual Aid Association' is the correct translation of the name of the union in Chinese, although its English registered name was 'Pineapple Cutters Mutual Help Association'. The union's history indicates it included all pineapple canning factory workers in Singapore rather than the pineapple cutters alone. See "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 13.

26. In 1936 a total of 76,405 tons of canned pineapples to the value of \$8,686,085 were exported, the principal markets being the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. See W.J.B. Johnson, "Recent Developments in the Malayan Pineapple Canning Industry", The Malayan Agricultural Journal, XXV, 7, July, 1937, 270-276.



industry, the piece rates for pineapple cutters ranged from 40 cents per 100 cans of 1 lb. cube to \$8.00 per 100 cans of 10 lbs. slice.²⁷ During the Great Depression the factory owners forced down the wage rates either by closing factories or a change of contractors. The new wage rates after successive cuts amounted to only 63 per cent of the 1920 wage rates.²⁸ In 1935 labour cost comprised only 12 per cent of per unit cost of production.²⁹ The upshot was that "Malayan canned pineapple was the cheapest canned fruit of commerce, its price being normally less than half that of pineapple from other sources and 30% to 40% lower than the prices of competitive canned fruits such as pears, apricots and peaches."³⁰ Low labour cost retarded the process of mechanization in the industry. Hand Labour was used in most of the operations and cans were made in each factory, in contrast to other canned pineapple producing countries, where the industry was more mechanized and can-making was an independent line of business.³¹

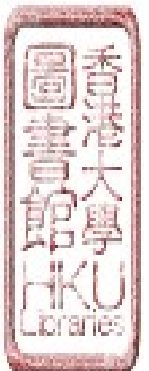
27. "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 13.

28. Ibid.

29. According to an estimate in 1935, average cost of production of one case of 48 cans each containing 1½ lbs. (any pack) was \$3.25 (not including capital cost of the building and machinery), in which labour cost (wages for can-makers, pineapple cutters, removal of waste from factory, labour for closing cans, cooking and stacking, and miscellaneous labour) was 39 cents only. Another contributory factor of low cost was that part of the pineapples was planted as a catch crop, usually in conjunction with rubber planting. See D.H. Grist, An Outline of Malayan Agriculture (Kuala Lumpur, 1936), pp. 154, 157-158.

30. C.E. Courtenay, "The Reconstruction of the Malayan Pineapple Industry", The Malayan Agricultural Journal, XXX, 1947, 184.

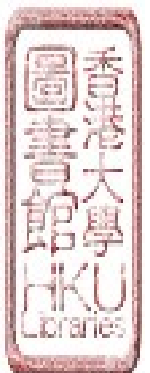
31. Grist, Malayan Agriculture, pp. 154-155.



The contract labour system prevailed in the pineapple cutting, canning, and labelling sections, and its abuses were rife. The contractors used to deduct seven cents for each dollar from the workers' wages, and competition between various contractors tended to lower the total wage bills. A worker seeking employment in a pineapple factory had to 'purchase' the job, i.e., bribe the contractor with a sum of money, which was again deducted from his wages. A pineapple cutter usually started from the lowest grade as pong kung (minor assistant) when young. After one or two years with very little pay the pong kung might become an apprentice. The apprentice had to pay a 'master fee' of sixteen dollars to the contractor. After another one or two years' apprenticeship, he was entitled to become a pineapple cutter. However, some apprentices were not promoted even when they had finished their apprenticeship. After being dismissed at the end of the peak season they had to pay once more the 'master fee' in order to stay in the trade as apprentices. The contractors also engaged in the selling of knives and daily necessities with prices high above the market rates. Delay in the payment of wages was common, and usury and fines provided another source of income for the contractors. Besides, truck in the form of opium and cigarettes was given in lieu of a portion of money wages.³²

Pineapple canning was subjected to the seasonal fluctuations of pineapple supply. Two main crops were harvested each year, the first in May, June, and July and the

32. "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 12.



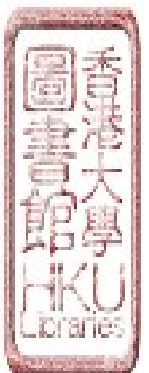
second in January, February, and March. A small supply of pineapples was available between the main cropping seasons. The peak seasons and the slack seasons in the pineapple canning industry, known in the trade as the 'big winter' and the 'small winter', were adjusted to the rhythm of pineapple harvest. During the peak seasons the factories worked day and night and employed the greatest number of workers, who worked 18-19 hours at a stretch each day.³³ In the slack seasons the additional labourers were laid off, some factories ceased operation altogether owing to the shortage of fruit supply. Being engaged on a temporary basis, the workers laid off in the slack seasons did not receive any allowance. The workers described their insecurity of employment as "working one winter while unemployed in another winter".³⁴

The pineapple canning industry affords a classic example of factory conditions in Malaya in the inter-war years. The factory owner, who belonged to the class of acquisitive entrepreneurs as distinct from the more conservative small workshop owners, was not bound by customs in his attitudes towards labour. His standard of values was distinctly laissez faire, which found congenial climate in minimal factory legislation and inadequate labour administration. When the pineapple canning workers started their new round of collective bargaining sixteen years after their first major collective bargaining in the industry,³⁵ they came up against conditions

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Vide supra., p. 50.



which remained essentially as they were in the earlier decades of the century.

In early September the workers in Singapore put forward a list of claims, which included increase of wage rates by 10 per cent, improvement of food, provision of gloves and working clothes, vegetables and opium supplied at fixed prices, lodging provided free of charge, wages to be paid twice monthly, and workmen's compensation.³⁶ Negotiations at the Chinese Protectorate failed to produce results. The police arrested twelve workers who assembled to discuss strike plan, and charged them with 'intimidation'.³⁷ On September 12 over a thousand workers from Chuan Seng, Sin Heng, and Huat Heng pineapple factories in Singapore went on strike. Led by their leader Khaw Bok Eng, they marched to the Chinese Protectorate, demanding the release of the twelve arrested workers and the registration of their union, in addition to their previous claims.³⁸ The workers at the Nam Ek pineapple factory in Johore joined in the strike at this juncture.³⁹ The factory owners refused to give in to the workers' claims on the grounds that the industry was highly competitive and the cost of production had to be kept low.⁴⁰ The Registrar

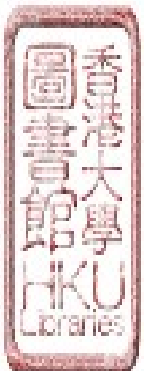
36. Parmer, "Labor Organization by Chinese Workers", p. 248.

37. "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 13.

38. SCJP, September 14, 15, 1936; "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", pp. 13-14.

39. SCJP, September 14, 15, 1936.

40. Parmer, "Labor Organization by Chinese Workers", p. 249.



of Societies was not prepared to consider the registration of the union before the strike ended. The twelve arrested workers were subsequently released as the grounds of allegation had been proved false, and each was given nine dollars as compensation for the injuries inflicted by police assault.⁴¹ The gathering outside the Chinese Protectorate continued until September 14, when the workers were dispersed by the police. Khaw Bok Eng was arrested a few days later and subsequently banished.⁴²

The strike of the Singapore and Johore pineapple factory workers collapsed under the joint pressure of the employers, the contractors and the government. On September 26 about 200 new workers started work at the Nam Ek factory in Johore Bahru under heavy police protection, and a number of old workers also drifted back to work.⁴³ However, Lee Kong Chian, a well-known Chinese entrepreneur and owner of the Nam Ek factory, disclosed that he had dismissed the contractors involved in underhand operation in his factory.⁴⁴ Most of the strikers at the three Singapore pineapple factories also returned to work shortly afterwards.⁴⁵ The pineapple canning workers nevertheless won the registration of their union. The issue of union registration was referred to London, and

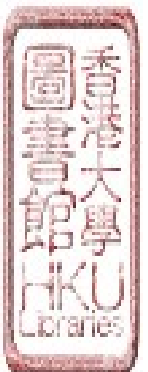
41. "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 14.

42. Ibid.

43. SCJP, September 27, 1936.

44. SCJP, October 23, 1936.

45. SCJP, October 2, 1936.

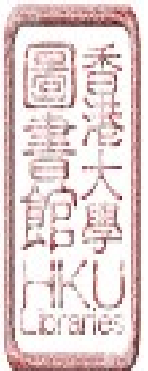


on the instruction from London the Pineapple Workers Mutual Help Association was registered towards the end of 1936.⁴⁶

The most important result of the building and pineapple canning workers' strikes was the impetus they gave to the process of unionization in Malaya. They had shown the efficacy of industrial union to reach out to hitherto unorganized workers and the possibility of operating within the existing legal framework. It is not possible to explain with certainty why the Pineapple Workers Mutual Aid Association was registered while the Building Workers' Union was not approved. In fact, the influence of the M.C.P. and the G.L.U. seemed to be behind both the unions. The reason seems to lie in the need to drive home a point: the government would not object to the registration of labour association as such but would take a firm and discriminating attitude towards union subversive of law and order. Whatever the message was, an important break-through was made by the registration of the Pineapple Workers Mutual Aid Association, which in a sense opened the floodgate of unionization of workers in various industries in subsequent years.

Singapore had come to halcyon days of labour unrest when the strike of the Singapore Traction Company employees followed hard on the heels of strikes in the building and

46. "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 14.



pineapple industries. The S.T.C. was the largest single land transport corporation in Singapore. It was British-owned and enjoyed a privileged position compared with the Chinese-owned transport companies. It monopolized all the routes in the populous town areas while other bus companies were relegated to running the less remunerative routes in the suburbs. It had a fleet of 108 trams and 102 buses, with about one thousand employees on its pay-roll.⁴⁷ The workers were mostly Indians and Chinese, plus a smaller number of Malays. The workers had grievances over wages, hours, insufficient medical care and frequent vexatious fines.⁴⁸

The first strike by the S.T.C. workers occurred on September 19. After the Assistant Controller for Labour gave the workers an assurance that their demands would be duly considered, the workers went back to work.⁴⁹ The management's reply was considered unsatisfactory, and a further letter was sent to the Labour Department. The letter demanded an increase of wages, an eight-hour working day, extension of time from ten minutes to twenty minutes to allow conductors to gather tickets in the depot, two rest-days with pay each month, sick leave and medical attention. These demands were rejected by the management.⁵⁰

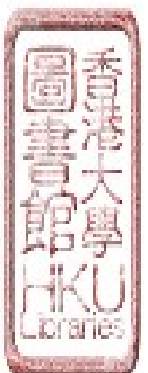
On October 22 over 800 S.T.C. workers struck. The Company initially took a hard line against the strikers.

47. SCJP, October 23, 1936.

48. Ibid.

49. SCJP, October 22, 1936.

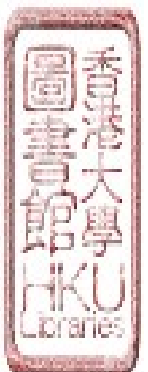
50. Ibid.



An announcement was made on the same day that any worker who failed to report by 12 o'clock would be considered to have resigned. The Company also put up a notice for the recruitment of new workers at the old wage rates.⁵¹ Scores of inspectors were sent to take over the job of the drivers and conductors. Policemen were called to protect strike-breakers. Other bus companies were invited to run some of the S.T.C. lines temporarily. The workers organized picketing at the S.T.C. depot and obstructed the entrance of strike-breakers and the departure of vehicles.⁵² On the following day two workers were arrested for obstruction. Five hundred workers soon gathered in front of a police station, securing the release of the two workers on bail.⁵³ In the negotiation the management asked the workers to resume work before negotiation could be started, but the proposal was rejected by the workers' representatives.⁵⁴

The strike came to an end when the management had accepted the following terms: daily wages at 90 cents with yearly increment of 10 cents up to the ceiling of \$1.30; 10 holidays with half pay for daily-rated workers and 20 holidays with half pay for monthly-rated workers each year; one rest-day each month instead of six rest-days each year; workers were entitled to 28 days' sick leave with half pay,

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51. SCJP, October 22, 1936.
 52. SCJP, October 22, 23, 1936.
 53. SCJP, October 23, 1936.
 54. SCJP, October 24, 1936.

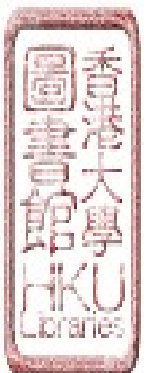


but they must produce a certificate from an appointed doctor; the current system of fines would be retained, and decision would be made according to the merits of each case; all drivers and conductors employed by the Company before the strike were allowed to return to work; dismissal of four workers on charges of accepting bribery would be deferred pending further investigations.⁵⁵ The agreement was embodied in a written statement issued by the management on demand from the workers.

In terms of economic gains the workers obtained larger yearly increment and better working conditions but not an increase in wage rates as demanded. The S.T.C. strike, just as the F.M.S. Railways strike in 1934, pointed up to the possibility of different races of workers coming together in collective action so long as they were not divided by differential treatment in the terms of employment. This possibility was underlined by the absence of racial enmity between the Chinese and Indian labourers. The result of the strike boosted the workers' morale and encouraged them to form their own union, which was registered in the following year.

Industrial disputes in the mining industries dominated labour unrest on the Malayan mainland. Certain common features underlined the industrial relations in iron mines, coal mines, and tin mines. In all these industries the contract labour system with all its attendant evils were

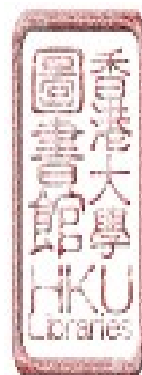
55. SCJP, October 24, 25, 1936; Labour Department Annual Report, 1936, p. 42.



prevalent. The labourers had no access to the management, who generally refused to deal directly with the labour force. Interposed between the management and the labourers were the contractors and the sub-contractors. No prior negotiation was possible under the circumstances and strike remained the only way whereby the workers could bring their grievances and claims forcibly to the attention of the management. Apart from wage claims, the contract labour system became the primary target of attack from labour.

The attitude of the Japanese management of the Ishihara Sanggyo Koshi Ltd. towards industrial dispute was, typically, flat refusal to negotiate with the labourers. The management entrusted the recruitment and control of labourers at its iron mines in Trengganu entirely to contractors. In early September some 300 Chinese labourers under five contractors called a strike over the abuses of the contract labour system. They demanded food charges to be fixed at 28 cents daily, food and drinks to be provided to sick workers free of charge, provisions to be sold at market prices, opium to be provided at official prices; workers dismissed without good reasons should be given one month's wages plus transport fares; compensation and medical fee in case of industrial accident; if the contractors refused to accept the demands, the management should portion out all the works for the labourers to handle directly.⁵⁶ The last demand amounted to the abolition of the contract labour system. The Japanese

56. SCJP, September 4, 1936.

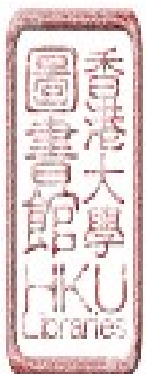


manager refused to entertain the workers' claims and shifted the whole responsibility to the contractors under the pretext that he knew nothing at all about the real conditions.⁵⁷ This strike seems to have ended without a settlement.

A major strike occurred in November at the Malayan Collieries at Batu Arang, Selangor, the only collieries in Malaya.⁵⁸ The Malayan Collieries supplied almost all its products to the F.M.S. Railways and power stations, and hence any work stoppage on the mines was bound to have serious repercussions. Altogether some 7,000 Chinese and Indian labourers were employed on the mines. Employment was by contract in both the surface section and the underground section. In the underground pits, the coal-hewers were paid on piece rates and the builders of wooden pillars on daily rates. For the coal-hewers wages were calculated according to the number of carts they had filled. The workers complained that the contractors used to cut back on the number of carts filled by the workers under the pretext that the carts were insufficiently loaded. The contractors batted on this practice in addition to other squeezes. This had been the long-standing grievance of the workers, but no mitigation was forthcoming. The management intended

57. Ibid.

58. The Malayan Collieries started coal mining in 1913. Its output in 1936 was 502,823 tons as compared with 377,441 tons in 1935 and 321,461 tons in 1933. See Annual Report on the Administration of the Mines Department and on the Mining Industries, Malaya, 1936, p. 14.



furthermore to cut the daily wages of the pillar-builders.⁵⁹

Although there was no trade union as yet on the mines, the coal miners were organized into a tightly-knit network by the M.C.P., which had apparently been organizing the labour force for some years. Delegates were elected from various sections of the mines to form a committee, which comprised altogether over 300 delegates. The 300-man committee was the leading body of the strike.⁶⁰ It established 'an elaborate defense system, courts, and an administrative body'.⁶¹ The whole network was so elaborate that it was regarded as a 'Soviet Government'.⁶² Organization was the strength of the Batu Arang coal miners and proved to be an important factor in winning the strike, in contrast to the result of the unorganized spontaneous strike at the Japanese-owned iron mine in Trengganu.

Strike decision was taken by the 300-man committee, which met on the evening of November 14 to discuss the European management's refusal to pay heed to their claims.⁶³ Serious disturbances broke out when the police surrounded the meeting place and arrested two of the delegates. The police opened fire in the ensuing scuffle with the workers,

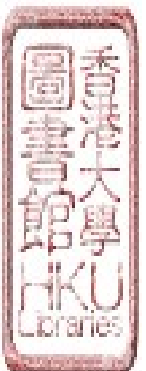
59. SCJP, November 18, 1936.

60. SCJP, November 17, 18, 1936.

61. Hanrahan, The Communist Struggle in Malaya, p. 22.

62. Ibid.

63. SCJP, November 17, 1936.



and one of the arrested delegates was reported to be injured. Strike was thus precipitated on that very evening. The labour force came out in demonstration; the power station was surrounded and electricity supply to the whole mining area was cut off.⁶⁴ For a few days Batu Arang remained in the complete possession of the coal miners, who organized pickets and defied all attempts to recapture the mines. The government, deeply perturbed by the serious implications of the strike, despatched 300 policemen to Batu Arang. The policemen made a surprise attack under the cover of darkness, and the mining town was finally retaken.⁶⁵

The serious view taken by the government regarding the turn of events was shown in a later report of the Inspector-General of Police, F.M.S., which stated:

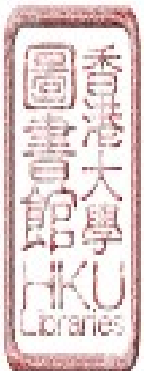
"The F.M.S. has passed through the most serious crisis of its history. It was within an ace of dissolving into temporary chaos as a result of Communist intrigue. The evidence is now clear that Batu Arang was to be the trial of strength between the Communist Party and the government. Had the organization there not been crushed and crushed quickly it is almost certain that there would not only have been a general strike but that this country ... would have been in very serious danger of being overrun by angry and desperate Chinese mobs."⁶⁶

The prospect of the whole country 'overrun by angry and desperate Chinese mobs' was no doubt overdrawn, but the likelihood of the strike spreading to other industries

64. SCJP, November 17, 18, 1936.

65. Hanrahan, The Communist Struggle in Malaya, p. 22.

66. Quoted ibid.



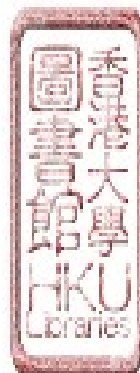
was a real one. Batu Arang is situated close to tin mines, estates, and the railways, where labour discontent was already brewing. To defuse a potentially explosive situation, both the management and the government decided to come to accommodation with the coal miners. Officials from the Chinese Protectorate and the Chinese Consulate arrived to investigate the workers' grievances, and the management began to indicate its willingness to improve the conditions of the workers.⁶⁷

Negotiation between labour and management took place on November 19, with officials from the Chinese Protectorate and the Chinese Consulate participating as mediators. The workers demanded an increase of wages, no deduction of the number of carts filled by the coal-hewers, wages of pillar-builders to remain at \$1.00 a day, unconditional release of the two arrested delegates, and some other demands regarding one of the delegates reported to be wounded.⁶⁸ The management agreed to a wage increase by 5 per cent for surface workers and 10 per cent for underground workers and replacement of the contract labour system by direct employment wherever possible.⁶⁹ The promise on the gradual elimination of the contract labour system led to the immediate

67. SCJP, November 17, 18, 1936.

68. SCJP, November 18, 1936.

69. SCJP, November 19, 21, 22, 1936. The company adopted the policy of employing more and more men on direct labour and of seeing that those who had still to be employed under contractors were receiving a proper share of the contract money. See Labour Department Annual Report, 1937, p. 35.



resignation of a number of sub-contractors from the mines. The mining town returned to normal on November 21.⁷⁰

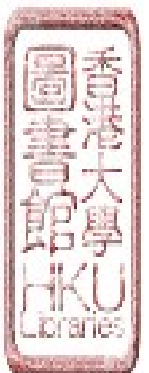
The Batu Arang strike, which was regarded by the M.C.P. as 'a glorious page in the annals of the Malayan revolutionary struggle',⁷¹ bears a striking similarity with the strike at the Anyuan coal mines in the Kiangsi Province of China in 1922. The Anyuan strike was led by the Hunan branch of the C.C.P., whose head was Mao Tse Tung. The coal miners had a workers' club, which was organized on a quasi-Soviet model. The leading body for 12,000 coal miners was the General Delegate Committee, which consisted of fifty-one members. The contract labour system had been the source of many a conflict on the mines. The greatest achievement of the Anyuan strike was the removal of most of the abuses of the contractors and eventually the abolition of the contract labour system itself.⁷² Considering the affiliation of both the Chinese Communists and their Malayan counterparts to the Profintern,⁷³ it is not unlikely that a leaf was taken out of the Chinese experience in conducting the Batu Arang strike.

70. SCJP, November 22, 1936.

71. Hanrahan, The Communist Struggle in Malaya, p. 22.

72. Teng Chung Hsia, Chung-Kuo Chih-Kung Yun-Tung Chien-Shih (Tientsin, 1949), pp. 25, 33, 92-94.

73. The Profintern was the Communist Trade Union International.



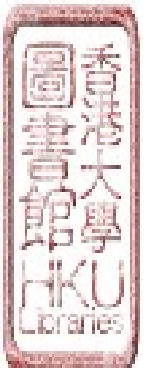
The Batu Arang strike succeeded where many previous attempts to abolish the contract labour system had failed. In industries where contract labour was employed its impact was most keenly felt. Tin mining labourers, whose methods and conditions of employment were comparable to those of the coal miners, were stirred to action. The Chinese labourers on rubber estates also began to review their own position and prepare for action. The result of the strike gave a fillip to the rising incidence of labour unrest in the ensuing months.

In the midst of the general excitement caused by the Batu Arang strike, workers at the British-owned Sungei Besi Tin Mine in Selangor called a meeting to discuss increase of wages and improvement of working conditions. The mine had approximately 1,300 workers, of which 900 were Chinese and 400 Indians. The Chinese workers, who were employed under contractors, called a strike on November 26.⁷⁴

The workers' claims were concerned with wages and the abuses of the contract labour system. They demanded a 50 per cent wage increase, no compulsion to work on rainy days, abolition of a charge of 10 cents for each bed, interest-free loans, clean drinking water, prices of opium to be fixed at 36 cents a piece, no beating of workers by foreman, no increase of food prices, free medical attendance and food provided by the employer in case of sickness.⁷⁵ The management was quick to respond to the workers' claims. The following terms

74. SCJP, November 27, 1936.

75. Ibid.



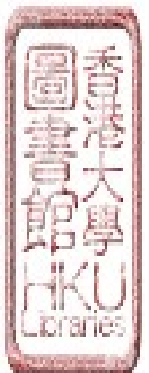
were agreed upon: an increase of wages by 15 per cent for piece-rated and daily-rated workers; no compulsion to work on rainy day but work should be resumed when rain was over; abolition of a charge of 10 cents for each bed; no interest on money borrowed by the workers; clean drinking water would be provided; opium would be handled by the workers themselves; the workers could lodge complaints to the Chinese Protectorate in case of beating by foreman; no raising of food prices during festivals; any worker sick for four days would be given an allowance of 30 cents each day, and after four days the worker would be sent to hospital and given one dollar a day.⁷⁶

The arrest of three workers at this juncture by the police on the grounds of involvement in dangerous activities gave the turn of events a new twist. The workers organized a march on Kuala Lumpur on November 28, the purpose being to secure the release of the three workers. Their procession was stopped by the police at a point four miles south of Kuala Lumpur. When they tried to break through the police cordon, they were beaten back and some suffered slight injuries. Stoppage of work continued until December 1.⁷⁷

Some 400 workers at the Tung Sang Mine near Kuala Lumpur demanded the release of the three arrested workers from the Sungei Besi Mine in a show of solidarity with the Sungei Besi workers. They went on strike on December 1. Their claims included, among other things, an increase of

76. Ibid.

77. SCJP, December 1, 2, 1936.



wages by 50 per cent and an eight-hour working day. The management promptly conceded a 15 per cent wage increase and an eight-hour working day.⁷⁸ A strike was called to enforce similar claims at the Hung Fatt Tin Mines in the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur, where 2,400 workers were under the charge of twenty-one contractors. They obtained a 15 per cent wage increase and a promise to restrain the abuses of the contractors.⁷⁹

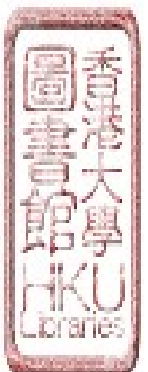
The conditions of employment of quarry workers in Singapore were comparable to those of mining labourers on the Malayan mainland. All the quarries were owned by the Chinese. They supplied granite to the building and construction industry in Singapore. The workers were paid on piece rates and hourly rates by their contractors.⁸⁰ Since most of the quarries were situated at Pulau Ubin, a small island to the northeast of the Singapore island, the quarry owners kept sundry shops and supplied rice and other necessities to the labourers at exorbitant prices. Late payment of wages was usual, industrial accidents frequent, and medical care inadequate.⁸¹

78. SCJP, December 3, 1936.

79. SCJP, December 4, 1936.

80. The stone-diggers received wages ranging from 30 cents to 90 cents for each foot of stone dug, according to the hardness of the stone. Stone-removers received wages ranging from 11 cents to 15 cents for each cart filled and the cart-pushers were paid according to the distance they covered. The hourly-rated workers received on the average 75-90 cents per day. See SCJP, December 5, 1936.

81. SCJP, December 5, 1936.



About 700 labourers from eight quarries at Pulau Ubin struck on December 2 and this was followed by a strike of 300 labourers at the Mandai quarry on the Singapore island. Their claims included a 10 per cent wage increase, an eight-hour working day, labour insurance, regular payment of wages, fixing the prices of provisions, and no dismissal of workers without good reason.⁸² Most quarry owners gave concessions, which included a wage increase and a check on the abuses of the contract labour system in the industry.⁸³ The result of the strikes encouraged the labourers to form their mutual aid association, which was registered in the following year.⁸⁴

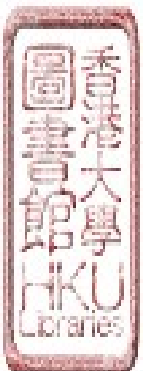
The growing labour unrest throughout Malaya, the results of the S.T.C. strike and the Batu Arang strike, and the coming visit of the Sastri mission sent by the Government of India,⁸⁵ provided the setting for the Singapore Municipal strike in December, which was the biggest strike ever launched by Indian labourers in Malaya. The general labour unrest

82. SCJP, December 4, 9, 1936.

83. SCJP, December 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 1936.

84. See Appendix C, Table 1, pp. 364-378.

85. The deputation led by Srinivasa Sastri started its visit in Malaya on December 13, 1936, and ended in January, 1937. The terms of reference of the deputation was to examine the conditions of Indian labourers in Malaya and to make recommendations as to 'what improvements are desirable in respect of these or any other matters' and 'whether assisted emigration to Malaya should be permitted in future, and, if so, on what conditions'. See Straits Times, March 8, 1937.



emboldened the Indian labourers to action, and they apparently hoped that the Sastri mission might intervene on their behalf. The time was considered opportune to strike.

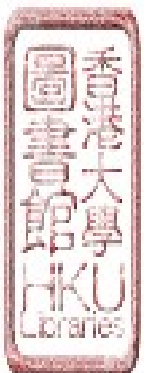
The Singapore Municipality employed a labour force that was almost entirely Indian in its composition. Wage cuts during the Great Depression had not yet been fully restored; the basic wages of the Municipal labourers were 49 cents daily as compared with 55 cents in 1929.⁸⁶ The provisions of the labour law were apparently not strictly enforced in regard to this group of Indian labourers. They had grievances regarding overtime, sick leave, and housing conditions.

On December 1 a general strike of Municipal labourers broke out, involving 2,500 sewerage construction workers, 1,000 cleaning workers, 3,000 water and gas workers, and 2,000 workers at the Kallang Civil Aerodrome.⁸⁷ A mass meeting was held at the Race Course, where a decision was taken to present their claims to the Municipal authorities. The labourers demanded an increase of basic daily wages from 49 cents to 75 cents, with yearly increments up to the ceiling of 90 cents; wages to be paid during sick leave, labour compensation, and forty-five minutes' rest at noon.⁸⁸ After the mass meeting one thousand labourers marched to the Labour Department in order to present their claims to the Controller

86. SCJP, December 1, 1936; "Straits Settlements, Labour Wages and Cost of Living, 1929", Straits Settlements Blue Book, 1929, p. 2.

87. SCJP, December 1, 1936.

88. SCJP, December 2, 1936.



of Labour, but they were dispersed by the police and thirty-six labourers were arrested. The kandang Kerbau Police Station and then the Central Police Station were soon surrounded by the strikers, who refused to disperse until those arrested were bailed out. A mass meeting was again held in the evening, followed by a demonstration. When the procession reached Rochore Canal, they were forcibly dispersed by the police, and more labourers were arrested.⁸⁹

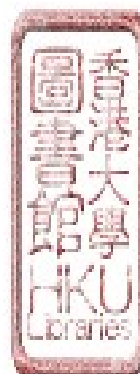
In the next few days strikes grew unabated and there were more disturbances. In a demonstration in the Tanjong Pagar area, traffic lights were smashed and stone missiles were hurled at the police force; the demonstration was finally dispersed by the police with fire engines.⁹⁰ By December 4 the general strike had involved some 13,000 labourers, which included, among others, 500 labourers employed by Messrs. Topham, Jones & Railton, Ltd. and Abdul Kader Company, Ltd., 400 labourers of the Singapore Harbour Board, and 150 labourers at the Botanic Garden.⁹¹ The strikers set up a relief centre at an Indian temple, where cash and donations of rice, vegetables, coffee, etc were received from the public and two meals a day provided.⁹²

89. Ibid.

90. SCJP, December 3, 1936.

91. SCJP, December 2, 3, 4, 5, 1936; Labour Department Annual Report, 1936, pp. 42-43.

92. SCJP, December 7, 1936.

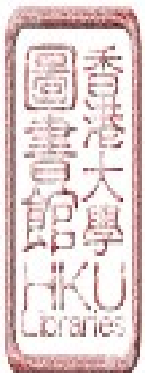


N. Jones, the Assistant Controller of Labour, F.M.S., was appointed by the Governor to handle the dispute. The Indian labourers handed in a modified list of demands: basic wages at 60 cents per day, an eight-hour working day, double pay for overtime; wages should be paid in full even when work was impeded by rain or other causes; medical fee should be provided and wages paid during sick leave; water and electricity should be supplied free of charge; the practice of stopping water supply from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. to the quarters should be abolished; higher rent allowance for labourers not housed by the Municipality; wages to be paid during public holidays, no matter whether work was done or not; no dismissal of workers without good reason; court cases against the strikers should be withdrawn; wages during the strike period should be paid as usual.⁹³

The demands were rejected by the authorities and it was announced that those not reporting for work would be considered as having resigned.⁹⁴ On the other hand, the Labour Department made the following assurances to the Municipal labourers: firstly, an enquiry on the conditions of Municipal labourers in Singapore would be held; any recommendation, once accepted, would take effect from November 1, 1936; secondly, N. Jones would make suggestion to the Municipal authorities to employ most of the strikers, but some labourers would be replaced by new labourers

93. SCJP, December 4, 1936.

94. SCJP, December 5, 1936.



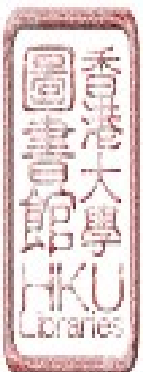
already recruited; thirdly, N. Jones would try to seek employment in Singapore for those who would not be re-employed; fourthly, if no jobs were available for labourers of the Health Department, N. Jones would try to find jobs for them in Kuala Lumpur; fifthly, the Labour Department would make suggestion to the police authorities to withdraw prosecutions against some of the strikers.⁹⁵ The assurances were coupled with an appeal from Srinivasa Sastri, who had just arrived in Singapore.⁹⁶ It seems that the persuasion of Srinivasa Sastri, in whom the Indian labourers had reposed much trust, was instrumental in getting the labourers back to work. By December 15 all was normal again. The Municipal authorities and other government departments subsequently gave a slight wage increase and some minor improvements in working conditions to the labourers.⁹⁷

Given the fact that the Municipal labourers and other government employees who joined in the general strike were unskilled general labourers and that they confronted the government as employer, the apparent lack of success of their strike was a foregone conclusion. The general strike

95. SCJP, December 10, 1936.

96. SCJP, December 13, 1936.

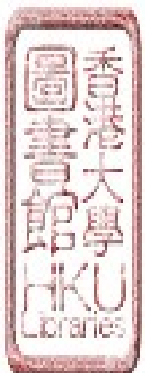
97. See M.R. Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya (London, 1970), p. 17. The basic wages of the Municipal labourers were raised to 52 cents per day in 1937; see "Straits Settlements, Labour Wages and Cost of Living, 1937", Straits Settlements Blue Book, 1937, p. 772.



brought into the open the tremendous ground-swell of discontent latent among the Indian labourers and their urge for economic justice. Although the labourers were unorganized, a strike of such dimension could not have been conducted unless they shared a feeling of common interest and a belief in the efficaciousness of collective action. Implicit in this understanding was the growing consciousness and self-assertiveness of the Indian labourers, and herein lies the real significance of the general strike. The reverberations of the strike on a wider scene was shown on the F.M.S. Railways. New stirrings among the railway employees in the wake of the Municipal strike induced the railway administration to announce a full recovery of wage rates to the pre-depression levels.⁹⁸

The Central Indian Association of Malaya was formed in 1936 amidst increasing unrest among Indian labourers. It was an amalgamation of existing Indian Associations, Indian Chambers of Commerce and Merchants' Associations. It was led by middle-class intelligentsia, who were oriented towards Indian nationalism. Questions of Indian wages and working conditions in Malaya were to become the centre of its attention in the ensuing years. In the absence of Indian trade unions, the C.I.A.M. became an outlet for the ventilation of the discontent of the inarticulate Indian labourers. Its espousal of the cause of Indian labourers, however, was weakened by its unwillingness to enter into the field of labour organization

98. SCJP, December 13, 1936.



and collective bargaining. Instead of entering the rough and tumble of action at the grass-roots level, the leaders of the C.I.A.M. sought to work in conjunction with Indian nationalists to bring the pressure of public opinion to bear on the Indian Government and the Malayan Governments in the hope that official steps might be taken to mitigate the conditions of Indian labourers in Malaya.⁹⁹

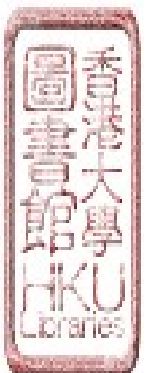
Discontent among Indian and Chinese labourers in the rubber industry was simmering, too. Profits in the industry had improved, but there was a general reluctance on the part of the rubber planters to share prosperity with their labourers. At the beginning of the year wages for Indian labourers remained at 35 cents for man and 28 cents for woman for a normal day's tapping and weeding task, as compared with 50 cents for man and 40 cents for woman in 1928. In March the rates were raised to 40 cents for man and 32 cents for woman.¹⁰⁰ As for the Chinese labourers, who were employed under the contractors in European plantations, earnings ranged from 50 cents to 65 cents per day, as compared with 70 cents to \$2.00 in 1928.¹⁰¹ The conditions of the Indian estate labourers were the principal subject of investigation undertaken by Srinivasa Sastri, who visited nearly thirty estates, mostly European-owned.¹⁰²

99. See Sinnappah Arasaratnam, Indians in Malaysia and Singapore (Kuala Lumpur, 1970), pp. 98-102; Sandhu, Indians in Malaya, p. 110.

100. Labour Department Annual Report, 1936, p. 30.

101. F.M.S. Annual Report, 1928, p. 61; Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, table 8, p. 277.

102. Straits Times, March 8, 1937.



A work stoppage at Yong Ek Leng rubber estate in Negri Sembilan in April led to the eviction of the strikers by the police and a number of arrests.¹⁰³ Some 200 Indian labourers involved in a work stoppage in a British-owned estate in Johore were similarly dispersed and replaced by new workers.¹⁰⁴ In December several rubber estates in Negri Sembilan were hit by strikes.¹⁰⁵ These were ominous of the big strikes of Chinese rubber tappers in Negri Sembilan and Selangor in the following year.

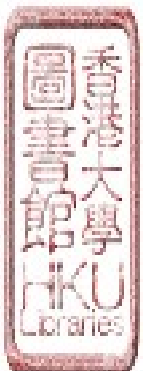
The forceful assertion of the right of labour to organize and the widespread use of collective bargaining for the improvement of labour conditions signified the rise of trade unionism in Malaya. The compelling need to raise wages and improve working conditions lay at the bottom of labour's attempts to organize, and once the impetus had been given the process of unionization was inexorable. Labour had widened the range of their demands and succeeded in obtaining positive results through collective bargaining. Wage increases were conceded to the Perak engineering mechanics, Singapore building labourers and quarrymen, Selangor coal miners, tin mining labourers, and pineapple canning workers.¹⁰⁶ The extent of

103. SCJP, April 20, 1936.

104. SCJP, September 26, 1936.

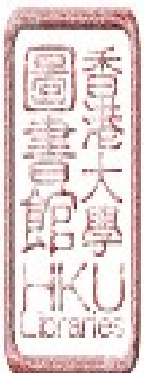
105. SCJP, December 19, 22, 1936.

106. Two thousand pineapple factory workers in Klang, Selangor went on strike in December, 1936. As a result wages were increased and the abuses of the contract labour system were brought under control. See SCJP, December 5, 1936.



wage increase differed from 5-10 per cent for the Batu Arang coal miners to 10-31 per cent for Perak engineering mechanics.¹⁰⁷ Never before had the contract labour system come under such an enormous challenge as in 1936, and important breach into the system had been made by the Batu Arang coal miners, Selangor tin mining labourers, Singapore building labourers, and Klang pineapple factory workers. There were conspicuous failures such as the Singapore Municipal labourers' strike, but many of the employers were wise enough to avoid intransigence in dealing with genuine grievances and came into accommodation with their employees. These developments underscored 1936 as a year of achievement for labour.

107. SCJP, March 6, 1936.

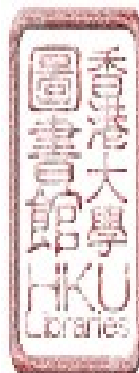


Chapter III

THE TURBULENT YEAR, 1937

Industrial conflict intensified as labour stepped up its offensive in 1937 in quest of higher wages and better working conditions. The offensive affected all the more important trades and industries over the greater part of Malaya. Rubber tappers, tin mining labourers, coal miners, iron mine labourers, quarrymen, building labourers, stevedores, tailors, mechanics, goldsmiths, hairdressers, shoemakers, washermen, printing workers and waiters were all swept into the vortex of industrial unrest, which gathered momentum and far surpassed what had happened in 1936. Instead of the piecemeal claims in the earlier decades, workers in the majority of cases put forward a multiplicity of demands, which brought out the whole range of underlying grievances crying out for remedy. The peak of labour agitation in the inter-war years had been reached in 1937.

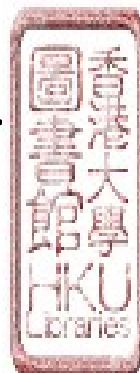
The centre of labour unrest shifted from Singapore to the Malayan mainland. The big strikes of the Chinese rubber tappers in Selangor and Negri Sembilan were launched in protest against low wages, the abuses of the contract labour system and unsatisfactory working conditions. The earnings of Chinese estate labourers in the two states remained at 60-65 cents per day at the beginning of the year, although rubber prices, profits of rubber companies, and the cost of living



all registered increase.¹ Slight increase of Chinese wages was granted in Perak and Kelantan from January 1, 1937, but the rubber planters were reluctant to extend similar wage increase to other Malay states. As a whole earnings of Chinese estate labourers still lagged a far way behind the pre-depression level. Most of the Chinese labourers on European estates were employed under contractors, whose irregular practices became all the more oppressive when wages remained stagnant. Housing conditions were poor; workers were crowded into ill-ventilated kongsi houses with mud floors; medical attention, maternity benefits, schools and nurseries for labourers' children were non-existent. Unsatisfactory working conditions were partly the result of the non-enforcement of the provisions of the Labour Code among the Chinese labourers.

Labour unrest in the rubber industry was almost as old as the industry itself. All the earlier strikes in the rubber industry were isolated ones, confining to one single estate or a few estates, and they had failed to bring sufficient pressure to bear on the employers. Unless this lesson was learnt, the strike weapon would remain ineffective for the

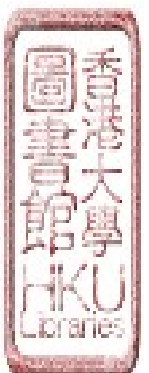
1. The average price of No. 1 rubber smoked sheet in Singapore rose from 36.47 cents per pound in January to 40.25 cents in April, but prices dropped towards the latter half of the year. The Asiatic standard of the cost-of-living index increased by 6.1 per cent as compared with 1936. See Report of the Federal Secretary to the Government, F.M.S., 1937, p. 65. The average earning per ordinary share of British rubber companies increased from 4.1 per cent in 1935 and 4.3 per cent in 1936 to 6.2 per cent in 1937. See Knorr, World Rubber, Table 10, p. 144.



purpose of increasing wages and improving working conditions, except for the removal of some specific minor grievances. Now for the first time in history combination of estate labourers on a large number of estates over a wide area was made to enforce their demands and produced results. The big strikes were therefore a step forward in collective bargaining in the rubber industry. It afforded a case study of how estate labourers without a national union of their own could successfully wield the strike weapon against a powerful combination of employers to achieve their own objectives.

Strikes first started in the Ulu Langat district of Selangor in early March. During the Great Depression the rubber companies in the district dispensed with the labour contractors and turned the Chinese labourers into direct employees.² All other aspects of labour administration on the estates, including wage payment by result and non-enforcement of the provisions of the Labour Code, remained unchanged. Actual labour conditions in the district, therefore, differed very little from the rest of the estates. The labourers demanded daily wages of one dollar, reduction of one task from 300-390 trees to 250 trees for V-cut tapping and 300 trees for single cut tapping, scrap rubber to be paid at 3 cents per pound, 50 cents per task for marking bark, fifty trees per task to be reduced at steep places, \$2.00 extra for starting new task, \$2.00 extra for washing cups, daily minimum wage of

2. Labour Department Annual Report, 1937, pp. 53-54.

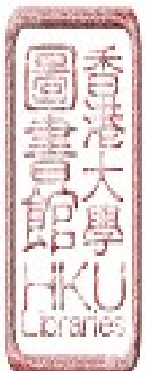


80 cents and eight hours for general labourers doing miscellaneous work, 50 cents monthly to be paid for tapping knife, which was provided by the labourers themselves. They also demanded the enforcement of the provisions of the Labour Code, amah to be provided by the employers at 18 dollars per month for every four children, schools to be built in the estates and teachers provided, sick labourers to be admitted to second class hospital ward at half pay, labourers' quarters to be improved, advance of \$6.00 on the 15th of each month for vegetables, three days' notice before wage settlement, rest on public holidays, no workers to be dismissed on pretext, the abolition of fines and labourers' consent to be obtained for the engagement of new labourers. Lastly, a demand for freedom of association, assembly, speech and publication was included in a list of otherwise entirely economic claims.³

The demand for freedom of association was related to the intention of the estate labourers to form their own trade union. A Straits Times correspondent, who had toured the strike area, revealed 'the growing desire of tappers and other estate workers for an organization of their own similar to those of planters and estate clerical workers'.⁴ It is not known why no immediate steps were taken in this direction, although the desire was expressed. The strikers were quoted as saying:

3. SCJP, March 10, 1937.

4. Straits Times, March 29, 1937.



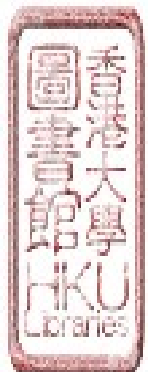
"We do not want to cease work, but what else can we do if managers persistently refuse to discuss the question and dismiss our requests with a wave of the hand? Our employers have their organizations by which they can arrange amongst themselves questions in which they have a common interest, our managers have their own society which looks after their interests; the estate clerks have now an association which is also taking up the question of better treatment, but we, the coolies, who do the work, are looked upon as Communists, if we venture to form ourselves into a band with the same idea of obtaining improved conditions. If we were allowed to organize ourselves as the European planters and the Asiatic clerks have been permitted to do, we would then be in a position to discuss the whole question thoroughly and probably receive better treatment."⁵

Strikes spread rapidly from the Ulu Langat district to the whole of Selangor and Negri Sembilan, and by March 17 some 20,000 Chinese estate labourers were estimated to be on strike in the two states.⁶ The Labour Department observed that "the strikes were well organized. Bicycles and buses were used to convey instructions and information over a wide area. The organizers maintained a high standard of discipline and managed to restrain their unruly elements almost completely."⁷ Labour organizers and agitators frequented the estates to spread the strikes and to maintain liaison among the strikers. It was largely through the activities of these labour organizers and agitators that the strikers were wielded into one collective force and the strikes on the estates ceased to be sporadic and disconnected. The list of claims raised by the strikers in Ulu Langat became the model on which all subsequent claims

5. Ibid.

6. SCJP, March 18, 1937.

7. Labour Department Annual Report, 1937, p. 54.

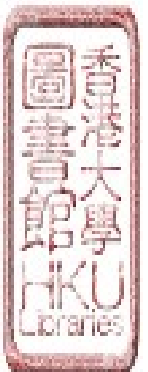


were framed, with only minor alterations. The vernacular press, which published the claims in full, played an unconscious but important part in ensuring the regularity of the men's demands. Spokesmen were appointed from among the labourers, and they were available when the need for dialogue and negotiation arose. In spite of the lack of an estate workers' union, the strikers in Selangor and Negri Sembilan entered into collective bargaining with their respective planters' association as one single bargaining unit.

March on the state capital was an important means of fanning the strikes. It was more than a means to bring the grievances of the men to the attention of the Chinese Protectorate, an act which had been done in the past. It was a device to boost the strikers' morale, arouse public attention, spread the strikes and stimulate sympathy strikes. Moreover, such action was bound to invite police intervention and hence brought the labourers into headlong clashes with the arms of law. When a situation of general disturbances appeared, two distinct possibilities were present: the strikes might either be forcibly suppressed, or, under favourable conditions, the government might intervene to bring the disputes to a settlement.

The first march was made by hundreds of labourers from Kajang to Kuala Lumpur on March 14 over the arrest of five labour agitators at the Bolton Estate.⁸ Their intention was

8. Bolton Estate was a division of Bukit Kepong Rubber Estate Ltd., which was under the management of W. Legott, chairman of the Incorporated Society of Planters. Three detectives in disguise were recognized and seized by the strikers. When a party of policemen came to their rescue, five labour agitators were arrested. See Straits Times, March 15, 1937.

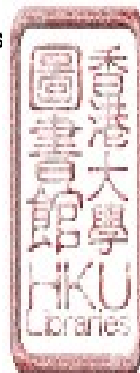


to stage a demonstration outside the Chinese Protectorate for the release of the arrested men. They were stopped by a party of 200 policemen armed with rifles and batons, and two demonstrators were shot during the confrontation. The police gave chase to the retreating marchers all along the highway from Kajang to Kuala Lumpur, and 109 labourers were hauled into the police vans.⁹ The second march on Kuala Lumpur was made in order to stage a demonstration for the release of all labourers under arrest.¹⁰ The third march was made for similar purpose by thousands of strikers, who tried to converge on the Federal capital by northern, southern and eastern roads; they carried the banner 'Association of workers; we want higher wages', but they were persuaded to disperse by the police before they reached Kuala Lumpur.¹¹ Meanwhile, strikers in Negri Sembilan also attempted to converge on Seremban, the state capital, but many of them were turned back by the police;

9. Of the 109 labourers arrested, the majority were later discharged. Prosecution was brought against 38 procession leaders only. See Straits Times, March 19, 1937.

10. Straits Times, March 20, 1937.

11. The marchers presented the following demands: the unconditional withdrawal of the charges against all the remaining 38 accused in the rioting case, compensation of \$500 if the man who was wounded in the stomach by a detective's bullet on March 14 died, compensation of \$100 to all those injured in the riot, a guarantee that the police should not assault crowds of marchers, and recognition of March 14 as a commemoration day, the anniversary of which was to be observed by all Chinese estate labourers. See Straits Times, March 23, 1937.



on the Mantin Road the marchers staged a sit-down on the road and held up the traffic before they agreed to return.¹² This was followed a few days later by another march on Seremban.¹³ These marches gave impetus to the strikes and stimulated sympathy strikes by coal miners and factory workers.

Women labourers played a very conspicuous part in the big strikes. The Labour Department observed that "the strike spread (from Ulu Langat) to Negri Sembilan and also to the north of Kuala Lumpur. Women took a leading part in it and in north of Kuala Lumpur were very aggressive."¹⁴ Among the labourers who staged a sit-down on the Mantin Road when their procession had been stopped by the police, half of them were women.¹⁵ They had cause to be aggressive because they were fighting for the rights of female labourers which they had never enjoyed besides other claims. The large influx of Chinese women immigrants since 1933 had therefore as one of its results the growing importance of women labourers in industrial disputes in the rubber industry as well as in a number of other industries.

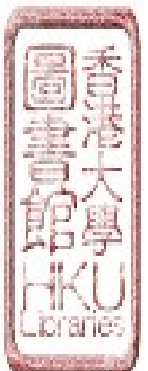
Sympathy strikes tipped the scale in favour of the Chinese estate labourers when the issues at stake still hanged

12. Ibid.

13. Straits Times, March 27, 1937.

14. Labour Department Annual Report, 1937, p. 54.

15. Straits Times, March 23, 1937.

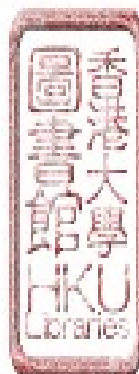


in the balance. On March 22, when the marches on the Federal capital were still going on, some 2,000 Chinese, Indian and Malay factory workers in Klang, a town to the west of Kuala Lumpur, held a protest meeting at a rubber factory and a pineapple factory to show their solidarity with the estate labourers. They surrounded a police station after the meeting and submitted a list of demands similar to those raised by the marchers on Kuala Lumpur.¹⁶ On the following day thousands of coal miners at the Malayan Collieries went on a sympathy strike. Strikers armed with crow-bars were moving about the coalfields in strenuous picketing. The government took a very serious view of the strike, which jeopardized the supply of electricity and the running of the railways. The Malay Regiment and the police force were despatched to Batu Arang, and in a serious clash between the troops and the pickets one striker was killed and several wounded.¹⁷ A list of twenty-three demands were then submitted to the management. Apart from the demand for the unconditional release of all the arrested labourers, punishment of the policemen and detectives who fired on the strikers, and freedom of association, speech and publication, the rest of the demands were concerned with labour conditions on the Collieries.¹⁸ As the strike was primarily designed to reinforce the estate labourers, it was brought to a close.

16. Ibid.; SCJP, March 24, 1937.

17. Straits Times, March 24, 27, 1937; SCJP, March 24, 25, 26, 28, 1937.

18. Nan-Yang Nien-Chien (Singapore, 1939), pp. (XV) 74-75.



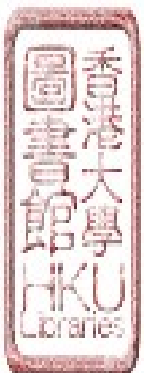
without much concession from the management.

The sympathy strike at the Malayan Collieries marked the turning point of the Chinese estate labourers' strikes. Prior to the disturbance at Batu Arang, the general attitude of the U.P.A.M. was to reject the men's claims, although individual planters were willing to make concession.¹⁹ This was supplemented by the government's vigorous suppression of disturbances. The big strikes, far from being checked or localized, showed every sign of spreading to other states. A negative approach to industrial disputes clearly failed to produce the intended result, and therefore a positive approach involving dialogue and negotiation with the strikers was necessary. The Protector of Chinese in Negri Sembilan extended an invitation on March 24 to the strikers in the state to send representatives for negotiation, specifying that the representatives be labourers themselves with at least one year's residence in Malaya.²⁰ Meanwhile, the U.P.A.M. appointed a negotiating committee, which was instructed not to concede more than 75 cents a day.²¹ Once

19. On March 12, a few days after the strikes began, the Federal Secretary received a deputation of the U.P.A.M. The deputation held views against making concession to the strikers. Another meeting took place on March 23, in which the U.P.A.M. representatives urged the government to take vigorous steps to round up the labour organizers and agitators and to permit free immigration of labourers. See J. Norman Parmer, "Chinese Estate Workers' Strikes in Malaya in March 1937" in C.D. Cowan (ed.), The Economic Development of South-East Asia (London, 1964), p. 159.

20. SCJP, March 26, 1937.

21. Parmer, "Chinese Estate Workers' Strikes", pp. 159-160.

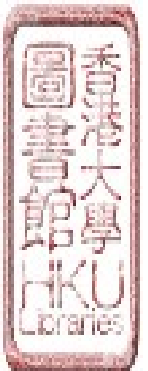


negotiation was set in motion, the remaining question was to haggle out terms acceptable to both parties.

Labour representatives were appointed from among the labourers. In Negri Sembilan, for example, five labourers were chosen to be representatives to conduct negotiation with the U.P.A.M.²² But the process by which the representatives were chosen from among the strikers over a wide area is not known. The labour representatives as well as the labour organizers and agitators were labourers themselves. Middle-class educated elements had not yet made their début in the field of labour agitation. Essential to those rough and raw days of labour unrest was the readiness to make personal sacrifice and an intimate knowledge of the men's conditions and grievances, and persons possessing these qualities emerged out of the rank and file to become leaders of men. Their biographies, unfortunately, are lost to the student of history. Most of the labour leaders before the Japanese occupation remained anonymous, and for obvious reason. The few names which came occasionally to the attention of the public were usually in connection with arrest, prosecution, or deportation. The Labour Department observed that "the subversive elements were there and became stronger as time went on".²³ The labourers which constituted the leadership of the big strikes might be in liaison with

22. Straits Times, March 26, 1937.

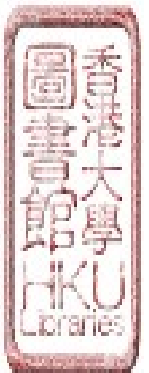
23. Labour Department Annual Report, 1937, p. 64.



the G.L.U., which was in a position to take stock of the overall situation and give broad directives.

In the negotiation between the labour representatives and the Negri Sembilan Planters' Association, the original list of demands made by the labourers in Ulu Langat was modified. It was now demanded that daily wages should range between 75 cents and one dollar according to the variations of rubber prices. Some new demands, including the removal of some of the abuses of the contract labour system, were added.²⁴ On March 28, a 17-point agreement was concluded between the Negri Sembilan Planters' Association and the Chinese rubber estate workers in the state. Three major gains were obtained by the labourers. Firstly, wages were raised; adult workers were assured of an average minimum wage of 75 cents per day; while new or lazy workers would earn 75 cents a day, a good tapper could earn more; extra wages would be paid for gathering scrap at 3 cents per pound. Secondly, the abuses of the contract labour system were checked; wages were to be paid before the 10th of each month, notices showing advances and wages due to each worker were to be posted three days before pay day; no interest would be charged for advances; the maximum prices of goods supplied in the kongsi shops would be fixed by the Protector. These terms meant that wages would be paid direct to the labourers instead of through intermediaries and that the power of the labour contractors were considerably reduced. Thirdly, the

24. Parmer, "Chinese Estate Workers' Strikes", pp. 170-173.

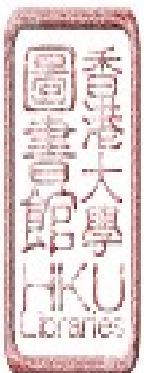


provisions of the Labour Code were for the first time extended to the Chinese estate labourers; amahs would be provided for the care of children according to the requirement of the health officers and the Chinese Protectorate; as for maternity benefits, 2/6 of the previous six months' wages for the first birth and 2/11 of the previous eleven months' wages for subsequent births would be awarded for workers entering estate or government hospitals; sick workers could be admitted to estate hospitals or third class ward of government hospitals with food and medical treatment provided free of charge.²⁵

On March 31 representatives of the Selangor planters and Chinese labourers met for negotiation with the participation of officers from the Chinese Protectorate. An agreement generally similar to the terms of the agreement in Negri Sembilan was reached. The workers were provided an average daily wage of 80 cents, which included the pay for scrap.²⁶ Strikes in Johore, Malacca, and Pahang, most of which occurred at the end of March and the beginning of April, were settled one after the other. The strike of Chinese estate labourers in the Kluang district of Johore lasted from the 8th to the 11th of April. They put forward a list of twenty-one demands, which were essentially similar to those raised in Selangor. At one point hundreds of labourers occupied the premises of the Overseas Chinese Kungso in Kluang as a meeting place.

25. SCJP, March 30, 1937.

26. SCJP, April 3, 1937.



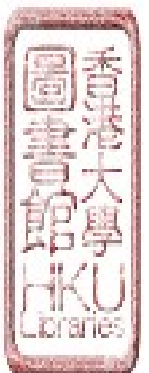
The terms of agreement, which covered Kluang and the adjacent districts, were similar to those obtained in Selangor.²⁷ The Malacca Estate Owners' Association offered terms generally similar to those in Negri Sembilan to the Chinese tappers, who were assured of an average daily income of 80 cents.²⁸

It is for the first time in history that collective agreements of such scope were concluded in the rubber industry. The strikes of the Chinese estate labourers were won, but the enforcement of the agreements remained uncertain. A full extension of the welfare provisions of the Labour Code to the Chinese labourers required close supervision of estate conditions, and this was beyond the Chinese Protectorate, which was already over-extended in its multifarious functions. Neither was there a proper machinery or agreed procedure to settle problems arising out of the implementation of the agreements. As prices fell steadily towards the latter part of the year, there was renewed attempt by rubber planters to reduce wage rates. In October leaflets appeared in some estates in Malacca and Negri Sembilan, alleging that the planters were trying to cut wages.²⁹ In spite of those weaknesses in the enforcement of collective agreement, the big strikes were a tremendous success for Chinese estate labourers.

27. SCJP, April 9, 10, 11, 12, 1937.

28. Straits Times, April 1, 1937.

29. SCJP, October 19, 1937.



The big strikes brought into bold relief the remoteness of estate management from the labourers and the inadequacy of the Chinese Protectorate. Immediately after the strikes, the need to make more personal contact with labourers instead of dealing with labour only through intermediaries was stressed in a meeting of the U.P.A.M.³⁰ An Advisory Committee on Chinese labour with competence in wage regulation was formed in the wake of the big strikes to supplement the work of the Chinese Protectorate.³¹ The strikes also led the Malayan Governments to consider new labour legislation to prevent strikes and settle industrial disputes.³²

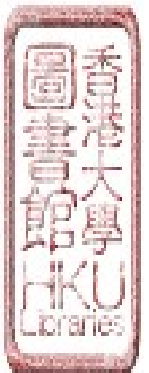
Indian labourers were only slightly affected by the big strikes. An Indian agitator sent by a labour union in Kuala Lumpur went around the lines of the Sue Betong Estate, and as a result 60 Indian labourers went on strike and marched in the direction of Port Dickson to join a mass meeting.³³ Differences in the methods and conditions of employment between the Indian and Chinese labourers precluded the former as a whole from joining in the big strikes. Although the Chinese estate labourers' strikes did not produce immediate repercussion among the Indian labourers, the results of the strikes could not have failed to impress

30. Straits Times, May 3, 1937.

31. Straits Times, April 2, 1937; Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, p. 136.

32. Straits Times, April 2, July 16, 1937.

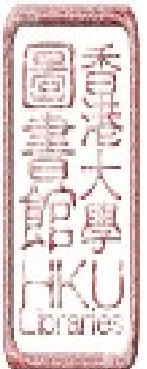
33. Labour Department Annual Report, 1937, pp. 55-56.



on the minds of the Indian estate labourers the efficacy of collective action and induce them to take similar course of action in the future.

Srinivasa Sastri's report on the conditions of Indian labour in Malaya was published during the Chinese estate workers' strike. The report said that the Labour Department in Malaya had established an effective control over employers, particularly on estates; it operated mainly in the interests of the Indian labourers and rendered them sympathetic and efficient service, and "estate management as a whole are of a good type and take a genuine interest in the welfare of their labour".³⁴ He found that housing was under reconstruction and the new cottage type lines which replaced the old lines were satisfactory; medical attention was satisfactory on the larger estates, but the dressers employed, particularly on the smaller and remote estates, were not always sufficiently qualified; the accommodation provided by estate schools and the teachers employed were susceptible of considerable improvement. The report recommended that Indian estates labourers' wages, which had been fixed since January 1, 1937, at 45 cents for men and 36 cents for women, be restored to the 1928 level, i.e., 50 cents for men and 40 cents for women in ordinary areas and 58 cents for men and 46 cents for women in certain special areas; standard rates be applied with statutory force without the distinction made between key areas and

34. Straits Times, March 8, 1937.



other areas, but the higher rates for special areas be maintained. The report also recommended that the kangany system of recruitment be abolished, and machinery be devised to prevent illicit recruitment; at least two more Indian members be appointed to the Indian Immigration Committee.³⁵

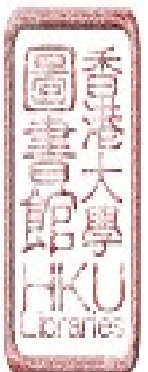
The Sastri report was received favourably by the rubber planters, who were impressed by the tribute paid by the prominent Indian leader. The only point which they opposed was the recommendation to abolish the kangany system of recruitment.³⁶ Partly as a result of the recommendation of the Sastri report and partly owing to the apprehensions that the Chinese estate labourers' strikes might affect the Indian labourers, the U.P.A.M. decided to increase Indian wage rates to 50 cents and 40 cents from April 1, 1937. Some rubber planters, however, seem to have required the labourers to work the maximum nine hours in order to get the increase.³⁷

In contrast, the Sastri report reaped a whirlwind of criticism from the Indian community, who felt that Srinivasa Sastri had not made any strong recommendation which could benefit them. K.P.K. Menon, who was counsel for Singapore municipal labourers during their strike in 1936, expressed the general sense of disappointment when he said:

35. Ibid.

36. Straits Times, May 3, 4, 1937.

37. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, p. 211.



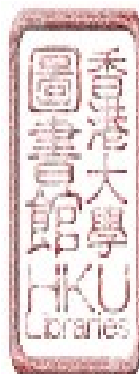
"On most of the controversial points, Mr. Sastri failed to appreciate the Indian point of view, and his recommendations will not find support either in India or in this country. Those of us who have been carefully watching Mr. Sastri's tour in Malaya and the way in which he was guided, I would almost say controlled, during his stay, knew that we could not expect much of the right honourable gentlemen but he has surpassed our expectations. I cannot go into the details of the report. But I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that Mr. Sastri has painfully betrayed the trust reposed in him."³⁸

This was the first time that such a strong criticism was leveled against a high ranking official sent by the Indian Government, and it was bound to create repercussions both in India and in Malaya; the Indian Government might be prompted to take more drastic action for the protection of the interests of Indians in Malaya, and the Indian labourers might turn more to direct action instead of passive reliance on the Indian Government.

The shrewder Indian nationalists had made their own diagnosis of the situation and arrived at their own answer to Indian labour problems in Malaya. It appeared to them that the Indian labourers must organize and assert themselves in order to achieve better conditions. This view was driven home by Jawaharlal Nehru in June, 1937, during his visit to Malaya. His message was that every effort should be made to develop workers' unions in Malaya.³⁹ He supported Sastri's recommendation that the kangany system of recruitment be abolished, but he went much further than

38. Straits Times, March 9, 1937.

39. Straits Times, June 3, 1937.



Sastri in insisting on an immediate raise of Indian wages above the 1928 level and complete equality between Indian and Chinese wages. He said:

"I do not know why the wage figure of 1928 had been made into something like an ideal standard for Indian labour. What mystic virtue attaches to that year or to that figure? Even the present conditions of industry patently permit a substantial increase. And I fail to see entirely why Indian labour should be paid less than Chinese or other labour. Apart from other and vital considerations which affect the Indian labourer and his present relatively low standard of living, there are national aspects of the question, and India must claim equality of status and wages with others."⁴⁰

Nehru refrained from making direct comments on labour conditions in Malaya, instead he made a strong appeal to Indian labourers to organize themselves. He said:

"Through generations of conflict and suffering in the industrial countries of the West, labour has learnt this primary lesson: that only by organizing itself and developing its own strength through unions can it hope to safeguard its interests and advance them. It has to contend against the organized power of the modern capitalist machine, it has to bargain with this power. What chance has poor labour got in this tussle unless it has unity and organization at its back also?"⁴¹

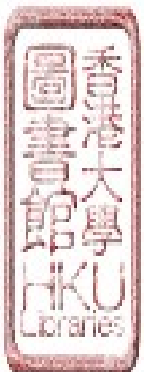
He added:

"To advance a community, self-reliance must be encouraged, and therefore an essential condition for the betterment of the workers is the promotion of trade unions and workers' organizations. The state itself will be able to do more for labour than otherwise."⁴²

40. Ibid.

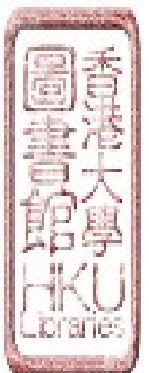
41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.



Nehru's appeal came at an opportune time and gave a fillip to the process of unionization which had begun in Malaya. But Nehru's appeal remained on a general plane, he did not elaborate on the specific problems of Indian labour organization. The difficulties stemmed from the inertia of the labourers themselves as much as from social constraints. The Indian labourers came from the lowest castes in India, where the sheer weight of centuries of oppression and degradation had deprived them of initiative and a sense of self-respect. It was their caste origins plus the paternalism of labour administration in Malaya that inured them to an attitude of passive expectation of better treatment from their social superiors. As long as the Indian labourers pinned the greater part of their hope on the state, they could not realize the full extent of their own potentials. However, things had changed. The longer the Indian labourers stayed in Malaya, the more they shed their caste characteristics and took on the traits of an industrial proletariat. A new spirit of self-assertiveness was already evident among the Indian labourers. The Labour Department observed that the old-fashioned Indian cooly who accepted everything as a matter of course was rapidly disappearing and that the labourer no more stood in awe of the kangany, clerk, or the conductor and was no more helpless against anyone in authority.⁴³

43. Labour Department Annual Report, 1937, pp. 50-51.

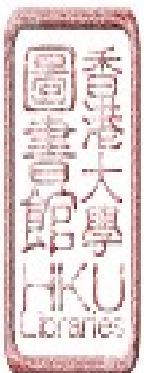


Large numbers of Indian labourers were involved in industrial disputes in 1937. In Penang, for example, strikes affected the Indian stevedores, employees of the East Asiatic Company, godown labourers, estate labourers, commercial employees, and employees of Hume Pipe and Company. There were also a number of strikes involving Indian estate labourers in the Malay States.⁴⁴ The undercurrent of discontent was palpably strong, but a local cadre of Indian labour organizers had to make their appearance and a tremendous amount of efforts had to be made before the idea of Indian labour organization could be translated into reality.

Labour unrest in 1937 again affected large numbers of Chinese craftsmen, who followed a pattern of collective bargaining largely similar to that in 1934. Since collective bargainings in 1934 resulted in partial recovery of the pre-depression wage rates, the Chinese craftsmen now aimed at a full return to the wage levels before 1930 and further protection of their interests. Most of them had ready forms of organization to ventilate their grievances and to carry on negotiations with their employers.

There were widespread industrial disputes in the tailoring trade throughout Malaya during the year. Collective bargaining initiated by tailors in one locality tended to set in a chain reaction in other localities. Industrial disputes spread from Anson and Ipoh in Perak,

44. Ibid., pp. 51-56.

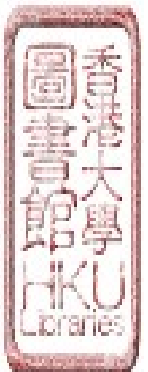


Muar and Batu Pahat in Johore to Penang and Malacca by the end of April. In May, Singapore, Seremban and Kuala Pilah in Negri Sembilan, and Pontian Kechil in Johore were affected. In July and August there were continued disputes involving tailors at Mentakab in Pahang, in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.⁴⁵ In some cases collective bargaining was carried on within the framework of the trade guild. Negotiations were conducted between the 'east house' and the 'west house' in the Tailoring Association in Muar, the Tailoring Guild in Ipoh, and the Hsuen Yuen Tailoring Guild in Malacca. Except a few minor work stoppages the disputes were generally settled quite amicably through negotiation.

In some localities the piece rates agreed upon in 1934 were disrupted owing to keen competition among the employers. The piece-rated workers either demanded a recovery of the 1934 piece rates or an increase of piece rates, and monthly-rated workers demanded wage increase ranging from 10 to 85 per cent. As a result of collective bargaining wages of Chinese tailors were generally increased.⁴⁶

45. SCJP, February 4, March 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 15, 18, 19, April 3, 14, 24, August 12, 16, September 4, 1937.

46. In Seremban the 1934 piece rates were restored, and in Kuala Lumpur the piece rates were increased by 40 per cent. The monthly-rated workers employed at 32 firms in Singapore obtained a 10-20 per cent wage increase; in Malacca and Seremban the monthly-rated workers obtained a 25-45 per cent increase; monthly-rated tailors elsewhere also obtained wage increases in varying degree. In Malacca the employers used to give their monthly-rated tailors wages calculated on a daily basis when business was slack, and this was corrected by collective bargaining. See SCJP, May 3, 4, 6, 18, 25, 1937.



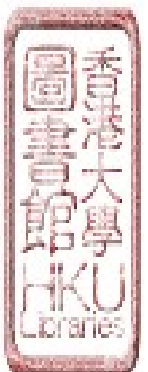
Another result was the reduction of working hours. The eight-hour working day was incorporated into collective agreements in Ipoh, Malacca, Seremban, and dressmakers in Singapore obtained reduction of working day to $8\frac{1}{2}$ hours. Public holidays were generally provided, but there was no provision for Sunday rest except in Ipoh, where a half-day rest was provided.⁴⁷

Tailoring was a trade in which the employees followed a hierarchy of masters, workers, and apprentices. The question of apprenticeship constantly cropped up in disputes. The general workers were concerned to see that wages of apprentices not too depressed nor the period of apprenticeship too long; on the other hand they wanted to impose restriction on the number of apprentices employed so that their interests might not be encroached upon by too much cheaper labour. The period of apprenticeship and the ratio of apprentices to workers were fixed in some places on demand from the workers.⁴⁸

The collective agreement in Malacca provided that all employees must be member of the Hong, new employees should join the Hong within the first week of employment, otherwise

47. SCJP, April 19, May 6, 18, 25, 1937.

48. The period of apprenticeship was fixed at three years in Ipoh, two years in Malacca, two and a half years in Kuala Lumpur and Seremban. The ratio of apprentices to workers was fixed at one to two in Malacca, one to three in Seremban, and one to five in Kuala Lumpur. See SCJP, April 19, May 6, 18, August 12, 1937.

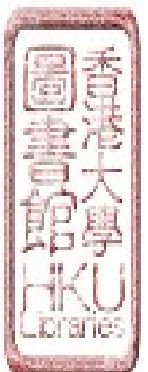


they would be dismissed. Tailors in Ipoh also demanded new workers be recruited from the Hong and no recruitment from outside the town be permitted, but the demand was rejected by the employers as an encroachment on their right to hire the cheapest labour.⁴⁹ The mediaeval guild regulation that practitioners of a trade must be confined exclusively to guild members seems to have lapsed into desuetude, and its enforcement was the exception rather than the rule in the competitive economic milieu in Malaya.

The goldsmiths' guilds played an active role in industrial disputes during the year. The Hing Woh Hong in Singapore included some 400-500 goldsmiths on 13 Cantonese-owned gold ornament firms. These goldsmiths suffered wage cuts during the Great Depression, which had not yet been fully restored. They consisted of piece-rated and monthly-rated workers. The wage rates varied from one firm to the other. The workers applied to their employers for a uniform wage scale, increase of piece rates and a 30 per cent increase in monthly wages. The employers' letter of reply, which suggested scaling down the wage claims, was rejected by a general meeting of the workers. On June 8, after negotiation had broken down, the workers went on strike.⁵⁰ Other goldsmiths in Singapore donated 10-15 per cent of their wages to the strike fund. The strikers also received financial support from the Hing Woh Hong in Penang, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Seremban Malacca, and Muar. A daily strike benefit of 20 cents was given to

49. SCJP, April 19, May 6, 1937.

50. SCJP, May 26, June 3, 10, 1937.



workers who had no family to support, and 35 cents to workers with family and dependents.⁵¹ The pan-Malayan ramification of the Hing Woh Hong also rendered any attempt by the employers to recruit new workers to replace the strikers quite infeasible. These factors favourable to the workers contributed to the length of the strike, which lasted until September 16. Through the mediation of the Chinese Protectorate a new wage scale incorporating higher piece rates and monthly rates was achieved.⁵²

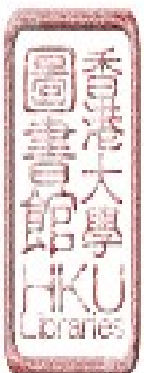
Meanwhile, members of the Hing Woh Hong in Penang also took the initiative to submit wage claims to their employers. Negotiation through exchange of letters dragged on for about a month until direct negotiation between both parties was conducted towards the end of July on request from the workers. A Wage Assessment Committee was set up by the Hing Woh Hong to submit a detailed wage scale to the employers. The employers were initially divergent in their attitude towards the wage claims, and were not willing to go beyond a 15 per cent wage increase.⁵³ It was not until August that both sides came to an agreement, which included a 20 per cent increase in wage rates. The agreement covered the employees of 17 gold ornament firms in Penang. Some of the employees were members of both the Hing Woh Hong and the Aw Ching Goldsmiths Hong, a guild which comprised both the employers and the employees.⁵⁴

51. SCJP, June 12, 1937.

52. SCJP, September 4, 18, 1937.

53. SCJP, July 24, 1937.

54. SCJP, August 4, 5, 9, 10, 23, 26, 1937.



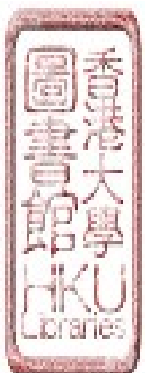
Goldsmiths in lower Perak were organized in the Man Wah Hong while their employers had the Gold Merchants' Association. Negotiations were carried on between the two bodies and produced results. The goldsmiths originally claimed 30 per cent wage increase, but they subsequently accepted 20 per cent increase offered by their employers. The new wage scale was applicable to the employees of the firms and members of the Hong only, and no piece-work was to be given to goldsmiths outside the firms and the Hong, so as to protect the interests of the guild members from the competition of other goldsmiths.⁵⁵ Members of the Hing Woh Hong in Kelantan, who probably had the lowest wages of all Chinese goldsmiths in Malaya, also managed to obtain better terms of employment.⁵⁶ Even goldsmiths who stayed outside the guilds, such as the Kheh and Teochiu goldsmiths in Singapore and Malacca, received higher wages after negotiations with their employers.⁵⁷

Shoemakers in Singapore had no association of their own, but they formed the 'Singapore Shoemakers' Committee for the Safeguard of Wage Rates' in the course of collective bargaining with their employers. The Committee consisted of eleven members, who were entrusted with the task of negotiating with the employers and leading whatever industrial action that might be necessary. There were altogether some 1,500 Chinese

55. SCJP, May 26, 1937.

56. SCJP, June 12, 1937.

57. SCJP, May 10, 11, 12, 13, June 16, 1937.



shoemakers in Singapore, who were engaged either directly by employers, or indirectly through contractors, or on the putting-out system. Under the contract system they received orders and materials from contractors on piece rates. The contractors, who played the role of middlemen between the shoe firms and the shoemakers, supplied the shoe firms regularly with finished products. Those employed by the firms on the putting-out system received orders and materials directly from the shoe firms without the medium of contractors.⁵⁸ The shoemakers employed on the contract system obtained increase in piece rates after negotiation with their contractors.⁵⁹ This initial success led to general wage claims by other shoemakers. The Shoemakers' Committee called a one-day work stoppage at Middle Road, one of centres of the shoemaking trade. An agreement was signed to give higher piece rates to the employees on the putting-out system. For the shoe firms along Java Street, where the shoemakers were directly employed, a separate agreement was signed.⁶⁰ Shoemakers in Perak and Selangor followed the example of Singapore shoemakers in making their wage claims. In Ipoh, Dat Yau Hong, the shoemakers' guild, represented the shoemakers in negotiation with their employers and managed to obtain a 10 per cent wage increase.⁶¹ Higher wages were obtained by shoemakers in Kuala Lumpur and Taiping as well.⁶²

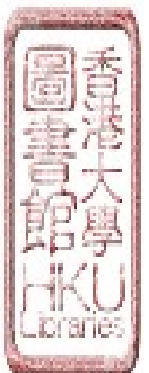
58. SCJP, February 24, 1937.

59. Ibid.

60. SCJP, April 28, 29, May 4, 1937.

61. SCJP, May 30, 1937.

62. SCJP, May 12, June 5, 1937.

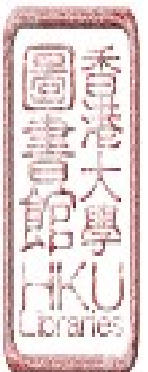


Kee Hee Hong was involved in some of the disputes in the engineering industry, but the initiative in taking industrial action may have lain with the rank and file rather than the executives of the Hong. The strike at the United Engineers in Singapore, which started in December, 1936, and ended in early January, 1937, seems to have been led by the G.L.U. rather than the Kee Hee Hong. The G.L.U. had not yet come into conflict with the Kee Hee Hong at this stage because the issues were wholly concerned with the men's grievances.⁶³ The United Engineers was something of a pattern-setter for wage rates in the engineering industry. The new wage scale set by the United Engineers was soon followed by other European engineering firms and was taken as a criterion by the workers on the Chinese firms in Singapore to present their wage claims. Workers at 40 Chinese engineering firms called a strike after their claims had been put forward to the employers by the Kee Hee Hong.⁶⁴ The most important result of the strike was the abolition of the contract labour system. All members of the Kee Hee Hong obtained an eight-hour day, an increase of 2-4 cents in hourly rates, improvement in the terms of apprenticeship, and medical attention according to the Labour Code.⁶⁵

63. SCJP, January 8, 1937.

64. SCJP, January 23, 25, 1937.

65. SCJP, February 6, 1937.



The Singapore strike was immediately followed by a whole series of disputes in the engineering trade in Taiping, Ipoh, Kampar, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Malacca.⁶⁶ In Kuala Lumpur the employers formed a combination under the name of 'ad hoc Committee of Inquiry into Wage Increase' and enforced a lockout in the trade.⁶⁷ All the disputes were eventually resolved to the advantage of the workers. As a result wages were increased, hours were reduced and working conditions were improved in the engineering industry.⁶⁸

Klang, a minor industrial centre to the west of Kuala Lumpur, was the scene of boisterous industrial unrest. It was in this town that factory workers first rendered their support to the Chinese rubber estate workers' strikes. The concentration of rubber factories, pineapple factories, and a biscuit factory in the small town made industrial unrest easily infectious. The Sam Yip Leong Rubber Goods Factory, the Overseas Chinese Rubber Goods Factory, the Malayan Pineapple Canning Factory, the Hok Huat Pineapple Canning Factory, and the Lee Kim Siak Match Factory were all hit by strikes in a short span of time.⁶⁹ Serious clashes occurred at the Overseas Chinese Rubber Goods Factory when a police force arrived on the scene to release the Protector of Chinese from being detained in the factory.⁷⁰ The Chinese employers

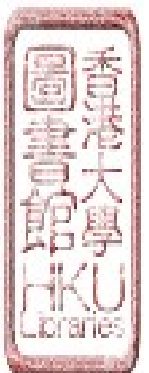
66. SCJP, January 12, 18, 30, February 2, 24, April 5, 29, 1937.

67. SCJP, February 24, 26, April 3, 1937.

68. SCJP, January 12, 13, 15, 18, 25, 30, February 8, 23, April 3, 12, July 7, 1937.

69. SCJP, January 18, March 3, 15, 16, April 1, 9, 1937.

70. Nan-Yang Nien-Chien, pp. (XV) 73-74; SCJP, March 3, 1937.



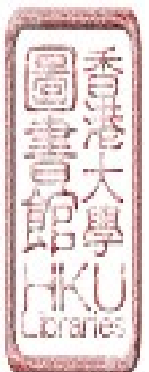
of all these factories eventually conceded higher wages, an eight-hour day, and overtime pay to the workers. The contract labour system at the Malayan Pineapple Canning Factory was abolished.⁷¹

In Singapore there were considerable disputes in the biscuit factories. Apart from the wage issues, the underlying causes of discontent were long hours, absence of maternity benefits, lack of Sunday rest and paid sick leave, inadequate medical attention and job insecurity. On April 21 some 1,200 workers from the Ho Ho Biscuit Factory and the Khiem Ek Biscuit Factory gathered outside the Chinese Consulate, where negotiation between the employers and the workers' representatives were taking place.⁷² Tan Kah Kee, owner of Khiem Ek, made a number of concessions to the workers, whereas the strike at Ho Ho seems to have collapsed after seventy workers were paid off by the employer and seven workers were arrested by the police and prosecuted for 'illegal assembly and use of violence'.⁷³ The Tai Hong Biscuit Factory and the Ching Ek Biscuit Factory, both owned by the Chinese

71. SCJP, January 18, March 6, 15, 16, April 14, 1937.

72. SCJP, April 24, 1937.

73. Two separate agreements covering the male and female workers were drawn up at Khiem Ek. In the agreement for male workers, the terms included a 21 per cent wage increase, an eight-hour day, medical treatment at appointment clinic, no dismissal of workers without good reason, pay day on the 1st and 16th of each month, and the removal of a foreman to another section. The terms for female workers included a 5 per cent increase in piece rates and a 10 per cent increase in monthly rates, no dismissal of female workers on pretext, wages due to each worker to be notified, abolition of unreasonable punishments; no maternity benefits were to be given but job would be reserved during confinement. See SCJP, April 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 1937.



entrepreneur Lee Choon Seng, were plagued by chronic industrial disputes. When strike occurred for the third time during the year at Tai Hong and a sympathy strike was called at Ching Ek, the employer enforced a lockout and paid off all the workers. Clashes occurred when new workers under police escort tried to break through the picket line. Within a few days both factories resumed operation, and most of the old workers went unemployed.⁷⁴ Strike could be a very costly weapon indeed if it is not wielded with tact.

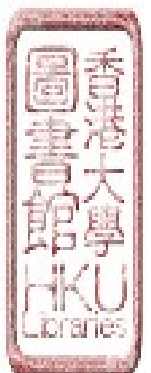
Pulau Ubin, the quarry island off Singapore, was another scene of disturbance. Strikes had been twice matched by the employers' lockouts before labourers on eight quarries on the island went on another strike in May for a 40 per cent wage increase, elimination of the abuses of the contract labour system, an eight-hour working day, overtime pay, and labour insurance.⁷⁵ A labour union which had just been formed was instrumental in organizing the strike. The authorities took a serious view of the situation because it threatened to stop the supply of granite for the vital construction projects on the Singapore island. Tension mounted as a police force was stationed on the island, and four labourers were arrested and one of them was prosecuted in court and subsequently banished.⁷⁶ The strike came to an end when most of the quarrymen were compelled to return to work on the employers' terms.⁷⁷

74. SCJP, October 20, 22, November 3, 8, 1937.

75. SCJP, March 24, May 15, 1937.

76. SCJP, May 22, 23, 1937.

77. SCJP, May 26, 31, 1937.



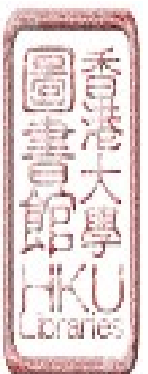
On the Penang waterfront the Indian and Chinese stevedores united in a concerted action to enforce their demands. There were some 3,000 Indian and Chinese stevedores employed by the import and export firms in Penang. They formed themselves into gangs, each consisted of scores to a hundred labourers under an overseer. The overseer came to deal with various employers and obtain assignments. The proceeds were divided among the stevedores, and the overseer took his share plus a commission. Negotiations were plagued by difficulty arising from the different wage rates conceded by such merchant guilds as the Rice Merchants' Kungso, Acheh Merchants' Kungso,⁷⁸ Copra Trade Kungso, and Rubber Trade Kungso.⁷⁹ A 'go-slow' was undertaken to enforce uniform wage increase, and as a result at least 10 per cent wage increase was conceded by the merchant guilds.⁸⁰

Following the renewed Japanese aggression on China in July, 1937, an anti-Japanese campaign was launched by the Chinese in Malaya. China Relief Association, first established in Singapore under the leadership of Tan Kah Kee, appeared in all parts of Malaya. The campaign had two primary objectives in view; first, aid to China's war effort against the Japanese and relief of Chinese war victims in the form of money, materials, and personnel; second, disruption of Japanese economic interests in Malaya. The response among the Chinese

78. The Acheh Merchants' Kungso was a guild of Chinese merchants trading with Acheh in north Sumatra.

79. SCJP, June 29, 1937.

80. SCJP, July 3, 1937.



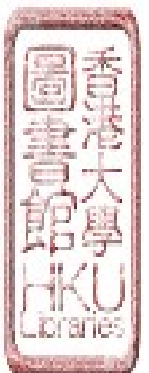
labourers was immediate. At the Tai Hong Biscuit Factory, a strike was under way when the news of the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War on July 7 was heard; the workers indicated they were willing to scale down their demands because the Chinese population were now united against the Japanese, and an agreement was concluded in this conciliatory mood.⁸¹ The Chinese labourers on the Sri Medan iron mine owned by the Ishihara Sanggyo Koshi Ltd. in Johore resigned en masse in December in protest against Japanese military expansion in China.⁸² The anti-Japanese campaign was destined to sweep large numbers of Chinese labourers and even a section of Indian labourers into its current in the following years.

Several important labour organizations were formed in 1937. The Singapore Traction Company Employees' Association was registered during the year. This association included a multi-racial membership, and its top positions were held by Indians. The Singapore Chinese Hairdressers' Union, the Singapore Quarry Workers Mutual Aid Association, the Chinese Stewards' Association, the Penang Chinese Tailoring (Employees') Association, the Penang Rattan Workers' Association, and a few Malay drivers' associations were also formed during the year.⁸³

81. SCJP, July 9, 1937. This agreement did not last long because of renewed industrial conflict in the factory.

82. Labour Department Annual Report, 1937, p. 56.

83. See Appendix C, Table 1, pp. 364-378.



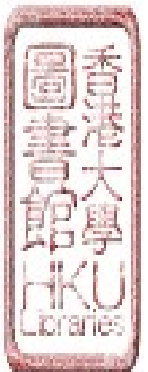
The Singapore Chinese Hairdressers' Union provides a classic example of labour union evolving out of the 'west house' in a trade guild. The Chinese hairdressers in Singapore had two early organizations, the Tsang Yong Hsuen, which included the Hokchiu hairdressers, and the Lù Lo Tong, which comprised the Cantonese and Kheh hairdressers. These trade guilds had a mixed membership of employers and employees. In 1928 the Tsang Yong Hsuen was enlarged to form the Hokkien Hairdressing Association.⁸⁴ In a trade dispute in 1937 the 'west house' of the Hokkien Hairdressing Association elected a 13-man committee to conduct negotiation with the 'east house'.⁸⁵ In the course of collective bargaining the workers developed the function of the 'west house' and turned it into a more independent Shop Assistants' Section led by their own executives. They extended the membership of the Shop Assistants' Section beyond the Hokkienese to include the Cantonese and Kheh hairdressers, male and female. The Shop Assistants' Section led the hairdressers' strike in June and eventually managed to secure a 10 per cent wage increase.⁸⁶ It became a rallying point for the Chinese hairdressers in Singapore because of its active leadership. The Shop Assistants' Section finally seceded from the Hokkien Hairdressing Association to form the Singapore Chinese Hairdressers' Union.⁸⁷

84. Fu-Chou-Jen Yü Li-Fa-Yeh, pp. 51-54.

85. SCJP, May 24, 31, 1937.

86. SCJP, June 26, 29, July 1, 3, 12, 1937.

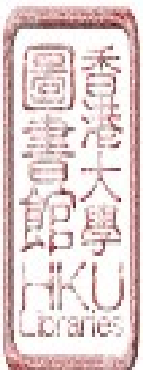
87. See Nan-Yang Nien-Chien, p. (II) 291.



The Chinese building labourers in Singapore, undaunted by their failure in 1936, made new efforts to get their association registered. The unregistered Singapore Chinese Building Workers' Union continued to function under a slightly different name: the Singapore Building Labourers' Association. On May 11 twelve building labourers were arrested and fined for being members of the Association on the evidence of badges, register, and fund-raising accounts discovered by the police on their quarters.⁸⁸ A mass meeting attended by some 2,000 building labourers was held on July 20, the birthday of the patron saint Lo Ban. Among the guests were officials from the Chinese Consulate and workers from other trades. The meeting produced a 29-man committee comprising the Hokkiense, Cantonese, and Khehs to apply for the registration of the Association. A statement issued by the committee suggested that the Association had the following aims in view: one, to organize the building labourers for the achievement of higher wages, an eight-hour day, and improvement of working conditions; two, to promote mutual assistance, friendly feelings and unity among the building labourers; three, to contribute the labourers' share to the relief of wounded soldiers and war victims in China.⁸⁹ This statement of objectives was more outspoken than either the statement of its predecessor in 1936 or most other labour associations were willing to admit. This Association, similar to its predecessor, failed to obtain registration.

88. SCJP, June 16, 1937.

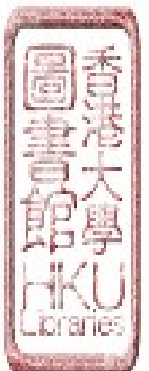
89. SCJP, July 21, 1937.



The Pineapple Workers Mutual Help Association, which was registered in 1936, could not escape the problems which new labour associations usually encountered. The labour contractors were opposed to the Association, and their influence was strong enough to prevent a number of workers from rendering support to the Association. Partly owing to the opposition of the labour contractors and partly owing to the slack seasons, the Association ran into serious financial straits. Owing to inability to pay rent, it had to vacate its premises and to keep its certificate of registration and signboard at the premises of the Quarry Workers Mutual Aid Association. These initial difficulties had been overcome by the end of 1937, when almost all workers had joined the Association. It resumed operation at its new premises, and a branch was established in Johore Bahru to include the pineapple canning workers there.⁹⁰

The steady progress of labour organization and the widespread collective bargainings speak for the growing consciousness and self-assertiveness of labour. Without this awakening labour could not have mounted industrial conflict to a peak and attained hitherto unattainable results. In terms of man-days lost through strikes, 1937 was the highest point of labour unrest before the Japanese occupation of

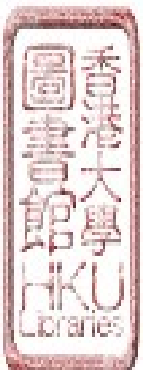
90. "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 14.



Malaya.⁹¹ The Chinese rubber estate workers' strikes secured at one go higher wages, the welfare provisions of the Labour Code, and a check on the abuses of the contract labour system. Factory workers, mechanics, tailors, goldsmiths, hairdressers, shoemakers, stevedores, lightermen also managed to secure wage increases in varying degree. When these results were added to the voluntary wage increase granted by the employers, there was a conspicuous trend of general wage increase during the year. It may be suggested that wage rates and basic labour earnings as a whole had returned to the pre-depression standard by the end of 1937. Since the cost of living was lower than in 1928-29,⁹² this meant real wages were higher than before the Great Depression. The contract labour system was abolished in the engineering industry in Singapore and in the Malayan Pineapple Canning Factory in Klang. The eight-hour day and better working conditions were achieved by some factory workers, mechanics, and tailors. Labour had succeeded in extricating themselves from the depression conditions after four years' continuous assertion of their own rights.

91. There were no official strike statistics in Malaya before 1946. An attempt is made in this study to compile the annual man-days lost through strikes in 1934-41 from official annual reports and newspaper reports. This compilation shows a total of 505,367 man-days lost through strikes in 1937 as compared with 299,650 in 1936. For the limitations and result of this compilation, see Appendix B, Table I, Table II, pp. 328-331.

92. The official cost of living index (Asiatic standard) was 100 for 1914, 157.3 for 1928, 155.6 for 1929, and 112.5 for 1937. See Appendix A, Table VI, p. 324.



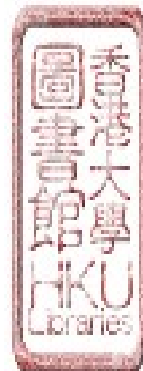
Chapter IV

EBB AND FLOW, 1938-1939

Labour situation in Malaya, as in other countries, was closely related to the economic cycles. Times of economic depression coincided with low incidence of labour unrest and periods of economic prosperity induced rising labour unrest, as was evidenced by the quiescence of labour during the 1929-33 slump and the increasing tempo of labour unrest during the 1934-37 economic recovery. This increasing tempo was checked to some extent by the economic recession in 1938 and the first eight months of 1939. Unemployment, underemployment, and wage cuts again came to be the lot of a sizable section of the working class, but times had changed and they were no more the utterly helpless victims of economic forces as they appeared to be during the Great Depression.

The metaphor that when the United States sneezes Malaya catches cold may well apply to pre-war conditions in Malaya. Rubber prices plunged in 1938 owing chiefly to reduced consumption of the automobile industry in the United States. The reduction in rubber quota put out of

1. The world consumption of rubber fell from 1,095,000 tons in 1937 to 933,000 tons in 1938, and the U.S.A. accounted for 106,000 tons in the fall. The average price of rubber in Singapore fell from 23.08 cents per lb. in January to 18.96 cents in May, and then it steadily rose to 28.70 cents in October and stood at 27.75 cents in December. See Baur, The Rubber Industry, pp. 132-133; Labour Department Annual Report, 1938, p. 37.



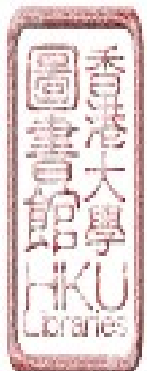
tapping the smaller estates and the small holdings, whose owners chose to sell their quotas to large estate owners indirectly through rubber dealers.² P.T. Baur argued that "a less severe reduction in the rate of release might have somewhat retarded the rate of recovery in the price but it would have eased the local situation."³ Reduced tin absorption by consumers, chiefly the iron and steel industry in the United States, and falling prices led the International Tin Committee to impose drastic cuts in the tin quotas.⁴ The policy of the International Tin Committee had been criticised on the ground that it sought ultimately to ensure high returns for the large tin companies with international ramifications by pegging tin prices at an artificial high level.⁵ Half of the tin dredges in Malaya

2. The Malayan rubber quota in 1938 was 70 per cent for the first quarter, 60 per cent for the second quarter, and 45 per cent for the third and fourth quarters. The annual average of export quotas in 1939 was only 58½ per cent. See Knorr, World Rubber, table VIII, p. 252.

3. Baur, The Rubber Industry, p. 135.

4. The tin quotas for the F.M.S. in 1938 were fixed at 56 per cent for the first quarter, 43 per cent for the second quarter, 25.5 per cent for the third quarter, and 25 per cent for the fourth quarter. See Labour Department Annual Report, 1938, p. 37.

5. The International Tin Committee aimed at raising tin prices to above £200 per ton, although the European tin companies in Malaya could maintain production at a much lower price range. See J.K. Eastham, "Rationalization in the Tin Industry" in Silcock (ed.), Readings in Malayan Economics, pp. 320-344.



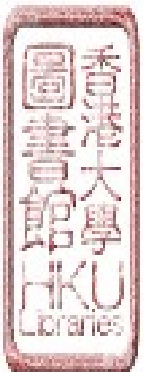
lay idle and many marginal Chinese tin mines were driven out of production.⁶ Other export-oriented industries, including oil palm, copra and pineapple canning industries, fared no better than rubber and tin. The pineapple canning industry was in particular severely hit by the shrinkage of export market. The engineering industry subsidiary to the tin mines was also seriously affected.

Unemployment situation in the rubber industry was somewhat eased by the departure of some 108,000 Indians in 1938-39, but unemployment in the tin mining, pineapple canning and engineering industries was particularly serious. It was estimated that during the first eight months of 1938 more than 27,000 mining labourers in Malaya had lost their jobs.⁷ The unemployed labourers drifted into Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and other urban centres, adding to the overcrowded condition, poverty, squalor, and rising crime rates. An inquiry in Kuala Lumpur revealed 283 men, women and children sleeping out at night, and most of them were tin mining labourers seeking relief.⁸ Chronic poverty amounting to destitution existed not only in Kuala Lumpur but also in most of the other urban centres. A riot occurred at Bahau, Negri Sembilan on February 5, 1938,

6. Patricia Glover, "Lower Malayan Tin Quota Leads to Chinese Unemployment", Far Eastern Survey, VIII, 13, June 21, 1939, 154.

7. According to John Bagnall, managing director of the Straits Trading Company. See Straits Times, September 27, 1938.

8. Lord Herbert, A., A Report on the Incidence of Destitution in Kuala Lumpur (Kuala Lumpur, 1939), p. 3.



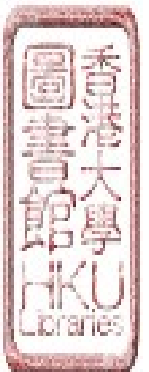
when hunger-stricken Chinese rubber tappers looted a rice store, resulting in a score of casualties.⁹

A departure in the official unemployment policy was made during the recession. The policy of repatriation on a massive scale and leaving unemployment relief largely to the charity of the community, as was adopted during the Great Depression, was altered in favour of repatriation on a limited scale and the provision of government-sponsored relief works. The old policy had been criticised both in India and in Malaya. Indian nationalist opinions were resentful of the way Indian labourers were imported only to be thrown back to India like 'sucked oranges' during slump.¹⁰ When the 1937 Selangor Unemployment Committee recommended repatriation as the chief measure to deal with unemployment and considered state aid unnecessary, the report was stigmatized as a 'negative stand'.¹¹ Besides, the government had already anticipated the cessation of assisted Indian emigration to Malaya, and hence it was considered necessary to conserve the greatest possible number of Indian labourers in Malaya. The growing tension of the European situation, which finally led to the outbreak of the European War in September, 1939, was another element in the government's assessment of the prospect of labour supply and demand.

9. SCJP, February 7, 1938.

10. Mahajani, The Role of Indian Minorities, p. 115.

11. Straits Times, July 3, 1937.



The planters were advised to spread work among the estate labourers and maintain the labourers' allotments in the estates, and the government did not insist on the legal provision that 24 days' work and wages must be provided.¹² Only those unabsorbed by the methods were repatriated at government expense.¹³ As regards the Chinese labourers the spread of the Sino-Japanese War to south China in 1938 rendered large-scale repatriation of Chinese labourers impracticable.¹⁴

The chief contribution made by the government to the alleviation of unemployment was the provision of relief work, which consisted principally of road construction and improvement, drainage and anti-malaria work. The recipients of the relief work were mostly Chinese unemployed labourers from tin mines. They lived in kongsi houses,¹⁵ where they set up communal messes, and their families quickly turned to vegetable gardening as in the previous slump.¹⁶ The number of labourers received into relief work in Perak, where unemployment in the tin mining industry was most serious, rose from about 9,000 in December, 1938, to about

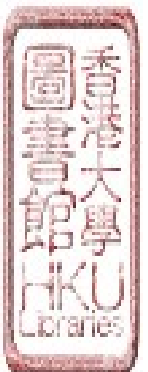
12. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 244-247. Indian labourers on estates were provided with garden allotments according to the provision of the Labour Code.

13. Altogether some 40,000 Indians (including minors) were repatriated in 1938 and 1939. See ibid., table 3, p. 272.

14. Shortly after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July, 1937, the Japanese imposed a naval blockade on China coast from Shanghai to Swatow. The Japanese occupied Amoy on May 13 and Canton on October 21, 1938.

15. The kongsi houses are long open barrack rooms made of wood or attap thatch in which the labourers lived.

16. Labour Department Annual Report, 1938, p. 37.

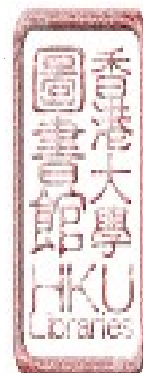


15,000 in June, 1939.¹⁷ The relief work yielded a number of benefits to the economy. It helped to stabilize the unemployed labour population and facilitate their re-absorption into regular employment later on. It removed an element of instability created by crowds of unemployed labourers and thus prevented the further rise of crime rates. The roads constructed and repaired added permanent value to the infrastructure of the country. The government relief work bore some resemblance to certain features of unemployment relief under the New Deal in the United States. However, it was designed as an expedient to meet the unemployment situation rather than part of an overall anti-recession scheme.

Considering the fact that four-fifths of the Malay Peninsula was jungle-clad, an obvious solution to unemployment might appear to be the settlement of the unemployed on land. However, there were two major objections to this course. Firstly, permanent settlement of the unemployed labourers might turn them into a class of farmers, a result incompatible with the aim of retaining the unemployed as a pool of reserve labour. Secondly, since the passing of the F.M.S. Malay Reservations Enactment in 1913,¹⁸ paddy cultivation had

17. SCJP, December 13, 1938; June 9, 1939.

18. The F.M.S. Malay Reservations Enactment, 1913, was designed to curb the tendency of land transfer from Malay cultivators to non-Malay middlemen and usurers through mortgages. Land transactions inside the Malay Reservation Areas after the promulgation of the law were limited to the Malays. The law was reinforced in 1933 by an amendment.



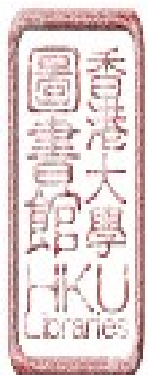
become exclusively a Malay occupation, and the government had no intention of changing its land policy. The families of Chinese labourers who turned to vegetable gardening were mostly squatters, who had no title to land and were liable to be evicted. The proposal to settle the Chinese on land for paddy cultivation, which had been raised during the previous slump,¹⁹ was again raised by a member of the Straits Settlements' Legislative Council.²⁰ By this time the government had become aware of the shortage of rice production in Malaya, which supplied about one-third of the country's rice consumption, and the need for self-sufficiency in view of the contingency of war. A 500-acre tract in Perak was allotted for an experimental scheme of rice cultivation by Chinese and other non-Malays, but the scheme had not made much headway before the Japanese invasion.²¹ The Tanjong Karang scheme in Selangor was accelerated, but it was not designed specifically for the non-Malays.²² Both schemes made little contribution in

19. Tan Kah Kee, who was appointed a member of the Chinese Advisory Board in Singapore in the early thirties, proposed the settlement of Chinese on land for paddy cultivation. The proposal was agreed upon in the Board and submitted to the government for consideration, but it had not been accepted. See Tan, Nan-Ch'iao Hui-I Lu, pp. 24-25.

20. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 247-248.

21. Ibid.

22. Tanjong Karang is a strip of land 2 to 4 miles wide along the coast of Selangor and extends over a distance of 27 miles. The systematic development of the Tanjong Karang area began in 1936. Although the project was not designed specifically for the non-Malays, the Chinese farmers came to predominate in the Sekinchan area in Tanjong Karang. See Udhis Narkswasdi and S. Selvadurai, Economic Survey of Padi Production in West Malaysia, Report No. 1, Selangor (Kuala Lumpur, 1967), pp. 39-45, 108.

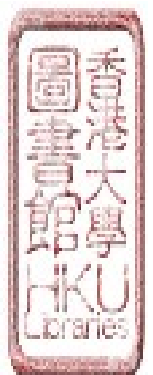


the way of alleviation of unemployment.

Less relief work seems to have been forthcoming from the community than in the previous slump. The Selangor Asiatic Unemployment Fund and some Chinese guilds made some limited contribution to the alleviation of unemployment. But there was consistent effort at self-help among the unemployed, notably the pineapple canning workers. In April, 1938, in a meeting attended by a number of labour organizations, a committee was formed for the relief of the unemployed in the pineapple canning industry.²³ The committee directed its effort at raising unemployment relief funds and urging factory owners to resume operation. The question of re-opening the factories was beset with difficulties owing to depressed export market and keen competition among the owners. With the formation of the Central Board of Pineapple Packers in 1938-39 an attempt was made to re-organize the industry,²⁴ but the outbreak of the European War disrupted canned pineapple exports, thus the labourers remained in a chronic state of unemployment.

23. The meeting was attended by the Singapore Workers Mutual Aid Association, the Chinese Clerks' Association, the Quarry Workers Mutual Aid Association, the Singapore Chinese Hairdressers' Association, the Goldsmiths' and Silversmiths' Association, the Building Workers Mutual Aid Association, and some other Chinese associations in Singapore. See SCJP, April 25, 1938.

24. The Central Board of Pineapple Packers managed to raise prices by controlling production on a quota basis and achieved a large measure of stabilization in the prices of pineapple crop bought mainly from the smallholders. See Courtenay, "Pineapple Industry", 183-189.



Similar effort at self-help was made among the Chinese rubber tappers in Johore.²⁵

Wage reduction affected a sizable portion of the labour population, but it was by no means universal. Rubber estate and tin mining labourers were the largest group of workers affected. From May 1, 1938, wages of Indian male and female estate labourers were reduced from 50 cents and 40 cents to 45 cents and 35 cents. Reduction of wage rates coupled with spreading work among labourers meant that Indian estate labourers' income was reduced by 25 per cent.²⁶ The U.P.A.M. further recommended wage rates to be cut from 45 cents and 35 cents to 40 cents and 32 cents for Indian male and female labourers from July 1, 1938, and the Rubber Growers' Association called for a larger cut in wage rates.²⁷ The proposal was not carried out chiefly because the Controller of Labour objected to further wage reduction.²⁸ The Controller of Labour noticed that the demand for wage cuts was first initiated by 'the London firms controlling estates in more than one country'. He conceded it was difficult to answer the argument of the large companies in regard to lower wage rates in other countries but regretted competition of other countries should force down Malayan wages.²⁹ As regards

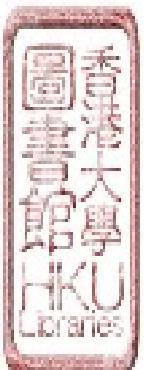
25. SCJP, February 25, 1938.

26. Baur, The Rubber Industry, p. 241.

27. Ibid.; Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, p. 213.

28. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, p. 214.

29. Labour Department Annual Report, 1938, p. 38.

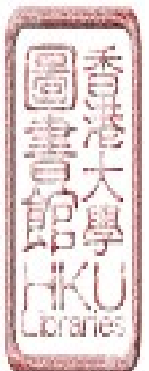


the Chinese estate labourers, the U.P.A.M. imposed three successive wage cuts, which reduced their daily wages from a minimum of 75-80 cents to 60 cents per day.³⁰ In the tin mining industry wages were cut by approximately 40 per cent.³¹ In government departments and statutory bodies the old wage rates were maintained.

The wage cut suffered by the Indian estate labourers was the last straw in the Indian nationalist agitation for the improvement of the conditions and status of the Indian labourers in Malaya. Indian nationalist opinions both in Malaya and India had been advocating more radical steps than the ban on the kangany system of recruitment as suggested by Srinivasa Sastri in the previous year.³² The total ban on Indian labour emigration to Malaya naturally suggested itself to the Indians as a weapon to force the Malayan authorities and rubber planters to reconsider their wage policy. On March 29, 1938, the C.I.A.M. sent an urgent telegram to the Government of India. The telegram reads:

"Reduction of wages of Indian labour is imminent. If wages are now reduced the action will finally render infructuous the main labour of the Sastri delegation. The present labour situation is definitely detrimental to the economic interests of Indian labour. It is suggested that assisted emigration be stopped pending settlement of issues between the two countries. We respectfully urge Government of India to take up a determined and firm stand and safeguard Indian rights."³³

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30. Parmer, "Chinese Estate Workers' Strikes", p. 165.
 31. Stenson, Industrial Conflict, p. 18.
 32. Vide supra., p. 157.
 33. Quoted in Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, p. 76.

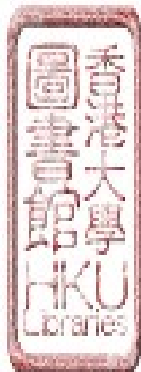


Meanwhile, the Agent of the Government of India in Malaya made strong recommendation on a similar line to the Indian Government. In his opinion, it was imperative for the Indian Government to change its emigration policy in order to maintain a reasonable wage level and living standard for Indian labourers in Malaya. He urged the Indian Government to adopt a firm stand against the 'arbitrary' and 'unjust' wage cut imposed by the U.P.A.M.³⁴ The Indian Government could not afford to ignore the Indian nationalist opinions and their effect on the stability of the British Raj under the circumstances. A ban was therefore slapped on all assisted Indian emigration to Malaya with effect from June 15, 1938.³⁵

The effect of the ban can be assessed from several angles. The ban had no immediate effect on the situation of labour supply in Malaya. The large influx of Indian labour during the previous two years had built up a sufficiently

34. Sandhu, Indians in Malaya, pp. 111-115.

35. "The effect of the ban was that no labourer was allowed to receive assistance to come to Malaya from India to work for hire or to engage in agriculture. Wives and children could join husbands and parents but not to work. Furthermore, no labourer could leave for Malaya even at his own expense if it was known that he was going to work for someone else. Even Indian labourers who had worked in Malaya and had subsequently gone to India for a holiday and remained there for more than two years were not allowed to return. Manduras (overseers) and kanakapillais (foremen) and railway porters were classified as skilled workers and allowed to return to Malaya. Similarly no restrictions were imposed on labourers emigrating on their own, provided they gave proof that they had independent means and had not been promised work by some private or government labour hiring-agency on arrival in Malaya." See ibid., pp. 114-115.

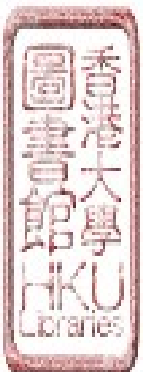


large pool of local Indian labour,³⁶ and, furthermore, the problem during the 1938-39 recession was one of excess labour rather than its shortage. After the outbreak of the European War in September, 1939, the continuance of the ban contributed to a tighter labour market. Appeals made by the Malayan Governments to the Indian Government to relax the ban were unsuccessful. The crux of the problem boiled down to the question of Indian wages in Malaya. While the Government of India insisted on improving the wages of Indian labourers, the Malayan Governments were not prepared to make concession on this point. Besides, wide ranging issues including citizenship were raised in the negotiation.³⁷ An era of free movement of population between the two countries was definitely closed.

The ban on Indian labour emigration was designed primarily to exert pressure on the Malayan Governments to raise Indian wages in the long run. As a weapon on the bargaining counter it proved ineffective not only in the immediate situation but also in the boom conditions which ensued. The weapon was blunted by the belated move of the Indian Government. If the measure had been adopted several years earlier instead of allowing the uninterrupted flow of Indian emigration to Malaya since 1934, the representations of the Indian Government may have received

36. No quota restriction was imposed on Indian labour emigration to Malaya in 1936 and 1937. In 1937 alone there was a total of 135,353 arrivals against 50,988 departures of South Indians. The migrational surplus was 84,365. See Appendix A, Table VIII, p. 326.

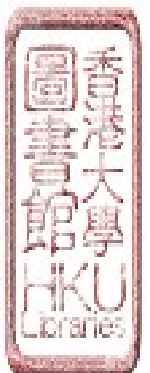
37. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 77-78.



a more respectful hearing in a situation of acute labour shortage. In the final analysis, low wages in tropical plantations were dictated by the need of capital export to regions where production cost was lower and the rate of profit higher than in the metropolitan country, and they were effectively maintained by the alignment of the capital exporters and the colonial administration. Migration was one of the factors but not the only factor in determining the social economic conditions of Indian labour in Malaya. That is the reason why the real wages of Indian labour did not increase in spite of tight labour supply after the outbreak of the European War in September, 1939. The Indian nationalists seem to have expected too much from the ban, which in fact had never produced any tangible result in the negotiation with the Malayan Governments.

The ban was a benchmark in the history of Indian population in Malaya. It marked a change from a volatile transient immigrant population to a more permanent settled population. The Indians became more reluctant to return to their native country for the understandable fear of not being able to come back to Malaya. The improving sex ratio among Indians contributed to more settled family life in the estates.³⁸ Birth rate and death rate began to supersede

38. The sex ratio of Indian population in Malaya rose from 482 females to per thousand males in 1931 to 637 females to per thousand males in 1947. During the same inter-census period the proportion of males with wives in Malaya had increased. See Tufo, The 1947 Census of Population, pp. 57-61

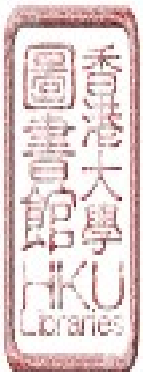


migration as the most important element in population growth. A whole new generation of Indians was born and brought up in Malaya, and they tended to acquire more readily a Malayan identity than the 'birds of passage' which were their forbears.³⁹

Finally, the ban exerted an indirect influence on the political orientation of the Indian labourers in Malaya. The leaders of the C.I.A.M. had never considered direct action by the labourers as the principal means to improve their livelihood. Now that the ultimate weapon in Indian diplomacy in regard to labour conditions in Malaya had been tried and proved ineffective, it provided an occasion for stocktaking for the Indian community in Malaya. It dawned on more Indians that they had to look to their own resources to fight for their rights. The message that Indian labourers must organize and rely on themselves took on a new urgency.⁴⁰ The Straits Times observed that "whereas

39. "The 1929-33 slump brought into prominence the extent to which a large Indian population had settled down here and had lost or was losing connection with India. Previously it was thought that only in Province Wellesley and Krian, home of the old sugar industry, were there many Indians of this description. The reluctance in all parts of Malaya of large numbers of workers to ask for repatriation in 1930-32 came as a surprise." See Labour Department Annual Report, 1938, p. 54.

40. Nehru's advocacy of trade unionism among Indian labourers in Malaya was reiterated in 1938 by Pandit Kunzru of the Indian National Congress and in 1939 by A.K. Gopalan of the All-Indian Trade Union Congress. See Stenson, Industrial Conflict, p. 26.



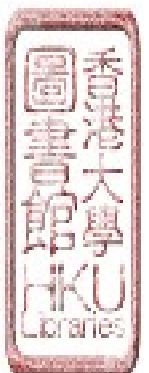
in the past the Indian labourer has lacked any kind of labour organization and has evinced little or no interest in political questions, today there are unmistakable signs of a new striving among the masses, which may prove to be of great significance to the near future."⁴¹

Wage reduction, unemployment and underemployment brought hardships to the labour population, and these hardships were compounded by the fact that the recession was not attended by a corresponding reduction in the cost of living.⁴² Signs of labour discontent were evident in almost all industries affected by wage cuts, and sporadic strikes occurred among rubber estate and tin mining labourers, quarrymen, charcoal burners, diamond cutters, and sawyers. However, the majority of workers affected by wage cuts acquiesced without protest because they were in no position to bargain with their employers. Among the 'defensive' strikes, only the Hong Fatt tin mining labourers and the Singapore diamond cutters managed to achieve some results, the rest were no more than a gesture of protest.

On the Hong Fatt Tin Mines near Kuala Lumpur, the labourers had their wages reduced from 80 cents to 50 cents in three successive wage cuts. The contractors again

41. Straits Times, August 18, 1938.

42. The retail price of Rangoon rice, the staple diet for estate labourers, ranged from 24 cents to 26 cents, the same price level as in 1936. See Labour Department Annual Report, 1938, p. 40.



deducted six cents per man for clerical services and four cents for tea, leaving only 40 cents for each worker.⁴³ A strike involving 4,370 labourers occurred on July 1, 1938. The manager's office was surrounded and a contractor beaten owing to his tactless behaviour. The labourers demanded a return to 80 cents per day, holidays with pay, installation of water taps, and that the tally workers should work at the bottom of the mines instead of at the top. The manager signed the paper with all the demands on it, which, however, was disowned by the Company's Board of Directors. On July 4 the Acting Controller of Labour, the Protector of Chinese, and the Senior Inspector of Mines met the workers' representatives. Negotiation soon produced an agreement, by which tasks would be set so that a labourer would earn 64 cents a day, 11 holidays with a subsistence allowance would be granted each year, and tea money was abolished. The management was also prepared to substitute the contract labour system by direct employment, as the Malayan Collieries had been doing.⁴⁴ The workers observed July 7 as a holiday, and work was resumed on the following day.

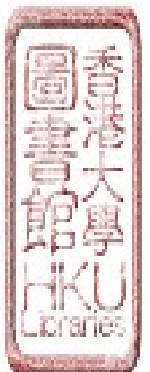
The Straits Times commented on the strike:

"Following the settlement of Hong Fatt strike, the present position of labour in Malaya is being widely discussed today.

Three lessons are drawn from the strike:

43. SCJP, July 2, 1938; Straits Times, July 6, 1938; Labour Department Annual Report, 1938, p. 59.

44. Straits Times, July 6, 1938; Labour Department Annual Report, 1938, p. 59.



One, the contractor system, which has been criticised in the past as victimizing labour through the commissions usually deducted from wages by contractors, has been laid bare once again and, though in practice it is still existent at most centres where the Chinese labour is employed, only a minority contends that it is preferred by the coolie who want advances and credit.

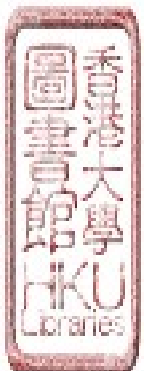
Two, in proposing the reduction of wages, the management of Hong Fatt mine were trying to cover the loss from reduced production under the current tin quota and to preclude similar situations. All companies employing large forces should in better times create wage reserve funds so that wage cuts when profits dwindle are eliminated.

Three, the unorganized labour almost invariably resorts to strike often leading to disorder in order to voice disagreement with employers, terms and negotiations for settlement being hampered by the absence of representatives, who can speak for labourers and have their trust.

This brings one to the conclusion that the Government is open to criticism for delaying the introduction of new labour dispute laws and its intolerant attitude towards trades unions, which would create greater facilities for negotiation with labour bodies."⁴⁵

Not all strikes during the recession were 'defensive'. Strikes for higher wages and better working conditions continued to occur as in previous years. Several factors accounted for this situation. Firstly, the 1938-39 recession was not comparable to the 1929-33 depression, and hence some sections of the economy were not much affected. In those sectors where workers saw fit to strike they might want to remove some long-standing grievances or they might think that a claim for wage increase would ward off possible wage reduction. Among the strikes aiming at better terms

45. Straits Times, July 7, 1938.



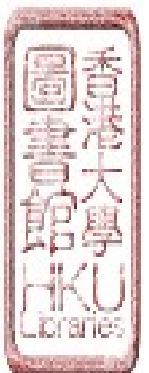
of employment, the Singapore box factory workers, municipal night-soil removers, and stevedores achieved some success, the S.T.C. employees won an arbitration award, while a few others, including the one at the F.M.S. Railways Central Workshops near Kuala Lumpur, ended in defeat.

The strikes at several box factories in Singapore in April and May were caused by poor working conditions. Working day extended to 12 hours, no sick leave or proper medical attention was provided, and workers used to sleep on makeshift beds on factory floors at night.⁴⁶ Owing to the reduction in order from the pineapple canning and rubber packaging industries, the principal buyer of wood boxes, rotation of work was introduced in the factories. Dismissal of six workers triggered off a three-day strike at the Heap Chuan Joo Factory, which employed half of the 400 workers at over 20 box factories in Singapore. The workers managed to obtain an eight-hour day and a slight increase of wages. Strikes at two other factories were settled on the employers conceding the eight-hour to 8½-hour day.⁴⁷

The strike by some 300 Singapore Municipal night-soil disposal labourers was caused by some long-standing grievances. The men were employed on daily rates, which averaged 68 cents and 73 cents respectively for new and old labourers. They

46. SCJP, August 29, 1938.

47. SCJP, April 19, 21, 22, May 21, 23, 1938; Labour Department Annual Report, 1938, p. 57.



complained of inadequate pay, strenuous working conditions, and the confusion as to the distinction between 'new' and 'old' workers. They demanded an increase of daily rates to one dollar, two paid rest-days each month, sick leave with pay, and gratuity for workers with at least five years' experience. During the nine-day strike in July, 1938, prisoners were called out for the disposal of night soil, and some new labourers were recruited. As the men's complaints were found to be reasonable, the Municipal authorities conceded increase of 7 cents in daily rates for both new and old workers, and the fight for gratuities was also partially conceded.⁴⁸

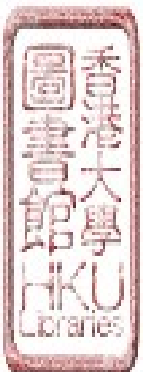
The strike at the Singapore waterfront was likewise owing to some genuine grievances. Some 3,000 labourers employed by the Tanjong Pagar Labour Company were restive over insufficient pay, lack of sick leave and medical attention, and shoddy meals.⁴⁹ After a strike which involved some 900 labourers, the Company granted an increase of 5 cents in daily rates, medical fee and sick leave without pay, and improvement of meals.⁵⁰

The most important of all the strikes was perhaps the Singapore Traction Company strike in Singapore. The greatest complaint of the S.T.C. employees was over the 7½ per cent reduction of pay made during the Great Depression

48. SCJP, July 30, 1938; Labour Department Annual Report, 1938, p. 56.

49. SCJP, August 8, 9, 1938.

50. SCJP, September 10, 22, 1938.



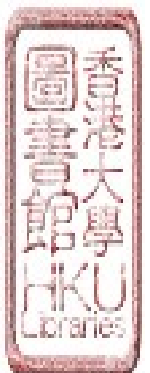
by the Company. They believed the cut unjustified because the Company was earning handsome profits and kept sending money to the Shanghai management at the time.⁵¹ The 1936 collective agreement did not provide for increase in wage rates except for a slight rise in yearly increment. Their claims included increase of maximum and minimum rates, increase of yearly increments, and reimbursement of the 7½ per cent reduction made during the Great Depression, and improvement of working conditions.⁵²

51. Mr. Stone, mediator of the S.T.C. strike, disclosed the balance sheet of the Company, 1929-36, as follows:

Year	Profit & Loss A/C (Profit)	1. Depreciation & Written Off 2. Debenture Redemption	1. Preference Interest 2. Shanghai Management	Arrears of Interest	Divided Ordinary Shares
	£	£	£	£	
1929	51,098	18,000 4,247	14,000 14,000	36,000	nil
1930	57,944	21,000 4,576	16,000 16,000	36,000	nil
1931	51,134	18,000 4,884	14,000 14,000	34,000	nil
1932	40,865	18,000 5,169	8,000 8,000	34,000	nil
1933	29,829	14,000 7,744	4,000 4,000	40,000	nil
1934	25,035	15,500 9,013	nil nil	50,000	nil
1935	54,473	23,500 9,739	nil 11,753	64,000	nil
1936	62,133	20,000 nil	11,752 15,500	debt paid by issue of shares	5%

(Source: Straits Times, July 23, 1938; SCJP, July 23, 1938).

52. SCJP, June 27, 1938.

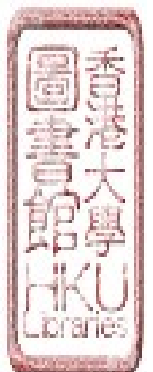


The claims first presented by the S.T.C. Employees' Association were rejected by the Company. The Association was particularly irked by what they considered to be the Company's refusal to recognize them as the workers' representative body, a complaint vigorously denied by the Company.⁵³ With the intervention of the Controller of Labour, negotiations between the Company and the Association were conducted, but no positive result was produced. Mr. Stone, President of the Singapore Rotary Club, who was invited to mediate in the dispute, considered the workers' complaints capable of settlement, some by prompt and accurate submission in writing to their employer, and some by organized reference to a Court of Arbitration.⁵⁴ The Company was inclined to accept arbitration, and the executive committee of the Employees' Association unanimously recommended settlement of the dispute by arbitration. But the Committee seems not to have received support from the rank and file. Not only was the recommendation rejected, but the committee itself was overthrown in a stormy general meeting on July 6.⁵⁵ The strike by some 1,500 S.T.C. employees was called on July 7, beginning with an observance of three minutes' silence in honour of war victims in China.

53. Straits Times, July 8, 1938.

54. Straits Times, July 23, 1938.

55. Straits Times, July 7, 1938; SCJP, July 7, 1938.



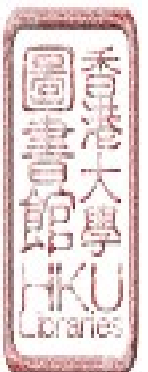
The S.T.C. management was not prepared to make wage concession, which might cause repercussion on the wage structure on the island because wages and working conditions in the S.T.C. were similar to other European concerns in Singapore.⁵⁶ The management rejected the wage claims and ordered the workers to return to work by August 2. The S.T.C. employees showed considerable determination in the strike, and they received ample support from Chinese labour and cultural associations in Singapore and Penang.⁵⁷ The strike revealed the risk of allowing one single company to monopolize the whole city routes. An emergency traffic plan involving the running of Chinese-owned buses and taxis along city routes was organized. Inconvenience soon caused public opinions to mount for the early settlement of the dispute. A joint petition to the Colonial Secretary, which was signed by thirty-four Chinese and Indian associations sympathetic to the strikers, urged the government to set up a neutral body for the settlement of the dispute.⁵⁸ The government and the business community were also anxious to end the strike as soon as possible.

As the strike drew on the workers indicated their willingness to accept arbitration if they were assured of certain conditions. Answering to the Colonial Secretary's suggestion to set up an Arbitration Court, the general meeting

56. See Thompson, Labor Problems, pp. 105-107.

57. SCJP, July 11, 14, 16, 19, 1938.

58. SCJP, July 29, 1938.

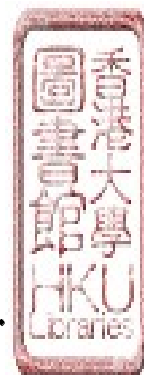


of workers on July 29 raised five demands as preconditions for arbitration: an eight-hour working day, Sunday rest, no dismissal of workers without good reason, free passage for workers of the Rolling Stocks and Workers section, wages during the strike to be paid. The rest of the issues they were prepared to submit to arbitration.⁵⁹ The Colonial Secretary rejected the workers' preconditions, and government pressure was brought to bear soon afterwards when Gurusamy, President of the S.T.C. Employees' Association, was arrested on charges of 'intimidation'. The 46-day strike ended on August 22, when the workers had decided to submit all issues except wages during the strike to an arbitration. The Company's indication of its acceptance of most of the preconditions and the persuasion of Tan Kah Kee, who was invited to be mediator at a later stage of the strike, were instrumental in inducing the workers to submit their case to arbitration.⁶⁰

The Arbitration Court established for the first time in local history was headed by a High Court judge. The Court was not a compulsory one, and the parties to the dispute retained their option either to accept or reject the award. The Arbitration Court award consisted mostly of what the Company had promised during the strike, which included increased increments for starters on monthly pay, weekly rest day with half pay, half-pay sick leave, and

59. SCJP, July 30, 1938.

60. SCJP, July 29, 30, 1938; Straits Times, August 19, 1938.



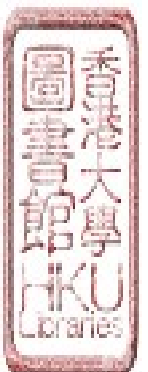
average duty of not more than eight hours a day to include reasonable time for reporting and finishing.⁶¹ The most important claim of the employees, i.e., reimbursement of the 7½ per cent reduction made during the Great Depression, was not granted, but the award made some improvement in the terms of service, and it was accepted by the S.T.C. labour and management alike.

The incidence of industrial disputes in 1938 was greatly reduced as compared with 1937. Most of the strikes occurred in Singapore, where the S.T.C. strike alone accounted for about half of the total man-days lost, whereas the Malayan mainland, which had witnessed widespread unrest in the previous year, became strike-free over large areas.⁶² The Chinese craftsmen, who had played a notable part in industrial disputes from 1934 onwards, were almost completely quiescent. Another feature of industrial disputes in 1938 was that most of the strikes were either lightning protest strikes over wage cuts, non-payment of wages or spontaneous strikes for wage increase.

The first eight months of 1939 continued to be characterized by low incidence of industrial disputes. There were only two major cases, one involving the F.M.S. Railways Central Workshops employees in Selangor and the other the building labourers in Singapore. Indians were the most numerous group among 2,500 workers in the Central

61. Straits Times, August 2, 1938.

62. See Appendix B, Table V, pp. 342-344.



Workshops, and the strike was timed to coincide with the departure of a government delegation to India for discussion on the relaxation of the ban on Indian labour emigration.⁶³

The issue at stake was the new wage schedule introduced by the Railway Department, which reduced the number of grades and gave an annual increment of 4 cents to the artisans.⁶⁴

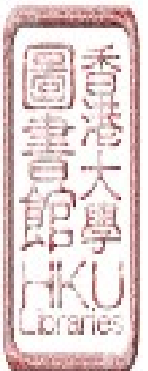
The workers regarded the new schedule unfair, and presented their own claims for annual increment of not less than 16 cents for all grades of workers up to ceiling, annual bonus to be increased from a half month's pay to a full month's pay, daily wages of the lower grade of workers to be raised to one dollar, and holidays with pay.⁶⁵ A notable feature of the strike was sit-down on workshop floors. A four-man delegation was elected to conduct negotiation with the management, who refused to make any concession. There was attempted sabotage, and the workshops were closed after the strikers refused to sign application for voluntary return to work by February 4 as demanded by the Railway authorities.⁶⁶ The strike fizzled out in the end, and the men drifted back to work one after the other. This was their second

63. The Government delegation included the Federal Secretary, the President of the U.P.A.M., the Deputy Controller of Labour and S.N. Veerasamy, the Indian member of the Federal Council.

64. Labour Department Annual Report, 1939, p. 4; SCJP, February 7, 1939.

65. SCJP, February 6, 1939.

66. Labour Department Annual Report, 1939, p. 4; SCJP, January 22, 1939.

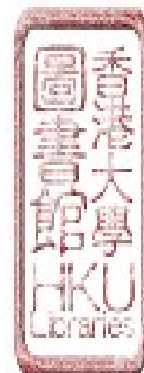


defeat since their unsuccessful strike for higher wages and better working conditions in 1934. The Central Workshops strike bore some resemblance to the 1936 Singapore Municipal strike as a dispute involving a government department and its employees and in the strikers' effort to enlist Indian public support. The strike was attended by an effort to form a workers' association, but the effort was vitiated by craft rivalries rather than racial differences among the artisans.⁶⁷

The general strike by some 4,000 Singapore building labourers in June, 1939, occurred over wage issues, the contract labour system, and long working hours. The economic gains of the 1936 strikes had not been consolidated, and the conditions of building labourers deteriorated in the 1938-39 recession. Inadequate pay, late payment and non-payment of wages, wage deduction, insecurity of employment, and long hours were the perennial complaints of the building labourers. The building industry revived in early 1939 owing to slightly better trading conditions and the housing projects initiated by the Singapore Improvement Trust.⁶⁸ The general strike was called in the wake of a strike at the Seletar Base, where 700 contract labourers obtained a

67. Labour Department Annual Report, 1939, p. 4; SCJP, January 22, 1939.

68. The Singapore Improvement Trust was formed on the recommendation of the Housing Commission of 1918 for the purpose of slum improvement. The Trust came into full operation with the passing of the Singapore Improvement Ordinance in 1927. The S.I.T. housing projects provided mainly low-cost flats for persons dispossessed under an improvement scheme. See Report of the Trade Commission, I, p. 133.



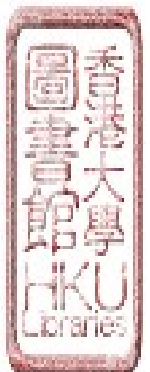
wage settlement. The Building Labourers Mutual Aid Association appeared to be behind the strike. The workers' demands included minimum wages, regular wage payment, an eight-hour day and overtime pay.⁶⁹ The contractors' association was sympathetic and its spokesman Lim Bo Seng suggested the registration of sub-contractors and the abolition of sub-sub-contractors. In the negotiation the contractors' association promised to take responsibility for the settlement of debt owed by its member absconding with wages, enforce eight-hour day, and give a higher rate of overtime pay. The negotiation, however, came to a deadlock over wage issue, and a 11-day strike ensued.⁷⁰ The wage settlement after the strike fixed the minimum wages of male skilled worker, male unskilled worker, and female worker at \$1.30, 88 cents, and 65 cents respectively.⁷¹ The agreement on minimum wages meant that employers were not supposed to pay less than the minimum rates, which would not be altered by changes in construction projects. It was the experience gained in the previous years which convinced the labourers of the need of the minimum wage clause, and its achievement was a major success for the building labourers in Singapore.

Although industrial disputes were reduced in 1938 and the first eight months of 1939, there were other issues which attracted the attention of the workers. The campaign for

69. SCJP, May 23, 1939.

70. SCJP, June 20, 1939.

71. SCJP, June 20, 21, 23, 24, 30, 1939.



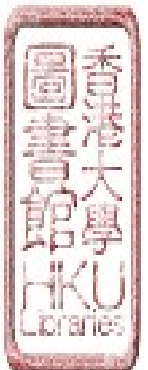
Sunday rest aimed at improving working conditions, and it was supported by public opinions on humanitarian grounds. Labour organizations joined with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and trade guilds to form the Singapore Committee for the promotion of the campaign.⁷² The purpose of the campaign was stated by the Committee as: one, to enable the Chinese to devote more time to the anti-Japanese cause; two, to improve the health of the labourers; and, three, to improve the relationship between the employers and the employees.⁷³ By the end of 1938 the campaign had spread to Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Malacca, Ipoh, and some other towns. The Straits Settlements Association also urged the Chinese shopkeepers to give their employees Sunday rest as a remedy for excessively long hours.⁷⁴

The campaign suffered from a number of weaknesses from the start. Although the campaign was supposed to cover factory workers, workshop artisans and shop assistants alike, it was the shop assistants alone who rendered active support to it. Many factory workers and workshop artisans were employed on daily rates and piece rates, and therefore Sunday rest would mean reduction of their income, a luxury they

72. The labour associations represented in the Committee were the Chinese Clerks' Association, the Tailoring Hong, the Building Workers Mutual Aid Association, the Quarry Workers Mutual Aid Association, the S.T.C. Employees' Association, the Pineapple Workers Mutual Aid Association, and the Newspaper Distributors' Association. See SCJP, February 28, 1938.

73. SCJP, March 22, 1938.

74. SCJP, May 13, 1938.



could ill afford under their conditions of employment. The shoemakers, for example, would not consider Sunday rest desirable unless a special allowance was given.⁷⁵ Many Chinese shopkeepers were very keen on doing business seven days a week, although they might pay lip service to the idea of Sunday rest. They either tended to stay aloof or tried to recoup their losses by extending working hours in week days and by other stratagems.⁷⁶ The campaign failed to reach the Indian shop employees, who also suffered from the worst abuses of long hours. A resolution passed by the South Indian Chamber of Commerce said that "though the shops were open for long hours, there were always surplus employees which enabled the men to work in shifts" and therefore weekly holiday was not necessary.⁷⁷

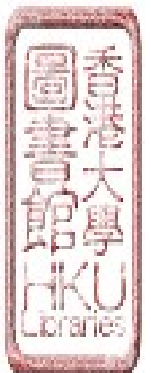
Owing to these inherent weaknesses the campaign achieved limited results. By January, 1939, it was reported that 40 per cent of the Chinese shops in Singapore observed Sunday rest, and one-fourth of those shops observed only half-day rest. In other towns the results were not much better.⁷⁸ The law provided that no labourer need work more than six days a week and nine hours a day, but the law was

75. SCJP, January 25, 1938.

76. It was reported that some shopkeepers opened a small entrance to continue doing business on Sunday, although they declared observance of Sunday rest. See SCJP, January 9, 1939.

77. Straits Times, September 1, 1938.

78. SCJP, January 9, April 23, 29, May 19, 1939.

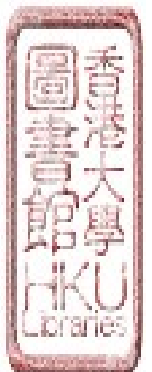


not enforced in regard to urban employees, and the employer who required his men to work seven days a week and thirteen hours a day was likely to continue in the customary abuse without qualms so long as he faced no penalty.

The issue of long working hours had been an issue of industrial disputes rather than one of humanitarian cause. Reduction of working hours was a recurring demand of industrial workers, and it was generally obtained through collective bargaining. Shop assistants, being scattered and unorganized, were the least able to obtain reduction of hours through collective bargaining as the industrial workers had done. As the campaign for Sunday rest was under way, some efforts were made to reduce long hours on Chinese shops, but the result was as yet very limited. An unofficial member of the Selangor State Council suggested government legislation to enforce reduction of working hours because employers were reluctant to reduce hours of their own accord.⁷⁹ But legal sanction for Sunday rest and reduction of hours had never been incorporated into law before the Japanese occupation.

The concern for betterment of economic conditions was overshadowed by the commitment to the anti-Japanese cause among the Chinese labourers during the 1938-39 recession. Malaya was the scene of the intensest anti-Japanese campaign conducted by the Chinese population in Southeast Asia. The campaign involved the Chinese entrepreneurs, merchants,

79. SGJP, December 9, 1938.



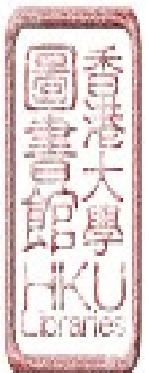
students, down to the labourers, who played a very prominent part in almost all aspects of the campaign.

The boycott of Japanese goods had a long history in Malaya. It first occurred as a reaction to China's humiliation at the Versailles Conference in 1919 and recurred time and again during the twenties and early thirties. The height of the boycott was reached in 1938. The boycott took the form of joint refusal to buy or sell Japanese goods, accompanied by coercion and physical violence to those marked down as 'Chinese traitors'. Boycott of Japanese building materials led to several work stoppages at construction sites in Singapore and Johore.⁸⁰ The boycott added a hard blow to Japanese exports to Malaya in addition to the imposition of the textiles import quota in 1934.⁸¹ Japanese imports into Malaya in 1939 had been reduced by about 75 per cent in a period of two years of intense boycott.⁸²

80. SCJP, February 10, 26, April 29, 1939.

81. The Importation of Textiles (Quotas) Ordinance, 1934, aimed at curbing Malaya's import of Japanese textiles, which had rapidly increased at the expense of British textiles. The percentage of textiles imports from the United Kingdom and Japan was 17.7% and 68.1% in 1933 and 33.30% and 46.32% in 1936. See Gull, British Economic Interests, p. 153.

82. Virginia Thompson, "Japan Frozen out of British Malaya", Far Eastern Survey, X, 20, October 20, 1941, 240.



Most of the Japanese investment in Malaya, which totalled 85 million yen in 1938,⁸³ was concentrated in iron mines. The Malayan iron ores were exported to feed the Japanese industrial-military complex, and hence became an obvious target of disruption. Mass resignation of Chinese labourers hit the Nippon Mining Company in Dungun, Trengganu, the mines owned by the Ishihara Sanggyo Koshi in Trengganu and Johore, and the Tunangan mine in Kelantan.⁸⁴ Some 300 Japanese fishermen in Singapore were sent to the Dungun mines to be trained as mining labourers in addition to the newly recruited Indians.⁸⁵ The Indian National Congress sent a message to Indian labourers in Malaya, urging them to boycott 'the manufacture of bombs and munitions'.⁸⁶ The message was effective in inducing the Indian labourers at the Dungun mines to resign.⁸⁷

Malaya's contribution to the China Relief Fund was reported at 105,007,194 yuan from July, 1937 to December, 1940, topping the list of contributions from overseas Chinese.⁸⁸

83. Gull, British Economic Interests, p. 223.

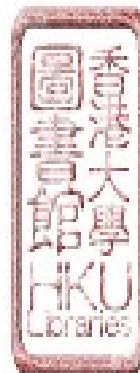
84. SCJP, February 1, 10, 11, March 13, April 20, 27, May 31, 1938.

85. Virginia Thompson, "Malayan Iron Ore for Japan", Far Eastern Survey, X, 11, June 16, 1941, 130-131.

86. British Malaya, April, 1938, p. 303.

87. SCJP, April 1, 1938.

88. Malayan contribution to the Relief Fund amounted to 19,577,194 yuan from July, 1937 to October, 1938, and 85,430,000 yuan from November, 1938 to December, 1940. In 1938 the exchange rate was 30 Straits dollars to 100 yuan, but the yuan was devalued by 50 per cent in 1939. See Tan, Nan-Chiao Hui-I Lu, pp. 312-313.



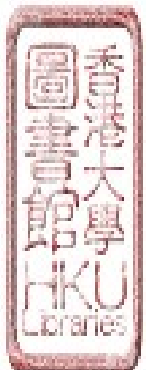
Most of the money was collected from the Chinese traders and labourers. The regular donation from the labourers was either deducted from their wages by their employer under a common understanding or collected by the labourers themselves. How far the large sum of overseas Chinese contribution was effective in aiding China's war effort, however, remains an open question. One is tempted to suspect much of the Relief Fund might have gone to line the pockets of corrupt officials before they were turned into something tangible for the front or the war victims. Another direct contribution to China's war effort was made by some 3,000 truck drivers and mechanics, who volunteered to man the Burma-Yunnan Highway and the Yunnan-Hanoi-Haiphong Road, two important arteries of supply from the Allied powers.⁸⁹

The intense anti-Japanese campaign among the Malayan Chinese was viewed with uneasiness by the colonial authorities. After the occurrence of two demonstrations organized by the Communists in January, 1938, in Singapore, the government banned all street processions and meetings without police permit and clamped down on several underground anti-Japanese organizations.⁹⁰ Over a thousand demonstrators again came out on streets in June to protest against Japanese bombing of South China ports.⁹¹ Large-scale riots broke

89. Ibid., p. 85; Sing-Chou Shih-Nien (Singapore, 1939), pp. 994-995.

90. Yoji Akashi, The Nanyang Chinese National Salvation Movement 1937-1941 (Kansas, 1970), pp. 22-23.

91. SCJP, June 27, 1938.

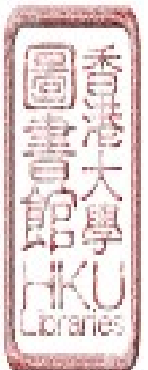


out in Penang on July 3, 1938, over a consignment of soya beans imported from Japanese-occupied territories in China. The riots were put down three days later by the authorities after a number of shops were gutted and scores of rioters arrested.⁹² On August 22, 1938, immediately after the S.T.C. strike was over, a minor 'hartal' occurred in Singapore. Chinese shops in the city area were closed and some 3,000 building labourers and 7,000 rickshaw pullers staged a lightning strike. The 'hartal' was a protest against the arrest and subsequent banishment of two Chinese newspapermen, who had been actively engaged in the anti-Japanese agitation.⁹³

The anti-Japanese campaign had a significant impact on the political orientation of the Chinese labourers. Both the Kuomintang and the C.C.P. were making effort to win over the overseas Chinese, although the two parties had been working together against the Japanese at the time. The Kuomintang influence was disseminated through its Consulate, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee, the Overseas Party Affairs Department, and some local Chinese associations, but its influence hardly reached the grass-roots level. The prestige of the C.C.P. was, on the contrary, steadily enhanced through the war period in proportion to its military success against the Japanese. A number of labour donations

92. Akashi, National Salvation Movement, p. 26.

93. Wang Yen Chih and Chan Wen Hua, the two newspapermen, were believed to be important cadres of underground anti-Japanese organizations. See SCJP, August 22, 23, 1938; Akashi, National Salvation Movement, p. 27.

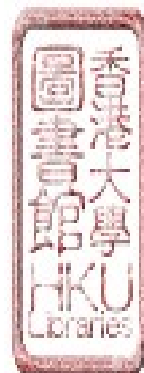


were made specifically to the 8th Route Army led by the C.C.P., and this was acknowledged by Chou En Lai in a message sent to Singapore on August 13, 1938.⁹⁴ The M.C.P. also increased its influence through its active promotion of the campaign and penetration into various anti-Japanese organizations. Hence the anti-Japanese campaign was instrumental in veering the political orientation of the Chinese labourers somewhat further to the left.

The anti-Japanese campaign also influenced the state of organized labour. Apart from the growing tendency among labourers to form their own associations, the campaign ushered in a proliferation of China Relief Sub-Committees among the Chinese labourers. The China Relief Sub-Committees in particular industries and trades formed the ground level of the Malayan branch of the Nanyang Chinese General Relief Association, which was formed on October 10, 1938, in Singapore by various regional Relief Associations in Southeast Asia.⁹⁵ The top leadership of the N.C.G.R.A. was composed almost entirely of prominent Chinese entrepreneurs, merchants, and traders, but at the ground level the M.C.P. was active in running the affairs of the China Relief Sub-Committees. These China Relief Sub-Committees became a vehicle for political propaganda, anti-Japanese activities, and a convenient instrument of labour organization and agitation. Apart from

94. SCJP, August 18, 1938.

95. Altogether 164 delegates representing 45 regional Relief Associations in Southeast Asia participated in the First Conference of the N.C.G.R.A. Tan Kah Kee was elected president of the N.C.G.R.A. See Tan, Nan-Ch'iao Hui-I Lu, p. 55.

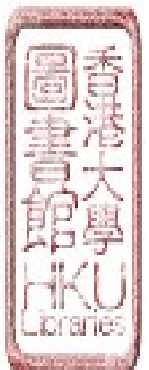


the China Relief Associations and Sub-Committees, there were illegal organizations such as the Anti-Enemy Backing-Up Association,⁹⁶ the Corps for the Eradication of Traitors, the National Liberation Vanguard Corps, which actively promoted the anti-Japanese campaign. The upshot was that an increasing number of Chinese labourers came into the fold of political organizations.

The anti-Japanese campaign made an impact on industrial relations in quite another way. Out of the common effort to promote the campaign emerged the idea of employer-employee cooperation among the Chinese. The Singapore building labourers, for example, suggested that in view of the Chinese national resistance against the Japanese, the Chinese employers and employees should avoid unnecessary disputes and enhance their cooperation on the principle of mutual accommodation and assistance.⁹⁷ The principle had an economic rationale apart from its political consideration. The Chinese industries were weak and insecure in the aftermath of the Great Depression. In contrast to the early decades of the twentieth century replete with the success stories of the Chinese nouveau riche rising from the ranks of labourers, the thirties were renowned for numerous failures in the Chinese enterprise. Harmonious industrial relations were thus considered a prime necessity for the regeneration of the

96. The A.E.B.U.A. was probably modelled after the Shanghai Anti-Enemy Rear Auxiliary Association, which was formed after the outbreak of the Shanghai battle in August, 1937. See Israel Epstein, Notes on Labor Problems in Nationalist China (New York, 1949), p. 78.

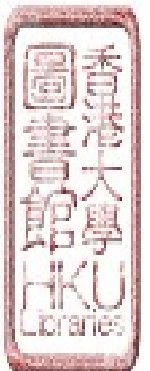
97. SCJP, May 23, 1939.



Chinese capital. Tan Kah Kee stressed the vulnerability of the Chinese capital as well as the imperative of China Relief in making a plea to the Chinese labourers to be moderate.⁹⁸

In concrete terms 'employer-employee cooperation' meant the Chinese employer should be sympathetic to reasonable claims and the labourers should approach their employer with restraint, and that disputes should be settled through conciliation in a spirit of mutual accommodation. However, the translation of this idea into reality always posed practical difficulties because of conflict of interests. Both the Chinese employer and his employees tended to think the other side should be more accommodating. Nevertheless the common acceptance of the principle of cooperation itself was conducive to more readiness on both sides to disentangle issues through conciliation. Even in the worst instance of disputes, the principle of employer-employee cooperation was nonetheless operative. It provided a standard by which the Chinese community judged both parties to the dispute and consequently brought the pressure of public opinions to bear on either side. The Singapore rickshaw pullers' strike was a case in point. The rickshaw pullers were not, strictly speaking, wage labourers in the proper sense of the term, but the dispute acquired all the trappings of an industrial dispute. The rickshaw pullers belonged to a

98. Tan Kah Kee, "Yu Lao-Tzu-Ch'u-Fen Tan-Tao Pen-Po Hua-Ch'iao Kung-Yeh", SCJP, July 30, 1938.



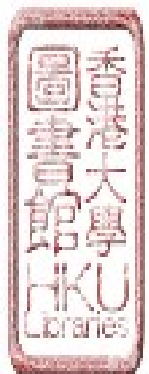
decayed trade facing government's tighter control of license issue and the competition of buses, taxis and trishaws. Their number had fallen from 30,000 in the early twenties to about 7,000 in 1938. They paid a daily rent of 40 cents to rickshaw owners, who were organized in the Rickshaw Owners' Association.⁹⁹ The strike, which occurred in October and November, 1938, was caused by a claim for reduction of the daily rent to 32 cents. In the course of the 41-day strike, a score of rickshaws were thrown into a canal, the property of a rickshaw owner was damaged, and two thousand men were repatriated on their own request at government expense.¹⁰⁰ The Chinese press considered the dispute an unfortunate exposure of the weakness of the Chinese community, and that it should be settled in a peaceful way in a time of national difficulties.¹⁰¹ Under the pressure of public opinions and the mediation of community leaders, an agreement was finally concluded. The daily rent was reduced to 33 cents, and some of the remaining points of dispute were submitted to arbitration by community leaders.¹⁰² A statement was issued in the name of rickshaw pullers to the effect that they accepted arbitration as well as the agreement in a spirit of

99. SCJP, November 6, 1938.

100. SCJP, October 9, 11, November 2, 1938.

101. SCJP, October 10, 1938.

102. SCJP, November 14, 1938.



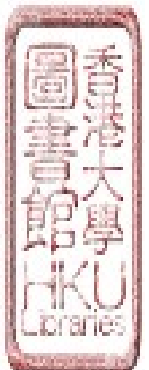
reconciliation for the sake of the Resistance War.¹⁰³

The heavy commitment of the Chinese labourers to the anti-Japanese cause tended to conceal a subtle, imperceptible change in the mentality of the Chinese immigrant labourers. Beneath their feeling of racial and cultural affinity towards China was a growing sense of identification with Malaya. Underlying the growing sense of Malayan identity was the change of the Chinese population into a more permanent settled community. Immigration restriction and the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War had already reduced the free flow of immigration. The sex ratio among the Chinese community was improved with the migrational gain of 190,000 Chinese female deck passengers from 1934 to 1938.¹⁰⁴ The majority of these female immigrants entered the rubber estates, tin mines, the building industry, and factories, making a conspicuous change in the sexual composition of the Chinese labour force. The emergence of squatter settlements in town areas, near estates and mines, was no doubt due to the increase of working-class families. As the Chinese labourers came into daily contact with other races and grapple with local economic, political and social issues, they also came to regard Malaya as their 'second homeland'.

The stridency of the anti-Japanese campaign also tended to conceal another strand in labour politics. Anti-colonialism

103. Ibid.

104. Blythe, Chinese Labour in Malaya, pp. 29-30.



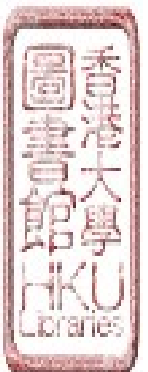
was a potent undercurrent through the years of labour unrest. It imparted political overtones to some of the strikes and demonstrations. A conflict occurred on May Day, 1938. A mass demonstration was planned to take place on the day. On May Day's eve the premises of the Singapore Chinese Building Workers Mutual Aid Association, where workers gathered to finalise their plan, were raided by the police and 120 workers were rounded up.¹⁰⁵ The demonstration nevertheless took place on May Day. Hundreds of youths marched through the streets, waving banners and chanting anti-colonialist, anti-Japanese slogans, and they dispersed before the police arrived. The police raid and the arrest of workers led to several protest strikes on the following day.¹⁰⁶

The outbreak of the European War on September 3, 1939, marked a new turn in labour unrest in Malaya. The immediate effect of the war was soaring prices of daily necessities.¹⁰⁷ The rise in the cost of living made sizable inroads into the purchasing power of the labourers, which had already been reduced by wage cuts among a broad section of labourers in the 1938-39 recession. On the other hand, the war put an end to the recession and brought in its train an economic

105. SCJP, May 2, 1938.

106. SCJP, May 2, 3, 4, 1938.

107. After the outbreak of the European War the local cost of living had risen from 10 to 25 per cent by mid-October, 1939. See Thompson, Postmortem, pp. 271-272.

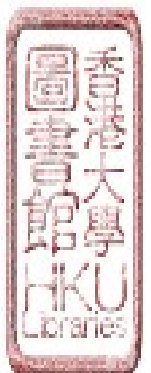


boom stimulated by wartime demands. Rubber and tin prices soared and their quotas were immediately raised, and other industries and trades also shared in the boom. The large unemployed labour force was re-absorbed, and government relief came to an end. The tightness of labour supply, accentuated by the ban on assisted Indian emigration and the difficulties of Chinese emigration owing to Japanese control of China ports, meant the labourers were again in for a more propitious time for collective bargaining.

The European War was looked upon by the Comintern as a war between two imperialist blocks scrambling for world hegemony. According to Leninist doctrine, it was the task of the proletariat in the imperialist countries to defeat and overthrow the government of their own country rather than take side in the war. The M.C.P., probably acting on the Comintern line, stepped up its anti-British, anti-imperialist, anti-war propaganda after the outbreak of the European War.¹⁰⁸ The G.L.U. also actively carried out this line among the labourers.

A rash of industrial disputes erupted in Singapore immediately after the outbreak of the European War. The Labour Department said that "the procedure in almost all cases was the same. A list of demands was presented giving a one to three days' time limit for acceptance. The expiry of the time limit or non-acceptance of all demands led to

108. Annual Report of the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Malaya, 1939, p. 9; Charles B. McLane, Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia (Princeton, 1966), pp. 242-245.

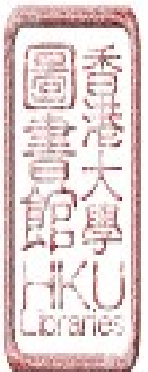


a strike which usually lasted from two days to two or three weeks. The list of demands usually started with a request for increase of wages by 20 to 30 per cent, and finished up with another that there should be no dismissal without good reason. Other frequent demands were for an eight-hour day, Sunday holiday and full pay sick leave."¹⁰⁹ In some cases the wage increase demanded by the workers was as high as 50 per cent. Most of the strikes were lightning strikes or lasted no more than a few days. The disputes were settled as much through conciliation as through strikes. That means the employers were generally ready to make concession to the labourers.

The result was a general rise in nominal wages and some improvement of working conditions for a broad section of the Singapore workers. The average wage increase ranged from 10 per cent to 30 per cent. The building labourers, for example, obtained a 10 per cent increase on the minimum wage rates obtained in 1938, the sago factory workers obtained a 30 per cent wage increase, and the shoemakers obtained a 15-20 per cent increase in piece rates and a 5-25 per cent increase in monthly rates.¹¹⁰ Reduction of hours, sick leave with pay and medical care, and improvement of meals were provided in some cases, and labour compensation clause was included in many of the agreements.

109. Labour Department Annual Report, 1939, p. 3.

110. SCJP, October 30, November 1, December 4, 28, 1939.



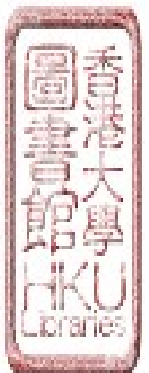
Considerable restiveness also existed among labourers in other parts of Malaya. In the rubber industry the U.P.A.M. restored the daily wages for Indian male and female labourers to 50 cents and 40 cents as from October 1, and individual planters also restored the wages of Chinese labourers to the 1937 rates.¹¹¹ Although wages had returned to the 1937 rates, the cost of living was considerably higher than in 1937, and this meant a reduction of real wages as compared with 1937. This was hardly justified when the rubber companies were reaping no mean profits as a result of wartime boom. A few work stoppages at Bahau, Negri Sembilan, were associated with claims for higher wages,¹¹² and the simmering discontent was to lead to greater unrest in the following years in the rubber industry. In the tin mining industry European and Chinese tin miners initially increased wage rates by 10 per cent, which hardly restored the wage cuts made in 1938 and were inadequate to meet the rising cost of living. The strike at the British-owned Sungei Besi Tin Mines in Selangor over a claim for 40 per cent wage increase became a crucial test case. The strike settlement provided for 20 per cent increase on wage rates prior to the outbreak of the European War.¹¹³ This percentage of wage increase was subsequently conceded by European and Chinese tin miners in Perak and Selangor.¹¹⁴

111. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, p. 215; SCJP, December 18, 1939.

112. SCJP, December 18, 1939.

113. SCJP, December 12, 1939.

114. SCJP, December 18, 1939.

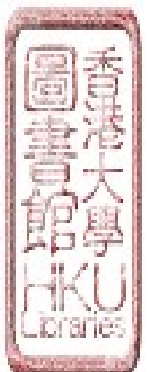


The government took a very serious view of the strike by some 4,700 labourers at the Malayan Collieries in early December. The labourers demanded a 50 per cent increase of wages, whereas the management was initially prepared to give an extra \$1.05 a month as wartime allowance, but it refused to incorporate the increase into the wage rates, because wartime allowance could be easily withdrawn when conditions returned to normal. The workers also demanded the abolition of the sliding scale of wages pegged to coal prices, which was introduced in July, 1938.¹¹⁵ During the five-day strike, police force was despatched to the area, and the government sternly warned that it would not tolerate the disruption of such an essential service as coal mining. But the strike was settled without eruption of violence. The collective agreement provided for a 15 per cent increase in wage rates and the abolition of the sliding scale of wages besides other improvements. One of the important results of the strike was the setting up of the grievance procedure. The management indicated it was willing to discuss with labour representatives on the settlement of grievances, and the procedure of grievance settlement was set out in detail.¹¹⁶

Skilled workers and general labourers employed by government departments, statutory bodies and the armed forces

115. SCJP, December 6, 1939.

116. SCJP, December 12, 1939.



received a cost-of-living allowance from November 11, 1939. The allowance changed on a monthly basis in accordance with the fluctuations in the labourers' cost-of-living budget.¹¹⁷ The allowance given compared very unfavourably with the wage increase granted by Chinese employers in Singapore.¹¹⁸ Complaints were made that the allowance was inadequate and that the labourers with higher wages were given higher allowance than those receiving lower wages, who were in greater need of assistance.¹¹⁹ The inadequacy of the allowance was not due to financial stringency of the government. In the period between World War I and the European War, Malayan gifts to the cost of Imperial Defence amounted to £20,000,000.¹²⁰ Much of the accumulated assets were derived from indirect taxes, which were borne largely by the lower classes. The government could have been more liberal in giving the cost-of-living

117. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, p. 216; SCJP, December 1, 1939.

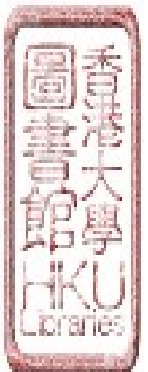
118. The cost-of-living allowance given to Singapore P.W.D. labourers, for example, constituted not more than 5 per cent of their wages.

Daily Rates	Monthly Earning	Monthly Cost-of-Living Allowance
not more than \$1.00	not more than \$30.00	\$1.00
\$1.00+ to \$2.00	not more than \$60.00	\$1.50
over \$2.00	over \$60.00	\$2.00

(Source: SCJP, December 1, 1939).

119. SCJP, December 1, 1939.

120. E. Jago, "Malaya and the Economic War", The Asiatic Review, XXXVI, 1940, 136.



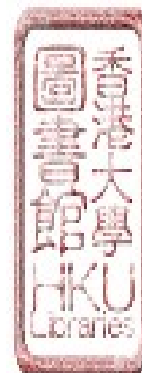
allowance to its employees.

Under the Emergency Defence Regulations, 1939, the government exerted more stringent control over the labour situation. Various emergency schemes which had been devised before the outbreak of the war were brought into operation. A number of industries and services, including transport, gas, water, electricity and municipal services, were declared Essential Services. Employees in the Essential Services were debarred from strikes, and anyone who joined in a strike was liable to be prosecuted. Newspapers were subjected to censorship.¹²¹ Besides, the Banishment Ordinance and the Sedition Ordinance of 1938 could be readily invoked. In December, a leading Chinese, who was active both in the N.C.G.R.A. and labour arbitration, was ordered to leave Singapore on the grounds that he was endeavouring to get the N.C.G.R.A. and the Communist-led A.E.B.U.A. in a common front.¹²² Under the circumstances workers who continued to strive for the improvement of their livelihood might have to do so at a higher cost.

In spite of the economic recession there was an unusual upsurge of labour organizations during 1938-39.

121. SCJP, September 3, 1939.

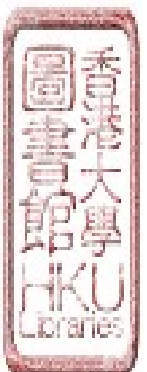
122. Hau Sai Huan was sub-manager of the Asian Insurance Company Ltd. and a right-hand man of Tan Kah Kee. As an important official in the N.C.G.R.A., he was heavily involved in the arbitration of labour disputes among the Chinese. On December 30, the day of his departure, he was seen off at the civil airport by thousands of Chinese labourers. See Tan, Nan-Ch'iao Hui-I Lu, pp. 90-92; SCJP, December 29, 1939; Annual Report of the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Malaya, 1939, p. 13.



The process of unionization begun in the previous years gained momentum instead of being thwarted by wage cuts and unemployment as the workers came to understand the importance of organization for the defence of their interests. Altogether forty-six new labour associations were formed in Malaya during the two years.¹²³ These new labour associations included rubber factory workers, oil-mill workers, sawmill workers, waterfront labourers, rickshaw pullers, commercial employees, goldsmiths, silversmiths, tinsmiths, laundrymen, piling workers, female servants, printing employees, quarrymen, building labourers, and transport workers. In Singapore there was a continual trend for some new labour associations to supplant the older trade guilds or craftsmen's guilds. The Singapore Chinese Goldsmiths' and Silversmiths' Association, the Restaurant Workers Mutual Help Association, the Rattan Workers Mutual Help Association, and the Laundrymen's Mutual Help Association, for example, were formed although these trades had been covered by guilds. The Singapore Rubber Workers' Association was one of those more radical labour associations under the influence of the G.L.U. Singapore remained the most active centre of organized labour, but the process of unionization was also evident in Penang and the Malay States. A few of the new associations were purely Indian labour associations.¹²⁴

123. See Appendix C, Table III, p. 380.

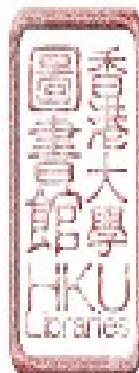
124. See Appendix C, Table I, pp. 364-378.



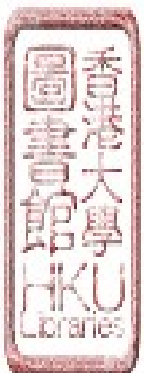
The growth of organized labour and the resurgence of labour unrest after the outbreak of the European War hastened the Malayan Governments' deliberation on the introduction of new labour legislation. The Trade Unions Bill, which provided for the registration and control of trade unions, and the Industrial Courts Bill were introduced during the year. In moving the first reading of the Trade Unions Bill in the Legislative Council in Singapore, the Attorney-General said, "... it is hoped by means of this legislation to foster the right kind of responsible leadership amongst workers and at the same time to discourage or reduce such influence as the professional agitators may have had, and to reduce the opportunities or the excuse for the activities for such persons. By providing a legitimate channel of communication between workers and employers, and ultimately with the Government, it should be possible to eliminate, or at least quickly reduce, costly and wasteful strikes."¹²⁵ It appeared the new legislation was intended primarily to curb labour agitation and reduce industrial conflict.

The important achievement of labour during 1938-39 was not in the economic sphere. The trend of wage increase since 1934 was checked by the recession, and a sizable portion of the labour force suffered a setback in their terms of employment. The rash of strikes after the outbreak of the European War was a response to drastic increase of prices,

125. Proceedings of the Legislative Council, Straits Settlements, December 11, 1939, p. B 141.



and it is doubtful whether wages rose as rapidly as prices. It was precisely at this difficult time that labour made great strides in organization and became more politically conscious, and this was more important for the interests of labour in the long run.



Chapter V

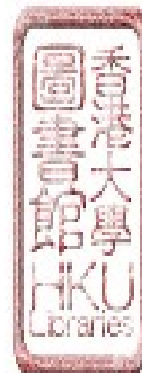
WARTIME LABOUR UNREST, 1940-1941

British wartime policy in colonial dependencies was set out in detail in a circular instruction sent by Lord Lloyd, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to colonial governments in June, 1940. The instruction reads:

"In the economic sphere the general aim of policy should be to bring to the maximum the positive contribution of the colonies to the immediate war effort in the way of supplies, and to reduce to a minimum their demand on resources in men, material and money which are or might be made available to this country or overseas. In particular:

- (a) Colonies which produce raw materials of importance to the war effort, including of course those sold for 'hard' currencies, should aim at maintenance and increase of production at whatever level may be indicated from time to time as being that necessitated by Allied requirements. It will be appreciated that owing to ever changing circumstances the optimum level of production of individual commodities for war purposes may alter rapidly.
- (b) Most colonies can give substantial assistance by refraining from making demands for non-essential imports of every kind from sterling or from non-sterling sources but especially of imports involving the use of iron and steel unless they are required for production in the immediate future of material of essential wartime value to this country.
- (c) The maximum development of production of foodstuffs to meet local demands for consumption should continue to be vigorously pursued.
- (d) It may no longer be possible for markets or shipping to be provided to the same extent as formerly for colonial commodities which are not of the first degree of importance to the United Kingdom."¹

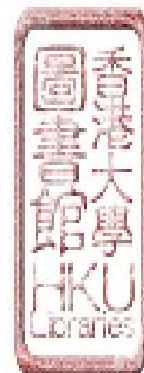
1. Circular Telegram No. 82, dated June 5, 1940, by Lord Lloyd, Secretary of State for the Colonies. See "Wartime Policy in British Colonial Dependencies", International Labour Review, XLIII, 3, March, 1941, 302.



In sum, the economy of the colonial dependencies was geared to the wartime needs of Great Britain, which claimed priority over local needs. The vast resources of the British Empire were given over to the struggle to win the war against Germany. The part assigned to Malaya in this imperial scheme was primarily what came to be known in newspaper parlance as the 'dollar arsenal', earning foreign exchange for Britain through full production of rubber and tin. It was only towards the latter half of 1941 that Malaya's military role in imperial defence began to receive greater attention. The Singapore Naval Base, which was proposed in 1921 and completed on the eve of the Japanese invasion in 1941, held the gateway to the Pacific and was supposed to protect India, Australia, and New Zealand from aggression. Its place in the imperial strategy remained, however, uncertain because from its very inception it had been overclouded by issues of party politics. It was opposed by the British Labour Party on grounds of pacifism and finance, and it was not provided with a fleet until the last days of 1941.²

Full production of rubber and tin was virtually ensured by the high prices engendered by wartime demands and unusually high quotas set by international restriction

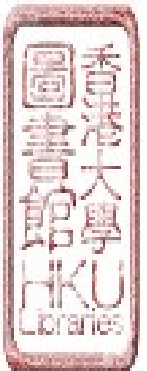
2. See C. Northcote Parkinson, Britain in the Far East: The Singapore Naval Base (Singapore, 1955), pp. 19-35.



scheme.³ Rubber planters and tin miners had never had it so good, but part of their profits went to augment the British war coffers. Apart from the $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent ad valorem duty on rubber and tin exports imposed by the Malayan Governments in December, 1939, rubber and tin mining companies registered in London had to pay a 100 per cent excess profits tax.⁴ The British Government as well as the rubber planters and tin miners in Malaya had a common interest in keeping cost of production low enough to ensure high returns. On the advice of the government the larger estates in Malaya issued rice from their own accumulated stocks on cost price after the outbreak of the war, but the measure was inadequate to offset the rising cost of living of estate labourers. The rubber planters, aware of the strategic importance of the industry and the support rendered by the government, adopted an intransigent attitude towards the claim for higher wages. Neither were the Malayan Governments prepared to concede to the Indian Government's oft-repeated request for raising Indian wages in Malaya. By the end of 1940 Indian

3. The releases of rubber in 1940 were first and second quarters 80 per cent, third quarter 85 per cent, fourth quarter 90 per cent; in 1941 the rates for rubber releases were 100 per cent for the first three quarters and 120 per cent for the fourth quarter. The international export quotas of tin in 1940 were 120 per cent for the first quarter, 80 per cent for the second quarter, and 130 per cent for the third and fourth quarters. The export quotas were 130 per cent for the four quarters of 1941. See Labour Department Annual Report, 1940, p. 1; Baur, The Rubber Industry, p. 383; Knorr, Tin Under Control, Table XIII, p. 307.

4. Thompson, Postmortem, pp. 168, 170-171.



male and female estate labourers were paid 50 cents and 40 cents daily, the rates obtained in 1937, although the monthly cost of living of the Indian labourer had increased by about 24 per cent from the end of 1939 to the end of 1940.⁵ The cost-of-living allowance, which was raised from 5 cents per day in January, 1941, to 10 cents in April, 1941, was not commensurate with the rising prices of daily necessities.⁶ Both the rubber and tin industries were declared 'essential services' in June, 1940.⁷ Full production at boom prices plus the lowering of real wages enabled the rubber and tin mining interests to reap handsome profits. In spite of the excess profits tax, shareholders of the British-registered rubber companies still managed to receive dividends in 1940 comparable to the amount in 1937.⁸ According to a conservative estimate, the rubber and tin industries made an addition of more than \$150,000,000 to Malaya's national income in the first year of the war.⁹ Immensely successful from the point of view of the war economy, the gains were nevertheless made at the price of

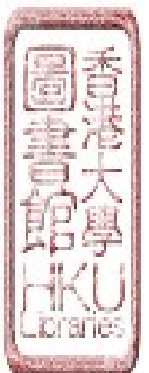
5. Labour Department Annual Report, 1940, p. 9.

6. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 216-220.

7. Stenson, Industrial Conflict, p. 48.

8. The average dividend per ordinary share of British rubber companies in 1940 was 4.4 per cent as compared with 4.8 per cent in 1937. See Knorr, World Rubber, Table 10, p. 144.

9. Thompson, Postmortem, p. 169.



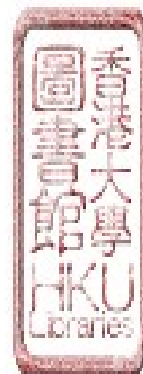
strained industrial relations.

The Trade-with-the-Enemy Act introduced early in the war made it an offence to trade with Germany, whose share in the total foreign trade of Malaya was less than 2 per cent before the outbreak of the war.¹⁰ As a measure designed to reduce non-essential imports of every kind, the restriction of imports of a wide range of goods from non-sterling countries had far greater consequences on the trade patterns and the livelihood of the population of Malaya. The shortage of supplies caused by the restrictions was not adequately filled by British imports because from the middle of 1940 onwards the British official policy was to reduce exports of non-essential goods.¹¹ The result was soaring prices of daily necessities. The absence of price control on imported and local manufactured articles encouraged war profiteering and exacerbated inflation. Matches and piece goods, for example, had risen by 500 per cent and 150 per cent respectively in two years of war.¹² As regards food production, in spite of the instruction on the 'maximum development of production of foodstuffs to meet local demands', no effective measures had really been taken to alter Malaya's reliance on imported rice before the

10. Alvin Barber, "British Malaya on a War Footing", Far Eastern Survey, IX, 1, January 3, 1940, 1-5.

11. Jago, "Malaya and the Economic War", 134-136.

12. Thompson, Postmortem, pp. 276-277.



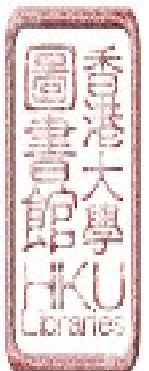
Japanese invasion. The government relied principally on food control laws and official regulation of rice imports to check rising prices of foodstuffs. The Food Controller, assisted by advisory committees, fixed from time to time the prices of such essential foodstuffs as rice, sugar, milk, salt, flour and meat. Violation of food control laws was liable to rigorous imprisonment and fines.¹³ The import of rice, which was a traditional Chinese business, was now transferred to a few government-appointed firms, with dire consequences for the Chinese rice dealers. Besides, stocks of rice, sugar, and flour were built up in government warehouses in order to stabilize the market.¹⁴ The combined effect of the growing shortage of Thai rice and profiteering led to steady increase of prices of rice in 1940 and 1941, although rice prices would have risen much higher without these rice control measures.¹⁵ The continuous increase of the cost of living lay at the bottom of much of the wage claims in 1940 and 1941.

The policy of reducing the purchase of non-essential colonial commodities dealt a hard blow to the Malayan pineapple

13. Jago, "Malaya and the Economic War", 134-136.

14. Thompson, Postmortem, pp. 271-272; Victor Purcell, "Malaya's War Effort", The Asiatic Review, XXXVI, 1941, 754-755.

15. "The price of No. 2 Thailand rice was fixed by the Food Controller on 1st January, 1940, at 33 cents a gantang in the Federated Malay States. At the end of the year the price was 45 cents. Burma rice rose in the same period from 33 to 40½ cents a gantang." See Labour Department Annual Report, 1940, p. 9.



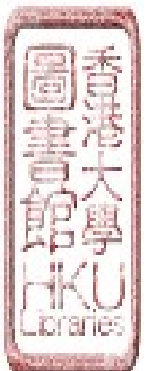
industry, which normally exported 80 per cent of its products to the United Kingdom. In March 1940 the decision made by the Ministry of Supply to stop the purchase of Malayan canned pineapples caused almost all the factories to halt production. A shot in the arm was given by renewed British order in October, but the revival of the industry was short-lived owing to the acute shortage of shipping space in 1940 and 1941. By May, 1941, most of the factories had been closed down.¹⁶ The freezing of Japanese assets in Malaya in July, 1941, was followed by the closing down of all Japanese-owned mines three months later.¹⁷ Unemployed labourers in these industries were, however, absorbed by the construction of defence works towards the latter half of 1941.

Labour shortage began to appear towards the latter part of 1940. Full production of rubber and tin, public construction of defence works and replanting of rubber absorbed an increasing number of labourers. Higher wages afforded in the war construction works induced workers on tin mines and waterfront to seek more remunerative employment in the construction industry.¹⁸ Rubber plantations began

16. SCJP, October 3, 8, 1940; May 9, September 11, 1941.

17. Thompson, "Japan Frozen out of British Malaya", 237-240; SCJP, September, 13, 1941.

18. SCJP, June 13, 16, 1941; Malaya Tribune, November 20, 1941.

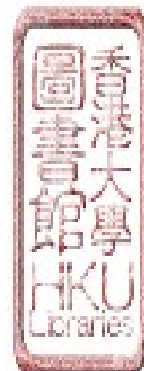


to feel the pinch of tight labour supply.¹⁹ A Penang member of the Legislative Council suggested that the government should help resolve the problem of labour shortage through negotiation with the Indian Government on lifting the ban on Indian labour emigration to Malaya, relaxation of quota restriction on Chinese immigrants, and importation of Javanese labourers.²⁰ In fact, the Malayan Governments had already approached the Indian Government on the issue of Indian emigration, but the negotiations produced no tangible results. The Chinese business community were generally in favour of relaxation of quota restriction on Chinese immigration. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Singapore, Penang, and Perak petitioned the government to increase the monthly quota of Chinese immigrants.²¹ However, the government was not in favour of more Chinese immigrants for the following reasons: firstly, as Malaya was able to supply only 37 per cent of its domestic consumption of rice, more Chinese immigrants would accentuate the already acute food problem; secondly, more Chinese immigrants would tend to create security problems, especially in wartime situations;

19. The sudden increase of rubber replanting by the London-registered companies in 1940 and 1941 withdrew much labour from tapping. As replanting expenditure was allowed as a charge against taxable profits, the sudden increase of replanting was a reaction against the 100% excess profit tax. See Baur, The Rubber Industry, pp. 161-164.

20. SCJP, June 9, 1941.

21. SCJP, June 19, July 9, 29, 1941.

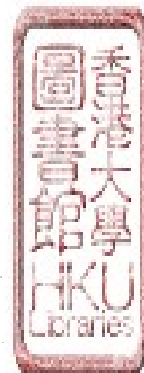


thirdly, it would create difficulties in the dispersion of population in the event of outbreak of war in Malaya.²² Political considerations regarding Chinese labour with their propensity for industrial disputes seemed to be the primary reason for rejecting the proposal. The importation of Javanese labourers, however, was looked upon favourably by the government. The Javanese blended easily with the indigenous Malay race and were amenable to discipline at rubber plantations; there was over-population in Java, and the Dutch authorities were co-operative. An increasing number of Javanese labourers were recruited by employers through private recruiting firms in Java. The legislation extending the Indian Immigration Fund to include the importation of Javanese labourers was enacted in late 1941 but had not been brought into force owing to the Japanese invasion.²³ Had the legislation been enforced for any considerable period of time, the racial composition of Malayan labour force might have been altered in favour of the Malay-Indonesian race.

Initial steps towards reorganizing labour administration in Malaya were taken to meet the changing situations. Over the years there had been discussions of the reorganization of the Labour Department to deal more effectively with labour problems. The Secretary of State proposed as early

22. The answer made by the Colonial Secretary to the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce. See SCJP, August 9, 1941.

23. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, p. 112.



as 1937 that the function of supervision over Chinese labour be transferred from the Chinese Protectorate to the Labour Department, but this proposal was opposed on the grounds that it might seriously weaken the Chinese Protectorate.²⁴ In 1940 a special committee appointed by the Singapore Chamber of Commerce again suggested the labour office of the Chinese Protectorate be amalgamated into one centralized Department of Labour.²⁵ The first step in this direction was taken by the government with the appointment of a Deputy Controller of Labour, Chinese, in Kuala Lumpur and the creation of four positions of Inspectors of Labour filled by Chinese in 1940.²⁶ Major Orde Browne, Labour Adviser to the Secretary of State, who made a study tour in Ceylon, Mauritius, and Malaya in 1941, considered the amalgamation in the form of one Department to deal with all labour questions desirable.²⁷ His report was not published until 1943, but his recommendation laid the foundation for centralized labour administration in post-war Malaya.

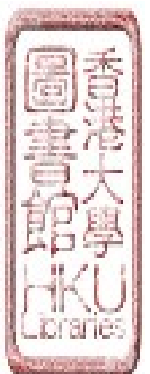
Against the background of growing international tension and the various wartime control measures introduced in Malaya, labourers in almost all industries strove to maintain or improve their standard of living. They saw

24. Ibid., p. 135.

25. SCJP, November 3, 1940.

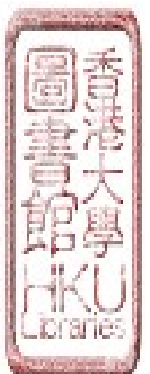
26. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, pp. 136-137.

27. Browne, Labour Conditions, p. 110.



whatever wage gains they had made in the past, if fortunate enough not to have been reduced during the 1938-39 recession, evaporated in inflation, their purchasing power was reduced and their position deteriorated. The labourers could scarcely understand why they should be made to share the war burden of the metropolitan country. The attempt to prevent the deterioration of living conditions underlined most of the labour disputes since the outbreak of the European war.

Wages remained the greatest single issue of industrial disputes in 1940 and 1941. The workers demanded as high as 40-50 per cent wage increase, which represented the target figure aiming at a positive improvement of real wages, but they generally came to settle down at a lower rate of increase in negotiation with their employers. In the majority of cases the workers succeeded in obtaining 10-30 per cent increase in daily, monthly, or piece rates. Wage increases as a result of collective bargaining were granted mostly by Chinese employers, whereas the European employers and government departments stuck generally to the cost-of-living allowance. Dissatisfaction with the inadequate cost-of-living allowance was the cause leading to a number of strikes in European-owned concerns and government departments, but the labourers were almost invariably defeated. With effect from July 1, 1941, a Supplementary Allowance was added to the cost-of-living allowance for



government-employed labourers.²⁸ It was not until then that Chinese labourers who had already gained wage increases began to demand wartime allowance. Major Orde Browne endorsed the policy of granting special allowance instead of raising wage rates because there was no doubt that the allowance was to be revoked once conditions returned to normal.²⁹ The uniform wage policy of the government and the European employers introduced rigidity into wage negotiations, in which any claim for wage increase was generally turned down. The Chinese employers by and large did not adhere to the government's wage policy. The concession made by them generally took the form of higher wage rates rather than the cost-of-living allowance.

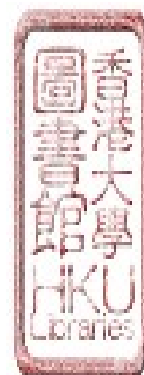
The reform in regard to weekly rest-day gained wider acceptance in the Chinese trading community on the basis of limited results in 1938 and 1939. Some 10,000 shop assistants on about 2,000 sundry shops benefited from the decision of the Sundry Goods Hong and three other trade guilds to enforce half-day rest on Sunday. The original

28. Monthly cost-of-living Allowance and Supplementary Allowance for government-employed general labourers, skilled workers and clerks in September, 1941, in Singapore:

Daily Wages	Cost-of-living Allowance	Supplementary Allowance
not more than \$1.00	\$3.50	\$1.60
1.00+ to \$1.50	\$4.50	\$1.85
1.50+ to \$2.00	\$4.65	\$2.05
over \$2.00	\$5.20	\$2.25

(Source: SCJP, September 4, 1941).

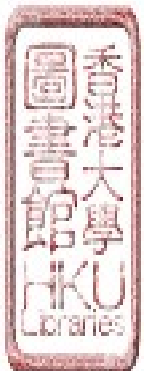
29. SCJP, July 24, 1941.



decision of the trade guilds were for whole-day rest on Sunday, but the decision met with opposition from quite a large number of shopkeepers.³⁰ Some moderate results were reported in other towns. In Penang half-day rest was given to sundry shop assistants.³¹ In Kuala Lumpur weekly rest-day was given to shop assistants in a number of trades.³² Restaurant owners in Ipoh and Taiping accepted the request for rest on Sunday.³³ In Seremban many Chinese shops were reported to be closed on Sunday.³⁴ A draft bill was drawn up by the Malayan Governments in 1941 to sanction a weekly holiday and a maximum of nine hours for shop assistants, but the bill had not been passed before the Japanese invasion.³⁵

One of the demands constantly raised since the outbreak of the European war was for labour insurance. The Controller of Labour seemed to misunderstand the demand for labour insurance as labour compensation in general when he said "curiously a frequent demand was for the bringing into force of Workmen's Compensation. In no case did enquiry show that the men alleged that there had been cases where

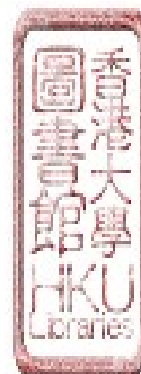
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30. SCJP, June 18, 20, September 13, 20, 1941.
 31. SCJP, November 5, 1940.
 32. SCJP, September 4, 1940.
 33. SCJP, September 5, 1940; April 28, May 19, 1941.
 34. SCJP, June 4, 1940.
 35. SCJP, April 9, 1941.



compensation had not been paid."³⁶ Labour insurance was developed after the coming into force of the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance, 1933. Employers were obliged to pay compensation to workers for personal injury by accidents on pain of penalty. Provisions under the law were so complicated that no ordinary employer could cope with it without the aid of specially trained personnel or legal institution. The Workmen's Compensation Insurance Association of Malaya, which comprised mostly European insurance companies in Malaya, was formed to underwrite insurance for the employers' liability. Once an employer took an insurance policy from an insurance company in the Association, his liability was transferred to the insurance company. The larger employers in Malaya had come to accept labour insurance, but most of the smaller employers remained indifferent or even unaware of the existence of the Labour Compensation Ordinance.³⁷ Accidents in Chinese-owned factories and workshops were thus productive of controversy and disputes. The popular demand for labour insurance put more Chinese employers on the labour insurance scheme. The question of wartime labour insurance cropped up in the latter half of 1941 because the labour insurance scheme did not cover losses, injuries or deaths caused by war. The Workmen's Compensation Insurance Association proposed a scheme similar to Britain's wartime labour insurance scheme,

36. Labour Department Annual Report, 1939, pp. 3-4.

37. Sing-Chou Shih-Nien, pp. 557-560.



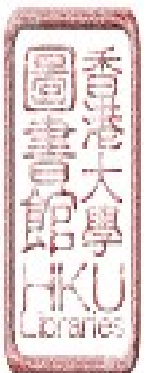
which was financed by the state. The proposal was supported by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce but received no response from the government.³⁸

A notable feature of industrial disputes in 1940 and 1941 was the part played by new labour associations in the process of collective bargaining. Some of them were bold and confident, some hesitant and vacillating, and some had no following among labourers. The Singapore Chinese Hairdressers' Association, which brought together the Cantonese, Hokkienese, Kheh, Hailam, Henghua and Hokchiu hairdressers, won almost all their claims after a one-week strike.³⁹ The most important result was the adoption of a uniform tribute system of wage payment in the Chinese hairdressing trade in Singapore. Before the strike only the Cantonese hairdressers worked on tribute, receiving 40 per cent of the total earning, while the rest of the hairdressers worked on monthly wages. Since monthly wages compared unfavourably with the tribute system in terms of workers' income, the general demand was for a uniform tribute system on the basis of equal share with the employer. The achievement of this claim laid the foundation for further improvement of wages in the post-war period, when the hairdressers' share was successively raised to 60 per cent and 70 per cent.⁴⁰ The

38. SCJP, May 11, 1941.

39. SCJP, January 10, 11, 12, 1940.

40. Fu-Chou-Jen Yü Li-Fa-Yeh, pp. 35-37, 57-61.



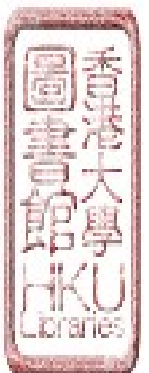
Singapore Lightermen's Association and the Chinese and Western Drug-Shop Employees Mutual Aid Association concluded collective agreements after strenuous negotiation with their employers. Trouble in the Singapore lighterage industry began when government control of rice imports from Siam, Burma and Java was imposed. Boustead & Company and Harper Gilfilan became sole importers of rice to the exclusion of the Chinese rice dealers. Transport of rice from the roads came largely into the control of an Indian lighterage firm, which engaged Chinese lighters at lower rates. The lightermen's wages were reduced by about 25 per cent.⁴¹ The Association made representations to the Chinese Protectorate and even intended to petition the Governor.⁴² The officers of the Lightermen's Association were assisted by 300 representatives from various waterfront gangs to carry on negotiations.⁴³ The dispute was settled after the formation of a new Lighterage Company by the Lighterage Kung Kek, which took over the bulk of the rice transport business. A new collective agreement was signed between the Association and the new Company.⁴⁴ The Chinese and Western Drug-Shop Employees Mutual Aid Association, which represented 2,000 Chinese medicine shop assistants, carried on a difficult and long-drawn negotiation with their

41. SCJP, December 19, 1940.

42. SCJP, May 13, 1941.

43. SCJP, April 29, 30, May 14, 20, 1941.

44. SCJP, May 28, 1941.



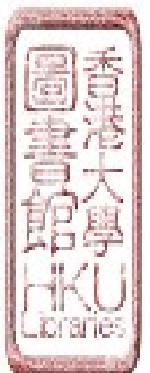
employers' association. Two elders from the Kheh community were invited to be mediators in the dispute. The employers, who insisted the labour representatives should withdraw all their claims before negotiation could start, so infuriated the mediators that one of them resigned. Instead of striking the whole trade, the Association decided to strike the firms owned by four important officers of the employers' association. The result was an agreement concluded with concession from both sides.⁴⁵

The Singapore Sawmill Workers' Association came to perform trade union function hesitantly when 1,500 sawmill labourers demanded a 30 per cent wage increase. Instead of representing the labourers in collective bargaining, the Association seemed to be content in playing the role of a mediator at the initial stage. A meeting of over 40 representatives from 12 sawmills was held at the Association's premises to elect seven representatives as negotiators.⁴⁶ The President of the Association chose to attend the negotiation as an 'observer'. The employers, who had apparently sensed the ridiculous situation, called upon the Association to discharge its duty as the representative body of the labourers. A collective agreement incorporating wage increase was finally signed between the Association and the employers and ratified by all sawmill labour representatives.⁴⁷

45. SCJP, May 9, 23, 24, 26, 28, 30, 31, June 2, 1941.

46. SCJP, April 10, 1941.

47. SCJP, April 11, 12, 17, 22, 1941.



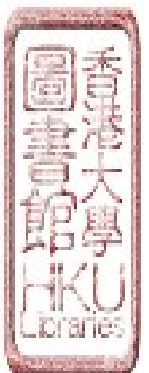
Both the Singapore Chinese Laundrymen's Mutual Aid Association and the Batu Arang Labour Association provided examples of weak inexperienced leadership who enjoyed no support from the rank and file. When the Laundrymen's Association had failed to obtain concession from their employers' association for their claims, the Association seemed to stall instead of giving a clear direction to the workers. The Association was asked to vacate its position as the workers' representative body, and subsequent events developed largely out of its control. The 2,000 laundrymen started a strike, organized picket groups making the round of some 300 laundries, and managed to obtain concession from their employers.⁴⁸ At the Malayan Collieries negotiation between the Batu Arang Labour Association and the management in March, 1941, broke down over the men's claim for 10-50 per cent wage increase as against the management's offer of 7½ per cent.⁴⁹ When a strike by about 5,000 coal miners had started, the Labour Association persuaded the labourers to end the strike on the management's terms. The strike was broken by a lock-out enforced under police protection.⁵⁰

Another important feature of industrial disputes in 1940 and 1941 was the increasing proportion of dispute

48. SCJP, March 19, 29, April 25, 26, 28, May 2, 3, 11, 15, 16, 1940.

49. SCJP, March 21, 1941.

50. SCJP, April 8, 10, 16, 17, 1941.



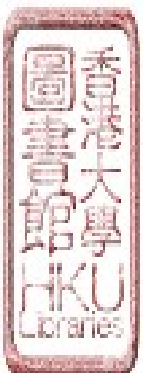
settlement without strike. Collective agreements incorporating wage increases and other improvements were concluded in negotiations between employers and employees in a number of industries and trades.⁵¹ Almost all cases of amicable settlement of dispute were confined to Chinese-owned business firms and industrial concerns. It may be suggested that better relations between the Chinese employers and employees were the principal factor responsible for this result. The rash of strikes in the few months after September, 1939, had put Chinese employer-employee relations under considerable strain, but the situation improved in 1940 and 1941. Although strikes were still frequent in 1940, the principle of 'employer-employee cooperation' again reasserted itself. The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce appealed to the Chinese labourers to avoid strikes for the sake of China Relief, Anglo-Chinese friendship, and the interests of the Chinese community as a whole.⁵² A Conciliation Committee comprising members from different dialect groups in the Board of Directors was formed to resolve labour disputes.⁵³ The Committee did a useful work in the cases presented to it for conciliation.⁵⁴ The bitter industrial relations in the pineapple industry were

51. See Appendix B, Tables VIII, X, pp. 355-357, 361-362.

52. SCJP, January 13, 1940.

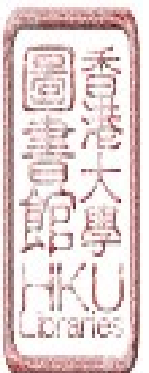
53. SCJP, January 12, 1940.

54. SCJP, January 8, 9, 12, 16, 17, 19, February 6, 1940.



an exception to the general picture of improved industrial relations among the Chinese. Another factor which contributed to the amicable settlement of disputes was the increased experience of the labourers. They had probably come to realize the strike weapon was not to be employed light-heartedly and that claims could be settled in many cases by means other than strike.

The somewhat incongruous labour conditions in 1940-41 was the ensemble of mutually conflicting factors and tendencies. A combination of shortage of labour and a drastic rise in the cost of living would mean costlier labour in normal circumstances. However, this did not lead to corresponding wage increase in the European sector. Both the private European employers and the Malayan Governments shared a determination to maximize capital returns from Malaya for the benefit of the British wartime economy. Rigid wage rates not reflective of economic trends could be imposed by putting down any serious challenge from labour. Factors conducive to wage increase were thus largely offset in the European sector owing to countervailing factors. In the Chinese sector the wage movement was more consonant with economic trends because shortage of labour, rising cost of living, better industrial relations and more effective collective bargaining on the part of labour combined to push up wage rates. However, the general picture of improvement in the Chinese sector was punctured by a few depressed spots. In those trades which suffered from



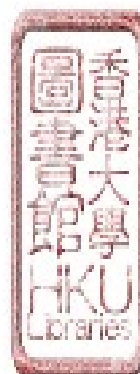
wartime restrictions, e.g., the canned pineapple industry and for a time the rice import trade, labour conditions deteriorated.

Labour unrest in 1940-41 had largely developed beyond the confines of purely economic issues as wages and hours. The M.C.P. stepped up its anti-British, anti-war agitation 'in order to smash the general offensive launched by British imperialism'.⁵⁵ Some of the actions were launched by the G.L.U. with this specific political objective in view. Some strikes were called in protest against the deprivation of civil rights and the suppression of organized labour, and hence became politically oriented. Even a strike arising out of purely economic grievances might develop beyond the pale of employer-employee relations to become a headlong confrontation between labour and the state, and thus acquired strong political overtones.

The G.L.U. started a major political strike at Singapore dockyards in January, 1940, to disrupt British shipping. The immediate issue was the demand for an increase of 32 cents in daily wages in addition to the cost-of-living allowance already granted to the dockyard artisans.⁵⁶ Electricity supply and the repair of British warships in the Keppel Harbour and Tanjong Pagar dockyards were disrupted. The government did not hesitate to invoke the Emergency

55. According to the Party's official history issued in 1940. See McLane, Soviet Strategies, pp. 242-243.

56. SCJP, January 13, 1940; Labour Department Annual Report, 1940, p. 5.

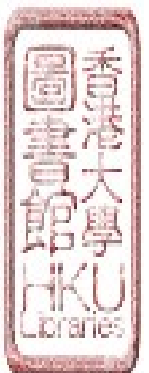


Regulations to arrest eleven of the strikers.⁵⁷ The S.H.B. authorities were not prepared to concede to the wage claim because the artisans' wages compared favourably to those in other trades. The strike was led by the G.L.U., while the 1,500 artisans on strike were members of the Kee Hee Hong.⁵⁸ How many workers were simultaneously members of the G.L.U. is not known, but the G.L.U. seemed to have sufficient following, especially among the younger workers and apprentices, not only to turn out the whole labour force on the dockyards on strike but to overrule the advice of the Kee Hee Hong. The S.H.B. authorities initially tried to approach the Kee Hee Hong for an end of the strike, but the attempt was frustrated by the men's rejection of Kee Hee Hong's representation.⁵⁹ This rejection must have come as a bitter shock to the Kee Hee Hong because their representation had never been questioned in previous disputes. The rivalry between the G.L.U. and the Kee Hee Hong was saturated with animosity on both sides. The G.L.U. denounced the Kee Hee

57. SCJP, January 16, 19, 1940.

58. The Kee Hee Hong was formed on a craft basis and included fitters, turners, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, pattern-makers, plumbers, welders, draughtsmen and qualified engineers in different industries. The Singapore Kee Hee Hong was formed in 1929, much later than the Kee Hee Hong in Perak; in 1940-41 it had a membership of 7,000 engineering mechanics. The Kee Hee Hong maintained close links with similar organizations in Canton and Hong Kong. In 1930 a central committee was formed to co-ordinate the Kee Hee Hong in various parts of Malaya. See Gamba, Trade Unionism in Malaya, p. 5; SCJP, April 30, July 22, 1941.

59. SCJP, January 16, 1940.



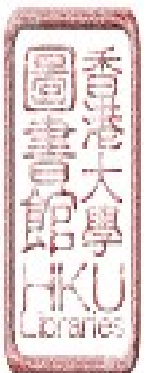
Hong as a 'yellow union', while the latter bitterly attacked the former for its 'venomous plot'.⁶⁰

The strike would have ended with a fair measure of success had the G.L.U. not committed a tactical mistake. On March 6, A.B. Jordan, Secretary for Chinese Affairs, suggested that negotiation between the artisans and the S.H.B. authorities would start immediately if the men promised to resume work on March 11, and whatever outstanding issues left unsettled in the negotiation would be submitted to him for arbitration.⁶¹ The labour spokesmen, who were chosen from among the artisans, accepted the suggestion during the interview, but came back later in the day turning it down apparently on the G.L.U.'s advice. When over a thousand artisans and their families staged a demonstration in front of the Chinese Protectorate on March 9, urging the release of the arrested workers and immediate negotiation with the S.H.B. authorities, strike weariness had already been manifest among the artisans.⁶² Division soon emerged between the older artisans, who wanted an end to the strike, and the younger workers and apprentices. Chinese public opinions had also turned against the strike. Sin Chew Jit Poh, an influential Chinese-language newspaper, came out with an editorial, which criticized the strike as detrimental to

60. SGJP, April 4, 1940.

61. SCJP, March 8, 1940.

62. SCJP, March 10, 1940.



Anglo-Chinese relations and British aid to China.⁶³ On March 27 the decision to resume work on S.H.B.'s vague promise to investigate individual cases and remedy grievances was taken by secret ballot in a general meeting. The decision was supported by the majority of artisans but opposed by about 300 apprentices.⁶⁴ Had the suggestion of the Secretary for Chinese Affairs been accepted earlier, division within the rank and file would have been avoided and some economic gains might have been secured.

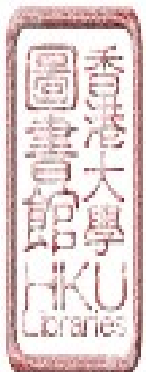
When the Singapore dockyard strike was drawing to an end, another strike which also seems to have involved the G.L.U. occurred at the Sungei Besi Tin Mines in Selangor. Some 1,200 labourers went on a one-week strike over the dismissal of two labourers on grounds of neglect of duty.⁶⁵ "Barbed wire entanglements were prepared at the Kongsis by the labourers and a stock of changkol-handles laid ready for use. The leaders issued written instructions for resisting the police and detaining the Protector of Chinese should he go to the mine."⁶⁶ When the police searched the kongsi houses, a large number of anti-British, anti-war documents were discovered. The 'head of the organization' was reported to have escaped, but ten Chinese labourers

63. SCJP, March 8, 1940.

64. SCJP, March 27, 28, 1940; Straits Times, March 27, 1940; Labour Department Annual Report, 1940, p. 5.

65. Straits Times, March 26, 1940.

66. Labour Department Annual Report, 1940, p. 6. A changkol is a hoe.



were arrested on the allegation of being members of an unlawful organization, the name of which was not disclosed.⁶⁷ The whole labour force was paid off but most of them were subsequently re-engaged.⁶⁸

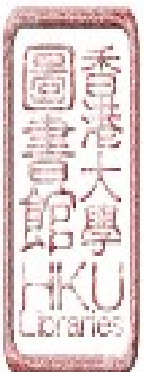
Thousands of labourers turned out on Singapore streets on May Day, 1940, in the biggest labour demonstration ever taking place. For one whole week before May Day, handbills and pamphlets were distributed or sent by post, posters appeared on lamp-posts and walls all over the city, calling upon labourers to celebrate the International Labour Day.⁶⁹ The demonstration was apparently organized by the G.L.U. In spite of the government's severe warning in advance, the demonstration took place as scheduled. Some ten thousand workers were reported to be abstained from work, celebrating May Day as a holiday.⁷⁰ In the morning workers collected at factories and construction sites in several parts of the island, trying to converge on the Kallang area in the city to attend a mass rally. Heavy police deployment stopped the processions of labourers on various points and prevented lorry-loads of workers in the outskirts from entering the city area. But 2,000 labourers soon gathered in the Kallang area, where they sang songs and listened to speeches. When

67. Strait Times, March 26, 1940; SCJP, March 27, 1940.

68. Strait Times, March 26, 1940; SCJP, March 26, 1940.

69. SCJP, April 30, 1940.

70. SCJP, May 2, 1940.



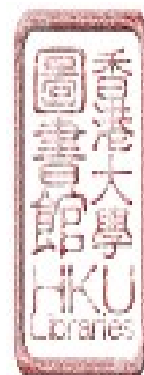
the crowd had been dispersed by the police, they formed themselves into a procession marching towards the junction of Syed Alwi Street and Rochore Canal Road, where serious clashes with the police occurred. In the mêlée two labourers were shot dead and a number of labourers and policemen were wounded.⁷¹

In other parts of Malaya, May Day was celebrated in a less tumultuous way except in Johore, where an employer's refusal to allow his labourers to celebrate May Day as a holiday precipitated a general strike in the Malayan pineapple industry. The depressed conditions of the industry had already made its industrial relations the worst of all Chinese industries. When pineapple workers in Singapore and Johore came out on strike in early 1940 for a 20 per cent wage increase, secret society thugs were engaged by employers as strike-breakers and a number of workers, including Goh Keng Hong, vice-president of the Singapore Pineapple Workers Mutual Aid Association, were arrested by the police. But eventually the workers obtained a 10 per cent wage increase.⁷² When the workers at the Johore pineapple factory started a protest strike on May Day, a number of workers were assaulted by thugs and some arrested.⁷³ This incident set off a general strike of pineapple factory workers in Singapore and Johore, who demanded the release of the workers arrested and medical

71. SCJP, May 2, 1940.

72. SCJP, January 8, February 2, 6, 1940; "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 14.

73. SCJP, May 12, 30, June 13, 1940; "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 14.



treatment and compensation for the workers wounded at the Johore factory, with the addition of some minor claims.⁷⁴ At a Singapore factory about 100 workers were rounded up by troops when they gathered in the factory canteen awaiting negotiation with their employer.⁷⁵ On June 14 some 3,000 labourers from pineapple factories and plantations gathered in front of the Chinese Protectorate in Johore Bahru. The gathering continued until the fourth day when it was dispersed by the police.⁷⁶ The labourers in prison conducted a hunger strike, but most of them were subsequently deported under Banishment Warrants.⁷⁷ The Singapore Pineapple Workers' Mutual Aid Association was de-registered after the strike in a general crack down on the G.L.U.⁷⁸ The backbone of organized labour in the pineapple industry was broken for the rest of the period. However, some of the younger workers who had gone through those turbulent years were destined to play an important part in post-war trade unionism.⁷⁹

74. Ibid.

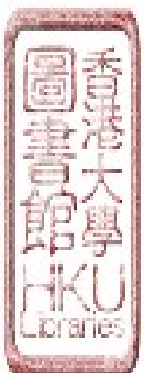
75. SCJP, May 29, June 4, 1940; "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 14.

76. SCJP, June 18, 1940.

77. "Kung-Lien-Hui Chien-Shih", p. 14.

78. Ibid., Labour Department Annual Report, 1940, p. 5.

79. Lim Chin Kok, one of the younger workers who had gone through the strikes and disturbances in the pineapple industry in the period 1936-1941, became President of the Singapore Factory and Shop Workers' Union and President of Malayan Pineapple Workers' Union in 1956. See "Pu-Ch'ü-Ti Kung-Jen Chan-Shih - Lim Chin Kok", Chendera Mata, p. 7.

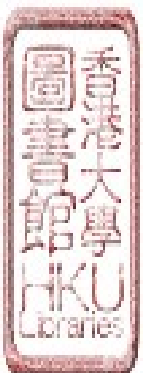


Crack-down on the G.L.U. immediately followed the pineapple workers' strike. The rubber milling and rubber goods factories in Singapore, where the Rubber Workers' Association had been formed, were considered a stronghold of the G.L.U. A series of raids was carried out at the rubber factories and many workers marked down as agitators of the G.L.U. were arrested. At the Tai Tong Rubber Factory, the workers had started a strike over the dismissal of a woman labourer. They occupied the factory, held political meetings and conducted physical drills in uniforms every day, apparently under the influence of the anti-Japanese campaign. On June 11, when a police force arrived at the factory in an attempt to arrest twenty-six workers on Banishment Warrants, they were met with violent resistance. Club-wielding and slogan-chanting labourers came out to meet the police, but they were soon subdued and eighty-one labourers arrested.⁸⁰ On the following day a protest strike involving 4,000 labourers in the rubber industry took place.⁸¹ New arrests were made at the Firestone Rubber Factory and Nanyang Rubber Factory, and the Singapore Rubber Workers' Association was de-registered.⁸² The influence of the G.L.U. also seemed to have extended to the military bases as seventeen Hailam waiters in Changi Barracks were arrested on the

80. SCJP, June 14, 15, 18, July 26, 27, 30, 1940.

81. SCJP, June 14, 15, 18, 1940.

82. SCJP, June 20, 22, 24, 30, 1940; Labour Department Annual Report, 1940, p. 5.



allegation of being members of the G.L.U., but they were acquitted by the court because of inadequate evidence.⁸³ These rigorous actions clipped the power of the G.L.U., but they did not strike to the bottom nor did they lead to disruption of its organization. The G.L.U. managed to recoup its losses and probably even increased its strength towards the latter half of 1941.

Another major strike which involved the G.L.U. in some indirect way was the Chinese rubber estate labourers' strike in December, 1940, in the Bahau-Rompin area of Negri Sembilan. Dissatisfaction with the rubber planters' tardiness in granting higher wages led to disputes on Bahau estates as early as May, 1940.⁸⁴ Before the December strike Chinese estate labourers in the Bahau-Rompin area had formed the Negri Sembilan Rubber Tung Yip Mutual Aid Association with its centre at Bahau.⁸⁵ The Labour Department revealed that the strike was led by a 'committee of labourers' in contact with the G.L.U.⁸⁶ Whether the 'committee of labourers' was in fact the Rubber Tung Yip Mutual Aid Association is not known. The workers, who were paid a daily rate of 85 cents plus 4 cents a lb. for scrap, demanded a daily rate of \$1.10 for a task of 350-400 trees.⁸⁷ On the Ladang Geddes Estate

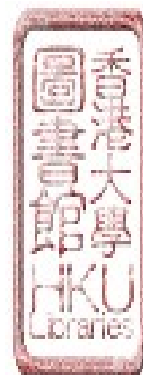
83. SCJP, August 15, 28, 1940.

84. SCJP, May 4, 1940.

85. SCJP, August 30, 1940.

86. Labour Department Annual Report, 1940, p. 5.

87. Ibid., p. 6.



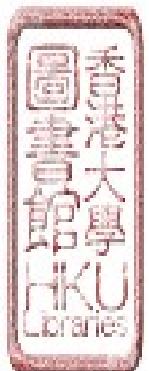
1,250 Chinese tappers were dissatisfied with the offer of 95 cents daily rate and started the strike. Labourers on other estates in the area soon joined in the strike, which came to involve about 3,000 labourers.⁸⁸ Riot broke out on the Ladang Geddes Estate on December 31 when the police carried out an arrest order. One of the labourers arrested was prosecuted for assisting in the management of an 'unlawful society', which might either be the Mutual Aid Association or the G.L.U.⁸⁹ Most of the labourers drifted back to work on the offer of the management before the strike.⁹⁰

Political strike was by no means confined to the Chinese labourers alone. The big strike of the Indian estate labourers in May, 1941, was economic in its origin but it was turned into a political strike as a reaction against the suppression of burgeoning trade unionism among the Indian estate labourers. By 1940 the Indian estate labourers had been feeling their way towards the need of improving their social and economic status through organization. Their discontent in 1940 and 1941 was accentuated by the wage issues. The call of leading Indian nationalists to get the Indian labourers in Malaya organized had sunk into their minds. Propinquity with the Chinese labourers might also have

88. These estates included the Bahau Estate belonging to the Dunlop group, Sungei Sebaling Estate, and Tanah Merah Estate. See SCJP, December 27, 31, 1940; Malaya Tribune, December 30, 1940.

89. Straits Times, January 3, 1941.

90. SCJP, January 8, 1941; Straits Times, December 31, January 3, 1941.

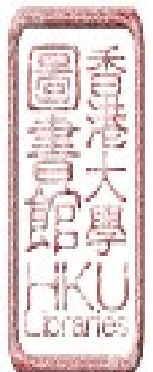


influenced their attitudes. Indian nationalism, entering into an anti-war, non-cooperative phase, was extending its influence among the labourers through the media of Tamil newspapers, estate teachers, and other educated elements in the estate population. All these factors conspired to make for the rise of trade unionism among Indian estate labourers.

In 1939 two young Indian nationalists, R.H. Nathan, sub-editor of the Tamil Nesan, and Y.K. Menon, an estate clerk, dedicated themselves to the upliftment of Indian labour population in Selangor. They reactivated the Port Swettenham Indian Union and formed the Klang, Kuala Langat and Kajang Indian Associations.⁹¹ These associations were not strictly speaking labour unions because they were not much different from many of the Indian sangams (societies) in their objectives, i.e., reform and enlightenment of the Indian community, and in their mixed membership of labourers, clerks, teachers, and kanganies. But they became the vehicle by which Indian estate labourers were organized and their discontent articulated. There was no evidence of any link between these associations and the G.L.U., but R.H. Nathan had contact with the Klang Rubber Manufacture Workers' Association, a multi-racial labour union formed in 1940. At its inaugural meeting he urged the Indian and Chinese labourers to work closer together for their common interests.

91. Stenson, Industrial Conflict, p. 27.

92. SCJP, September 10, 1940.

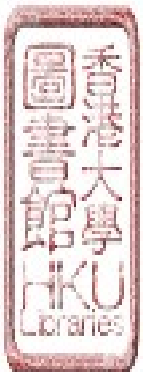


The first wave of strikes led by the Klang Indian Association started in March, 1941, on eight estates in the Klang area. The demands of the strikers did not appear to be novel if these were compared to what the Chinese labourers had already raised or achieved, but it was the first time that Indian estate labourers formulated such a comprehensive list of demands incorporating all their basic grievances. These demands included:

1. Parity of pay for Indian and Chinese labourers.
2. The removal of estate staff who were brutal and their replacement with Tamil-speaking staff.
3. The provision of 'proper' education for children.
4. An end to the molesting of labourers' womenfolk by Europeans and 'black' Europeans.
5. The provision of proper medical facilities.
6. The closing of toddy shops.
7. The granting of freedom of speech and assembly.
8. Free access to estates for relations and friends.
9. Permission for labourers to mount their bicycles in front of European managers and Asian staff.
10. The abolition of working days of 10 to 12 hours.
11. No victimization of those presenting grievances.
12. Permission for the labourers to have an association to look after their interests and put forward their grievances.⁹³

A noteworthy feature of the strikes was the solidarity of the kanganies with their labourers. The status of the kanganies had altered radically from the days when they were

93. Quoted in Stenson, Industrial Conflict, p. 29.



labour recruiters endowed with substantial authority over their labourers. Not only had their authority and income shrunk with their loss of recruiting function, they had also come to share largely the lot of the general labourers.⁹⁴ They rendered their support to the Indian associations and identified themselves with the strikes. When seven kanganies involved in the strikes were prosecuted and convicted in the court, the labourers attending the court caused an uproar, refusing to vacate the courtroom unless they shared the sentence passed on the kanganies. They had to be removed by the police.⁹⁵

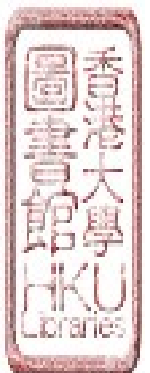
The strikes ended a few days later on the promise that the District Planters' Association would meet in April to discuss their wage claims. However, the U.P.A.M. had already reported to the government on the 'subversive activities' of R.H. Nathan.⁹⁶ The U.P.A.M. saw in the first attempt of Indian estate labourers at trade unionism an ominous threat to the interests of the rubber industry. It refused either to deal with the labour representatives or to consider their demands in the confident belief that it would receive the full backing of the government in wartime. Meanwhile, the government was contemplating steps to get rid of R.H. Nathan.⁹⁷

94. Ibid., p. 27.

95. SCJP, March 26, 1941.

96. Stenson, Industrial Conflict, p. 30.

97. SCJP, May 25, 1941; Straits Times, May 24, 1941.



On May 1, 1941, when Chinese labourers in Singapore were holding May Day celebrations quietly at their union premises, the second wave of strikes started on nine estates in the Klang-Banting area.⁹⁸ R.H. Nathan was detained on Banishment Warrant on May 5 on charges of 'offence against the State', which meant in fact nothing more than his trade union activities.⁹⁹ This attempt to cripple the organization and bargaining power of the Indian estate labourers set off a whole crop of protest strikes. The political character of the strikes came to the fore as they were concerned principally with the release of R.H. Nathan and 'freedom of association'. On March 7 about 300 labourers marched to Kuala Lumpur to stage a demonstration in front of the office of the Controller of Labour.¹⁰⁰ The Indian labourers employed by the Klang Public Works Department and Sanitation Board also joined in the protest strikes.¹⁰¹ The number of strikers rose from 4,000 in early May to 15,000 on May 15, affecting rubber estates in Kuala Lumpur, Klang, Port Swettenham area and the coast districts.¹⁰² The strike began to infect Negri Sembilan, where 'intimidators'

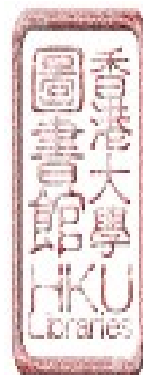
98. The nine estates were the Sungei Puloh Estate, Highlands Estate, Brooklands Estate, Bukit Cheedong Estate, Vallembrose Estate, Bukit Panjang Estate, Bukit Chu Estate, Bukit Cheraka Estate, Beveriac Estate. See Malaya Tribune, May 5, 10, 1941.

99. Straits Times, May 13, 1941.

100. Malaya Tribune, May 13, 1941.

101. SCJP, May 10, 11, 1941.

102. Malaya Tribune, May 13, 15, 17, 1941.



were reported to be active at Sepang.¹⁰³ R.H. Nathan was hastily deported at the height of the strike.

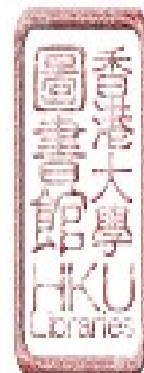
The strikes erupting after the detention of R.H. Nathan were largely the spontaneous reaction of the Indian labourers. Bands of agitators were reported to rove from one estate to another, spreading strikes on their way, but they seemed to be the more active elements among the labourers rather than 'outsiders'. Cases of intimidation were reported but the large number of labourers on strike suggested that they knew what they were striking for. The militancy shown by the strikers was a remarkable departure from what had been considered as the docile, malleable character of Indian estate labourers. Pickets were deployed on the estates, transport of rubber was obstructed, telephone wires were cut in many places, some toddy shops were destroyed, and police raids were met with violent resistance.¹⁰⁴ On May 12 the Klang police station was surrounded by a large crowd of labourers, but they were soon dispersed by baton charges.¹⁰⁵ Clashes with the troops and police resulted in a number of casualties, including four labourers killed. On May 16 a state of emergency was declared in Selangor.¹⁰⁶ The disturbance was considered a direct challenge to the authority of the

103. Straits Times, May 13, 1941.

104. SCJP, May 11, 14, 17, 1941.

105. Straits Times, May 13, 1941.

106. Straits Times, May 13, 16, 1941.



government and was dealt with as such.¹⁰⁷

On the day martial law was declared N. Raghavan, President of the C.I.A.M., made the following appeal to the strikers:

"... we think it would be deplorable if this state of things - use of force on the one hand and outbreak of violence on the other - were allowed to continue.

"In order to prevent further deterioration, we appeal to the workers forthwith to resume work unconditionally. Whatever grievances our workers have, whatever their sufferings, whatever their feelings at the moment, we are of the view that they should now resume normal work in the confident hope that they will be redressed by other means."¹⁰⁸

This appeal was followed by a promise made by the High Commissioner, Sir Shenton Thomas, that once the strikers resumed work any representations they made would be fully considered.¹⁰⁹ With their most important leader gone and some 300 labourers imprisoned, the spontaneous strikes could not last any longer.¹¹⁰ On May 21 the strikes were virtually over in Selangor.

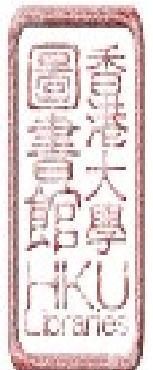
The first attempts at trade unionism by Indian estate labourers were frustrated, but the strikes had revealed that the approach of the rubber interest and the colonial administration regarding Indian labour had become an anachronism. The time when Indians were mere cheap labour power on account of their abundant supply and docility had come to an end once they decided to assert their rights in the Malayan society.

107. Straits Times, May 13, 1941.

108. Straits Times, May 17, 1941.

109. Straits Times, May 20, 1941.

110. Stenson, Industrial Conflict, pp. 30-31.

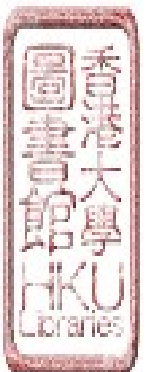


The momentum of labour unrest after the outbreak of the European War was maintained until about August, 1940.¹¹¹ From then onwards the number and frequency of strikes showed a marked decrease. The only exception to this trend was the Indian estate labourers' strikes in May, 1941. There was practically no serious strike among the Chinese labourers in 1941.¹¹² After nearly a whole year's collective bargaining an important section of labourers had already obtained wage increases, and, moreover, a number of disputes were settled without strike. The change of policy of the M.C.P. has also been suggested as the cause of the improved industrial situation. According to Malayan government records, the anti-British, anti-war policy of the Party was altered as a result of an instruction from the C.C.P. received in July, 1940.¹¹³ The alteration of policy which involved calling off strikes and anti-British agitation was reportedly intended to facilitate Britain's aid to China. However, it would be difficult to explain how Comintern's general position regarding the war was reconciled with the instruction. In the lack of corroborative evidence this information has to be regarded with some reservation.

111. Labour Department Annual Report, 1940, p. 5.

112. Malaya Tribune, October 11, 1941.

113. McLane, Soviet Strategies, p. 243.

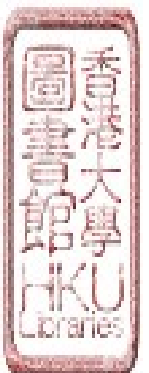


The anti-Japanese cause provided another channel of political activism for the Chinese labourers. Boycott and other overt forms of anti-Japanese activities were reduced compared with the previous two years, but contributions to the China Relief Fund were maintained at a high level. The anti-Japanese cause entered a critical phase in 1940 in Southeast Asia as well as in China. The United Front in China was strained to a considerable degree by frictions between the Kuomintang and the Communist troops, which culminated in the New Fourth Army Incident in January, 1941.¹¹⁴ This political undercurrent cast a shadow over the anti-Japanese cause both in China and Southeast Asia. The nine-month fact finding tour made by Tan Kah Kee in 1940 confirmed some of the worst suspicions of overseas Chinese: graft, inefficiency and extravagant waste of the Chungking Government, strains within the United Front, poor treatment of labourers serving on the Yunnan-Burma Highway, and lack of proper account of contributions from Nanyang Chinese.¹¹⁵ The only redeeming feature was the austerity, discipline, and dedication of Mao Tse Tung and his colleagues in Yen-an, which impressed Tan Kah Kee so much that the tour marked the beginning of his moral support for the Chinese Communists.¹¹⁶ The outspoken

114. In an armed conflict between the Kuomintang troops and the C.C.P.-led New Fourth Army in Anhwei Province in January, 1941, the entire New Fourth Army was nearly annihilated.

115. Akashi, National Salvation Movement, pp. 75-78, 115-119.

116. Tan, Nan-Ch'iao Hui-I Lu, pp. 186-188.

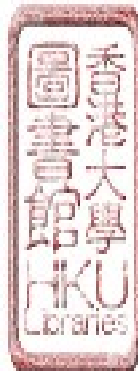


remarks of Tan Kah Kee exerted considerable influence on the Chinese community. The Chungking Government found it necessary to despatch Wu Tieh Ch'eng, a high ranking minister, on a mission to Singapore to counter Tan Kah Kee's influence.¹¹⁷ As part of the campaign to unseat Tan Kah Kee from the presidency of the N.C.G.R.A., a meeting with several Chinese labour associations was arranged at the Chinese Consulate. The labour representatives raised a number of questions pertaining to the improvement of living conditions, to which the emissary offered little beyond platitudes.¹¹⁸ His attempt to discredit Tan Kah Kee suffered a stunning defeat in a show-down between Tan Kah Kee and the Chinese Consul General at the opening meeting of the second congress of the N.C.G.R.A. in late March, 1941. Tan Kah Kee was unanimously re-elected after he had made a theatrical gesture of resignation, whereas the Consul General was barred from the rest of the conference.¹¹⁹ Tan Kah Kee's position regarding China Relief was supported by Chinese labour associations as a whole. The Kinta Mining Employees' Association, for example, took a stand on the New Fourth Army

117. Ibid., pp. 302-303.

118. The seven labour associations present in the meeting were the Kee Hee Hong, Tea Workers Mutual Aid Association, Wharf Labourers Mutual Aid Association, Drivers Mutual Aid Association, Lightermen's Union, Rickshaw Pullers Mutual Aid Association, and the Stevedores' Association. See SCJP, November 25, 1940.

119. Tan, Nan-Ch'iao Hui-I Lu, pp. 302-316.

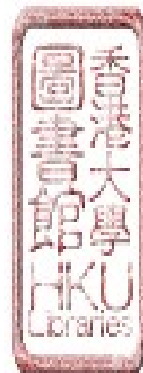


Incident. In a telegram sent to Chiang Kai Shek on January 31, 1941, the Association urged Chiang to "settle the matter in a just and cautious manner so that the arms of the whole nation can be directed towards our enemy".¹²⁰ On the eve of the second congress of the N.C.G.R.A. the Kinta Mining Employees' Association passed a number of resolutions, reiterating its stand against civil war in China and demanding constitutional government be instituted and corrupt officials punished. The resolutions also urged the Malayan Governments to allow more freedom to the anti-Japanese activities and supported Tan Kah Kee as the President of the N.C.G.R.A.¹²¹

It had become apparent by 1940-41 that a large immigrant labour population posed peculiar political problems. A fluctuating and transitory immigrant labour force, which could so adjusted as to keep wages low during prosperity and quickly get rid of during slump, subserved the interests of capital eminently well, at least in the earlier stages. This economic advantage, however, brought in its train political nemesis in the long run. An outside government could exert pressure on the Malayan Governments over its emigrant labourers in a way which otherwise would have been impossible. Revolutionary messages and ideology were transmitted and absorbed by a highly susceptible labour force. Political movements in India and China came to embrace their

120. SCJP, January 30, 1941.

121. SCJP, February 27, 1941.

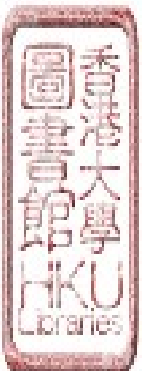


overseas population as part of their purview. These influences contributed to the political awakening of Malayan labourers and gave a fillip to labour unrest in Malaya. The small number of Javanese labourers might have displayed a distinctly Indonesia-oriented nationalism, which had already been the dominant note of a coterie of Malay nationalists, had large scale immigration of Javanese labour continued for any considerable period of time.¹²²

There was a remarkable proliferation of labour organizations in 1940-41. Altogether fifty-nine labour associations were formed during the two years. For the first time in history associations of estate labourers appeared. These were the Malacca Rubber Workers' Association, the Kinta Rubber Estate Employees' Association, the Sungei Siput Rubber Estate Labourers' Association, the Negri Sembilan Rubber Tung Yip Mutual Aid Association, and the Sepang Valley Estate Indian Labourers Reform Association.¹²³ The Kinta Mining Employees' Association was founded in 1940; it had a membership of 8,000 mining labourers in the most important tin-producing belt in Malaya. It seems to have been quite well run; it maintained a library, a drama group, a music group at its premises; it established branches in various

122. For the influence of Indonesian nationalism on the Malays, see W.R. Roff, The Origins of Malay Nationalism (Kuala Lumpur, 1967), pp. 221-235; Radin Soenarno, "Malay Nationalism, 1900-1945", JSEAH, I, March, 1960, 1-28.

123. See Appendix C, Table I, pp. 364-378.



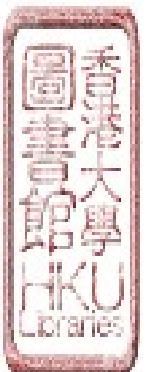
districts in Kinta and was actively engaged in China Relief.¹²⁴
 The greatest increase in strength, however, was registered by the G.L.U. It was estimated that the G.L.U. alone had a total membership of 50,000 in May, 1940, in which 20,000 were in Singapore, compared with a total of 12,716, which included the membership of the G.L.U. and other Communist-led organizations, in 1934.¹²⁵

The Trade Unions Bill, which provided for the registration and control of trade unions, and the Industrial Courts Bill were passed in 1940 in the Straits Settlements and the F.M.S. The Trade Disputes Ordinance was passed in the Straits Settlements in 1941, but it had not come into effect before the Japanese invasion. The new legislation received rather mixed response from the European business community. When the Trade Unions Bill was introduced in the Federal Council in May, 1940, it met with opposition by J.D. Mead, representative of the Chamber of Mines. He said the Chamber of Mines considered the Bill unnecessary as the experienced officers of the Chinese Protectorate and the Labour Department were capable of protecting the welfare of the labourers; industrial relations in the tin mining industry remained cordial; if the Bill was passed, trade unions would be open to the manipulation of trained agitators.¹²⁶ S.B. Parmer, President of the U.P.A.M., did

124. SCJP, January 8, 30, February 8, 1941.

125. McLane, Soviet Strategies, p. 244, footnote.

126. Proceedings of the Federal Council, F.M.S., 1940, pp. B40-41.



not object to the Bill in toto but considered the clause requiring only two-thirds of the officers of a trade union to 'be actually engaged or employed in an industry or trade' would lead to 'grave danger' from 'professional agitators'.¹²⁷ The Committee of the European Association of Malaya considered it necessary to enact a trade disputes law similar to the United Kingdom Act of 1927, which laid down penalty for 'intimidation' and limited the scope of picketing.¹²⁸ The Singapore Chamber of Commerce considered a proper machinery for the settlement of grievances instituted under the law was conducive to better industrial relations but more important was the elimination of labour 'agitators' and reorganization of the Labour Department.¹²⁹ Some employers, while not opposed to the legislation, held that its introduction should be phased and gradual.¹³⁰

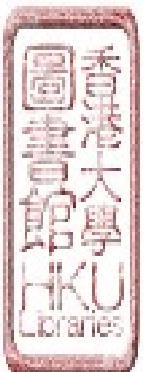
Labour opinion regarding the new legislation was conspicuous for its absence, at least in open public forum. None of the labour associations issued any statement on the issue although they were reasonably well informed about the

127. Ibid., p. B42.

128. SCJP, January 30, 1940; Straits Times, January 29, 1940.

129. SCJP, November 3, 1940.

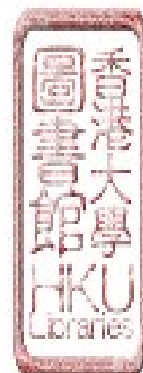
130. H.H. Robbins, Chairman of the Malayan Collieries, for example, said that "... something following the spirit of the inevitability of gradualness is needed, and any attempt to force this country at one step into the adoption of principles which have elsewhere been considered right and serviceable with domiciled labourers possessing full citizenship right is, I am convinced, at the early stage wrong in the interests of master and man alike." See Straits Times, March 30, 1940.



provisions and intention of the Bills, which were reported in the vernacular press. Labour opinions had not been solicited in the framing of the legislation which so vitally affected their interests. The view of the M.C.P., however, was disclosed by the Secretary for Chinese Affairs in the Federal Council in August, 1940. He quoted a passage from a Communist pamphlet, which called upon 'the workers not to have faith in the so-called Trade Unions legislation which is only another deceitful method of the British imperialist in securing a firmer control of the labourers in time of emergency'.¹³¹ If this brief reference was indicative of the general position of the Party regarding the new legislation, it can be inferred that the G.L.U. and other labour associations under its influence also came round to the same view.

Although the Trade Unions Bill was passed in the Straits Settlements and the F.M.S. respectively in February and September, 1940, they did not come into force until the middle of 1941. The Malayan Governments showed tardiness in enforcing the legislation or taking steps for its implementation. Before the Japanese invasion in December, 1941, no trade unions had been registered under the law. The apparent hesitation betrayed a sense of uncertainty about its possible results on the part of the government. Initiative for the introduction of the legislation came from

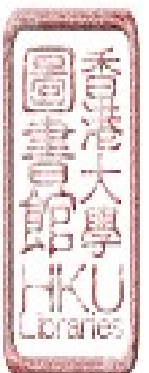
131. Proceedings of the Federal Council, F.M.S., 1940, pp. B60-61.



the Colonial Office, not from the Malayan Governments, who were more intimately and acutely aware of the sentiments of the local European business community. For the practical purpose of curbing labour unrest, the existing law and the Emergency Defence Regulations had already endowed considerable power to the government to deal with the situation. The sense of urgency with which the Malayan Governments introduced the legislation immediately after the outbreak of the European war seemed to lapse towards the end of this period. Neither the Trade Unions Ordinance nor the Industrial Courts Ordinance and Trade Disputes Ordinance had played any practical part in the evolution of trade unionism prior to the Japanese occupation, but they were to provide the legal framework, with some modifications, for trade unionism in the post-war period.

Labour situations changed drastically in the latter half of 1941 in Malaya primarily because of increasing tension in the international situations in Europe and the Far East. The beginning of Russo-German war in June, 1941, led to a change of the policy of the M.C.P. In the Seventh Enlarged Plenum of the Central Committee held in Singapore in July, 1941, the Party decided to alter its anti-British orientation now that Great Britain was fighting on the side of Russia and China.¹³² Although the Party's offer of cooperation with the British authorities was not immediately

132. McLane, Soviet Strategies, p. 243.



accepted, rapport had already been built up between labour and the establishment. The Penang Wharf Workers' Association assisted in air-raid defence and the Singapore Rickshaw Pullers' Association was invited by the Chinese Protectorate to enroll in first-aid.¹³³ Some labourers joined the Volunteers Corps and the non-combatant Chinese Labour Company of the Malayan Command.¹³⁴ Sir Shenton Thomas paid tribute to 'the readiness of labourers to work long hours on defence work' and their 'contribution to the fight for freedom'.¹³⁵ The Aid-to-Britain campaign, which had begun in late 1940, came to receive more support from the labourers. A number of labour associations were actively engaged in the campaign, whose aim was to raise funds for British civilian population suffering from German air raids.¹³⁶

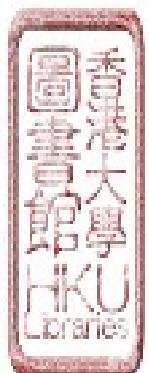
A number of wage disputes were settled amicably and strikes were reduced to a minimum in the latter half of 1941. The more important strike was conducted by 450 Indian labourers employed by the Penang municipal authorities for an increase of 15 cents in daily rates in lieu of the cost-of-living allowance. It was swiftly brought to an end after

133. SCJP, February 11, 28, March 5, 6, 8, 1941.

134. SCJP, October 9, 1940; Malaya Tribune, November 13, 1941.

135. Speech by the Governor, Sir Shenton Thomas, at the meeting of the Legislative Council on October 13, 1941. See Malaya Tribune, October 13, 1941.

136. SCJP, August 14, 20, 23, 30, 1941.



thirty-six labourers had been arrested and convicted under the Emergency Regulations.¹³⁷ When the Singapore sawmill labourers went on strike in November, 1941, two idle sawmills were operated by the Royal Navy and Army to expedite important defence orders. The labourers were reported to have expressed admiration for 'the way this work had been done by men who were strangers to the trade'.¹³⁸ This strike was ended without a wage settlement.¹³⁹

After the Japanese invasion of Malaya on December 8, 1941, the Malayan Governments decided to accept the offer of cooperation made by the Communists. A meeting with the M.C.P. representatives was arranged and an agreement was reached on collaboration against the Japanese.¹⁴⁰ Political prisoners were released from the Changi Prison, the M.C.P. and all its front organizations, including the G.L.U., came into the open. On December 21 the M.C.P. passed a four-point resolution on unification of Malayan people against the Japanese, arming of all party members, elimination of traitors and enemy agents, and undertaking guerilla warfare against the Japanese.¹⁴¹ The G.L.U. came to form a Trade Unions Federation, which claimed the

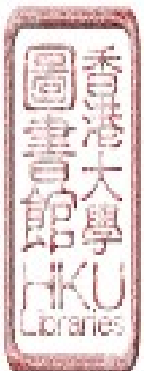
137. SCJP, July 15, 16, 17, 1941.

138. Malaya Tribune, November 15, 18, 19, 1941.

139. Malaya Tribune, November 18, 20, 1941.

140. Mclane, Soviet Strategies, p. 304.

141. Ibid.



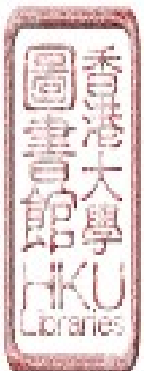
affiliation of over 70 unions.¹⁴² The G.L.U., which already had a sizable membership, must have considerably increased its membership and influence towards the end of 1941. Its principal task was to mobilize the labourers for resistance against the Japanese. Crash courses were provided by British officers at special guerilla schools for Communist-selected cadres. By the end of 1941, when the Japanese had advanced into Perak, 165 cadres graduated from the schools were sent to Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Johore to organize the first four Independent Regiments of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army.¹⁴³

On December 26 the Governor, Sir Shenton Thomas, received 60 leaders of the Chinese community, including 10 Communists recently released from prison, and Tan Kah Kee was invited to form a Mobilization Council for the purpose of organizing a volunteer police force, propaganda, and mobilization of labour power.¹⁴⁴ The Mobilization Council headed by Tan Kah Kee consisted of the General Affairs Section, Labour Services Section, Defence Corps (Volunteer Police)

142. Report of Singapore Labour Department, 1946, p. 13. The names of these unions are not known. They probably included some of the registered unions and the illegal unions.

143. N.C.G.R.A. (ed.), Ta-Chan Yü Nan-Ch'iao (Singapore, 1946), p. 27; Mclane, Soviet Strategies, p. 304.

144. Patricia G. Barnett, "Malayan Chinese Aid the British War Effort", Far Eastern Survey, XI, 1942, 36-37; Malayan Tribune, December 26, 1941.



Section, Arming-of-Masses Section, and Propaganda Section. The Arming-of-Masses Section was proposed by the Communists although Tan Kah Kee was not in favour of its being included in the Council.¹⁴⁵ Lin Chiang Shih, a Communist, headed the Arming-of-Masses Section, and Lim Bo Seng, a Kuomintang member, headed the Labour Services Section.¹⁴⁶ One of the important contributions of the Mobilization Council was the recruitment of 3,000 labourers daily for the Army, Navy, and government departments.¹⁴⁷ When the majority of the 6,000 labourers in the Naval Base had deserted owing to heavy Japanese bombing, Tan Kah Kee made an effective appeal to them to return to their work.¹⁴⁸ The Quarry Workers' Union helped the Army to carry out excavations for blowing up the causeway in the defence of Singapore.¹⁴⁹

The Singapore Chinese Volunteer Force, known officially as the Dalforce, was formed by the Arming-of-Masses Section. As early as 1940 the Chinese had suggested the formation of

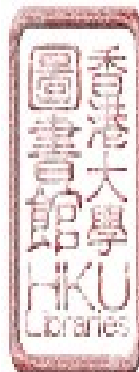
145. Ta-Chan Yü Nan-Ch'iao, pp. 5, 53.

146. Lim Bo Seng left Malaya on the fall of Singapore but returned afterwards to work for British Force 136. He was subsequently arrested by the Japanese and later died in prison. Lin Chiang Shih was killed by the Japanese after the fall of Singapore. See Ta-Chan Yu Nan-Ch'iao, p. 54.

147. Malaya Tribune, January 19, 1942.

148. Tan, Nan-Ch'iao Hui-I Lu, p. 346.

149. Report of Singapore Labour Department, 1946, p. 13.



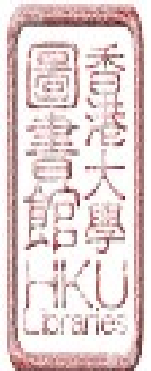
a Chinese regiment, but the government had not accepted the suggestion on the grounds of shortage of equipment.¹⁵⁰ The Dalforce consisted of a few thousand men and was given 1,000 rifles in early February, 1942, by the government.¹⁵¹ It was disbanded by its commander, Col. John Dalley, on February 13, two days before the fall of Singapore, after it had made a courageous stand against the Japanese landing forces.¹⁵²

It is evident that the upsurge of labour unrest remained powerful even under wartime conditions in 1940-41. There was no general ban on strike, and in those industries declared as 'essential services' the ban was not effective when the workers decided to strike in defiance of the law. Labour agitation under wartime regulations inevitably invited the forceful intervention from the government and hence led to intensified confrontation between labour and the state. Wartime economic policies also introduced distortion in the pattern of industrial relations. Labour in the Chinese sector gained proportionately more than in the European sector and government departments because the Chinese employers were not committed to the wartime needs of the metropolitan country as the European employers and the government were. International conflicts simultaneously unfolded in different

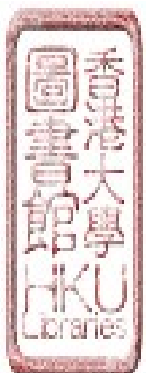
150. Barnette, "Malayan Chinese Aid the British War Effort", 36-37.

151. Ta-Chan Yü Nan-Ch'iao, pp. 54-55, 58.

152. Ibid., pp. 58-59.



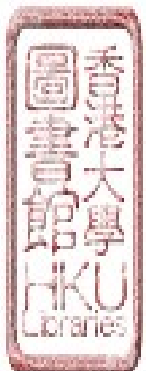
theatres of war exerted a tremendous influence on labour situation in Malaya, and this was clearly brought out in the last months of 1941. Labour had become stronger in their organized strength, more experienced in collective bargaining and political activism in spite of great frustrations, and they had emerged from those turbulent years to become a force to be reckoned with.



Chapter VI

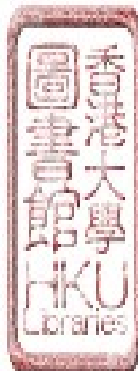
CONCLUSION

The powerful upsurge of labour unrest in Malaya from 1934 to 1941 was a reaction against social, economic injustice and the severe impact of the Great Depression. It was an expression of labour's tremendous discontent and their growing assertiveness. Large-scale profitable investment in the rubber and tin industries required a cheap labour force, and much of the grievances of labour, including low wages, unsatisfactory working conditions and obsolete systems, arose from the desideratum of the colonial economy itself. The comparative tranquility before 1929 was rudely shaken by the Great Depression. Large numbers of labourers were discharged and repatriated, wages were drastically cut, and those remaining on the job were put on short time for a mere pittance. Labour was thrown into the depth of economic degradation, but once the depression was over they started their long and strenuous fight to defend their own interests. Their problem was first of all to pull themselves up from the depression conditions and in the long run to remove the sources of their discontent. Three principal methods were available to achieve this objective: collective bargaining, labour organization, and political action. An assessment of the advance of labour during the period has to be based on the results obtained through these methods.

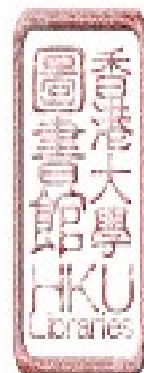


The consistent and widespread use of collective bargaining as a means of improving labour conditions began from 1934 in Malaya. Throughout the period under review wages and working conditions remained the basic issues underlying industrial unrest, although emphasis shifted from one set of demands to the other in the course of time. The first wave of unrest in 1934-35 saw the craftsmen and skilled artisans demanding a return to pre-depression wage rates. In the following two years a broad section of the labour force pressed for higher wages in addition to a multiplicity of demands relating to the contract labour system, hours, maternity benefits, overtime pay, holidays, paid sick leave, and job security. An all-round improvement in wages and working conditions was clearly the goal of labour. When the 1938-39 recession set in, the key issue was to prevent the existing wage rates and working conditions from deterioration, although a small section of the labour force still maintained their 'offensive' stance in putting forward wide-ranging demands. Soaring prices after the outbreak of the European War thrust the wage issue to the fore. The primary concern of labour was to press for substantial increase in money wages to keep pace with the drastic price increase, whilst other issues receded into the background.

It is evident that wages remained the most prominent issue throughout the period. Before the Great Depression the power of labour played little part in the long-term

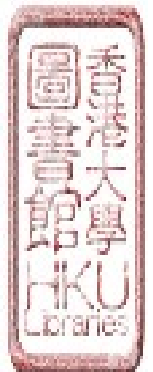


movement of wages because labour had not yet learnt to make use of collective bargaining consistently. The continuous and widespread assertion of labour after the Great Depression introduced a new potent element into wage determination. From 1934 to 1937 a conspicuous trend of money wage increase corresponded with rising prices of rubber and tin and the tremendous pressure from labour. The Chinese craftsmen were the first group of workers to obtain substantial wage increases through collective bargaining in 1934-35. In the following two years the trend of rising money wages affected all sections of the labour force. Factory workers, tin-mining labourers, coal miners, quarrymen, shop assistants, building labourers, craftsmen, engineering mechanics, transport workers, and the Chinese rubber estate labourers were the recipients of wage increases largely as a result of collective bargaining. By mid-1937 Indian wage rates in the rubber industry and government departments had also returned to the 1928-29 levels. It may be suggested that the wage rates and basic labour earnings in almost all sectors of the economy had returned to the pre-depression standard by the end of 1937. This trend of wage increase was checked by the 1938-39 recession. The rubber and tin companies, some factory owners and shopkeepers had resort to wage reduction. The result was that a sizable portion of the labour force had their earnings slashed under the pre-depression standard. The outbreak of the European War



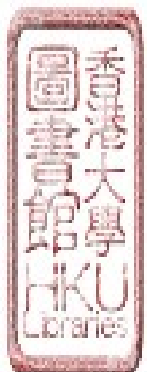
again ushered in a phase of rising wages. Substantial wage increases were conceded to large numbers of labourers in the wake of a rash of industrial disputes. In the rubber industry and government departments the labourers obtained wage rates comparable to those in 1928-29 in addition to a cost-of-living allowance. It may be safe to suggest that by the end of 1941 money wages in most of the industries had surpassed the 1928-29 levels.

If 1932, the worst year of the Great Depression, is taken as the base, the wage movement up to 1941 was an impressive steep ascent out of the depression. Better trading conditions, temporary labour shortages, and pressure from the Indian Government no doubt contributed to wage increase, but most of the significant wage gains throughout the period were the direct result of collective bargaining. It is almost certain that wages would not have risen to the same extent as they had if labour passively awaited better pay from their employers. The position would be more complicated if real wages are considered. From 1934 to 1937 wages rose more rapidly than the cost of living. By the end of 1937 wage rates had returned to the pre-depression standard, but the cost of living remained lower than in 1928-29. This meant an increase in real wages compared with those before the depression. A reverse trend began from the 1938-39 recession. Even after the outbreak of the European War the rise in money wages was outstripped by the increase in the cost of living.



Although money wages in 1941 were higher than in 1928-29, they must be set against the drastic increase of prices. The inadequate wage and cost-of-living statistics do not warrant any exact statement on this subject, but it seems extremely doubtful whether real wages had surpassed the pre-depression standard by the end of 1941.

The widespread and consistent demand of labour for an eight-hour day produced tangible results. The excessively long hours in a number of trades and industries were reduced. The eight-hour day clause was included in a number of collective agreements. It benefited, among others, the engineering mechanics in Singapore and Penang, the building labourers in Singapore, Penang, and Malacca, the tailors in Ipoh, Malacca and Seremban, the S.T.C. and S.H.B. employees, workers at the Sam Yip Leong Rubber Factory, the Overseas Chinese Rubber Factory and the Lee Kim Siak Match Factory in Klang, the Khiem Ek Biscuit Factory, the Singapore Rubber Factory, the Eagle Aerated Water Factory and the Singapore Sugar Refinery, and tin-mining labourers at the Tung Sang and Hong Fatt Tin Mines in Selangor. In some factories, e.g., the sawmills in Singapore, the working day was reduced from 10 hours to 9 hours. Shop assistants still had the longest working day, but their hours had been reduced as compared with a decade earlier. Most of the coffee shop and sundry shop assistants and hairdressers obtained reduction of working day from 14-17 hours to 12-13 hours. The eight-hour day clause was

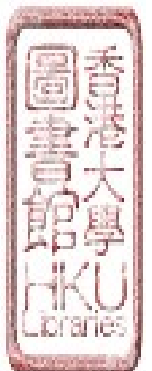


sometimes accompanied by the provision on overtime pay, which was normally one and a half times the daily rates. The workers could make use of the higher overtime rates to augment their income. The reduction of working hours was achieved without the aid of legislation, and hence the result was different from one industry to another and from one geographical area to another. Moreover, in those industries where the labourers were predominantly piece-rated, no attempt had been made to reduce long hours. Major Orde Browne, Labour Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, found in 1941 that working day extended to 84 hours a week in the various brick and pottery undertakings in Malacca but no reduction of hours was contemplated.¹

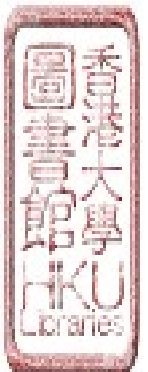
Largely as a result of a reform movement, large numbers of shop assistants became the beneficiaries of the weekly rest-day. In factories and workshops the weekly rest-day had not been a prominent issue in industrial disputes. Rather, the more common feature was for the factory workers or workshop hands to demand time-and-a-half or double rates for work done on Sunday. This was accepted and incorporated in a number of agreements. The workers usually made use of this provision as they made use of the overtime rates to increase their earnings.

Chinese indentured labour was completely and effectively ended after the Great Depression by a combination of economic forces and the labourers' refusal to remain in debt bondage.

1. Browne, Labour Conditions, p. 107.



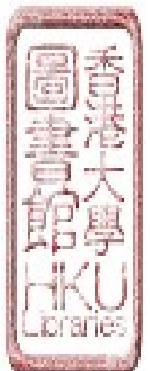
The last attempt of the Chinese employers to revive the credit-ticket system in 1934-35 was dealt a death blow by the desertion of imported labourers. The change-over from the kangany system of recruitment to voluntary assisted immigration deprived the kanganies of their most important function and hence their power over the Indian labourers declined. Instead, the contract labour system remained deeply entrenched. Never before had this system come under such persistent and forceful challenge from labour as from 1934 onwards. The complete abolition of the system was confined to the Singapore engineering industry and a few factories, mines and firms. On the Malayan Collieries contract labour was gradually replaced by direct employment, but this process had not yet been completed by the end of 1941. On rubber estates in Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Johore, and Malacca, the labour contractors had lost much of their control over the Chinese labourers after the big strikes of 1937. More European planters made direct payment of wages to their labourers instead of through intermediaries. The contractors still retained their responsibility in regard to the recruitment and disciplining of the labour force, but they could no longer make squeezes on the men's wages. In the building and construction industry and in some factories, the abuses of the contract labour system were checked by collective agreements, which provided for, among other things, regular payment of wages, open account of wages due to each labourer,



regulation of loans, fixed prices of foodstuffs and other necessities.

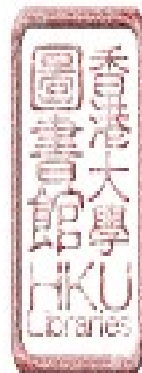
The labour compensation law provided the basis for claims in regard to personal injury by accident, but the workers found it necessary to assert their legal right by incorporating the labour compensation or labour insurance clause into collective agreements. The widespread demand for labour insurance from September, 1939, onwards put more employers on the labour insurance scheme. Labour compensation had become an established rule in industrial relations by the end of this period by dint of law reinforced by collective bargaining. Other forms of fringe benefits, including maternity benefits, sick leave and medical attention, were also conceded. After the big strikes in 1937 the Chinese rubber estate labourers obtained all the welfare provisions of the labour code hitherto denied to them. In other industries sick leave and medical attention were conceded to large numbers of labourers but maternity benefits were still the exception rather than the rule. Some employers granted maternity leave to their women employees but no wages or allowance was given.

It is difficult to state with any degree of precision whether the workers were assured of more job security after years of effort to check the arbitrary of the employer to hire and fire. In answer to the frequent demand that no dismissal be made without good reason, some employers

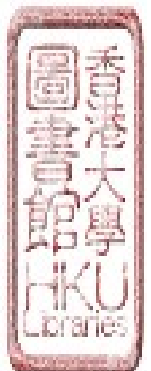


insisted on their right to dismiss any labourer as they saw fit, but others accepted the demand as one of the terms of agreement. What constituted 'good reason' was not clearly defined. Nor was there a set of mutually accepted rules on which disciplinary action could be based. The joint regulation of industrial behaviour by labour and management, which has been regarded as one of the great achievements of trade unionism in the West, was still remote in Malaya. Insofar as the employers became more cautious in sacking or punishing his employees, this was largely actuated by the apprehensions of arousing the men's resentment. The growing strength and organization of labour may conceivably have imposed some restraint on the exercise of the employers' prerogatives.

In sum, the consistent and widespread use of the method of collective bargaining had succeeded in extricating labour out of the depression conditions and securing improvement in working conditions for a large section of the labour force. Central to the process of collective bargaining was the strike weapon, whether used as a demonstration of protest or a trial of strength. Many of the strikes were planned and led by labour organizations or workers' committees. Although spontaneous and unorganized strikes were frequent, the increasing importance of organization characterized the use of the strike weapon in this period. The scale of the strikes was larger than anything known before. The workers had

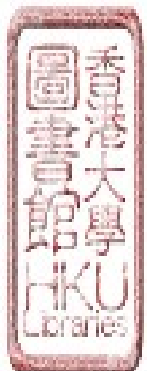


learnt to go beyond a single factory, estate or business concern to combine with other workers to bring sufficient pressure to bear on their employers. Industry-wide strikes were frequent, especially among the craftsmen, the skilled artisans, and the building labourers. Even the scattered rubber estate labourers had learnt to combine over a wide geographical area. The Chinese rubber estate workers' strikes in March, 1937, involved at one time some 20,000 strikers, and the Indian estate labourers' strikes in May, 1941, involved some 15,000 men at their height. There was as yet no set pattern for the duration of strikes. They included lightning strikes which lasted not more than a day as well as long-drawn strikes. It is noteworthy that the longest strikes were conducted by the craftsmen and skilled artisans. The Cantonese goldsmiths in Singapore conducted a 101-day strike in 1937, and the engineering mechanics were also noted for their long strikes. In a large number of cases the workers raised a multiplicity of demands, which brought out all the underlying grievances calling for remedy. It was different from the earlier decades, when the claims were generally concerned with the removal of one or two immediate grievances. It was also different from advanced trade unionism in some other countries, where the claims tended to be more specialized because issues such as hours or fringe benefits had largely been resolved. In those trades and industries with better relations between the employers and the employees, negotiation



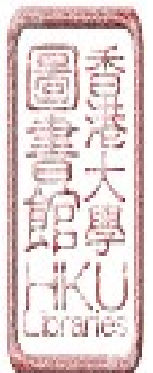
usually preceded a strike. Conversely, in those industries not noted for consultation between labour and the management, e.g., the rubber industry, strikes were frequently called without prior negotiation. Strikes without prior negotiation could also result from an aggressive labour offensive. In the few months following the outbreak of the European War, for example, the workers generally allowed only a few days for the employers to consider their claims. They were quite impatient of the drastic price increase and confident of the effectiveness of the strike weapon at the time. A strike was usually settled in one or a combination of the following ways: direct negotiation between both parties, conciliation and mediation, or the claims being wholly or partially conceded by the employer without direct negotiation. Conciliation and mediation often involved the Labour Department, the Chinese Protectorate, and Chinese community leaders. Of course, a strike could also be defeated and thus brought to an end without a settlement for the workers.

The statement on the efficacy of collective bargaining must be made with some qualifications. First of all, collective bargaining was not equally effective in all industries. There were victories and defeats, gains and losses for the workers. Collective bargaining was the least fruitful and the strike weapon the most ineffective in government departments. When the government was uncompromising, it was capable of mobilizing the vast



resources and power at its command to defeat a strike. The F.M.S. Railways strike in 1934 and the Singapore municipal strike in 1936 were cases in point. Next to the government departments collective bargaining in the rubber industry was most arduous and not necessarily productive of results. From the labour's point of view, the difficulties lay in the lack of communication between the management and labour and the unequal bargaining strength between the two parties. With the exception of the Chinese rubber estate workers' strikes in March, 1937, labour's effort to raise wages and improve working conditions in the industry had not been noted for success. Factory workers, building and transport workers, mining and quarrying labourers and shop assistants had a mixed record of success and failure, with success outweighing failure as a whole. The best results were obtained in those trades where the requirement of skill was high, labour was better organized and the unit of production was small. The goldsmiths, the tailors, the shoemakers and the engineering mechanics started the first wave of industrial unrest after the Great Depression, and they had continually improved their position since then.

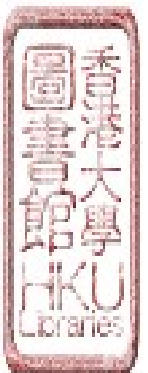
Neither was collective bargaining equally effective at all times. The experiences of 1934-41 bear evidence to the general thesis that it is more effective in raising wages and improving working conditions in times of prosperity than in resisting wage reduction and the deterioration of working conditions in times of recession. A wide segment of the labour population was powerless against wage reduction and



discharges in the 1938-39 recession because the workers' bargaining position was greatly weakened. It was a repetition of the Great Depression in miniature.

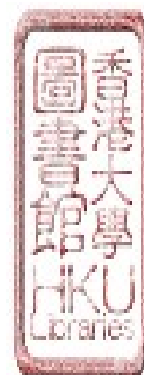
The administration of collective agreement was no less important than the concluding of collective agreement, and this was precisely the weakest link in the chain of collective bargaining. The agreement had not attained the status of a contract enforceable by law. This implied that either party could turn their back on the agreement without having to face legal consequences. All the agreements had these in common: the effective period of the agreement was not specified, the methods of the interpretation of agreement and the procedure for settling any problems arising out of its implementation were not provided. It is in this light that the oft-repeated charge that labour was irresponsible in violating existing agreements need to be re-examined. In fact, the employers were as much prone to violating existing agreements as labour. The employer was strongly motivated to reject the existing agreement in times of recession, and the labourers would refuse to abide by the terms of agreement in times of prosperity or drastic price increase. These serious loopholes indicate the machinery of collective bargaining was as yet incomplete.

The gains of the collective bargaining had not fallen equally on the Chinese and the Indian labourers, the two main racial groups of labourers. The Chinese labourers were the beneficiaries of most of the gains made in those



years of labour unrest. This was primarily the result of the concentration of the Indian labourers in the rubber industry and government departments, where collective bargaining was less effective. A contributory factor was that the Indian labourers were less organized than the Chinese. Insofar as Indian labourers also benefited from collective bargaining, they were usually employees of private concerns in the urban areas. The vast Indian labour force in the rubber industry and government departments had not obtained any appreciable advance either in real wages or working conditions by the end of 1941 as compared with the late twenties. In contrast, the Chinese labourers had not only retained their margin of higher wages over Indian wages but had made significant improvement in their working conditions. This meant the differences in the terms of employment between the two racial groups of labourers had widened.

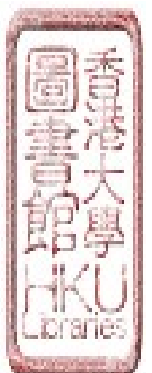
Finally, collective bargaining had not succeeded in removing the basic causes of labour discontent because of its innate limitation. It had not succeeded, for example, in effecting a redistribution of wealth in favour of labour or the removal of the conflict inherent in industrial relations. In the process of collective bargaining the workers were concerned with immediate issues rather than long-term objectives. It was a process for the readjustment of the relative position of capital and labour within the wage system rather than a challenge to the basic assumptions



of that system. It is doubtful whether a fundamental change in labour conditions could be obtained if labour confined themselves solely to the method of collective bargaining. While the experiences of labour vindicated the necessity of collective bargaining for the protection of the immediate interests of the labourers, they also indicated it was a method of limited efficacy insofar as the long-term interests of labour were concerned.

It was in those years of stress and strain that organized labour grew in strength. The most significant episode in the rise of organized labour was no doubt the open assertion of the right to organize by the Singapore building and pineapple factory workers in 1936. The difficulties they encountered were the lack of legal provision for trade union and the official reluctance to grant registration. To overcome these difficulties they tried to get their unions registered as mutual aid associations and meanwhile a campaign involving strikes and demonstrations was launched to back up their application. Although only the Pineapple Workers Mutual Aid Association was eventually registered, they gave a tremendous impetus to the process of unionization of workers in various industries. There were frustrations and suppression of attempts at labour organization in the ensuing years, but the trend of the growth of organized labour was irreversible.

By the last quarter of 1941 labour organizations had registered a remarkable increase as compared with 1933. A compilation from official and newspaper sources shows that



there were at least 178 workers' associations in existence in Malaya in 1941.² Over two-thirds of these workers' associations were formed during 1934-41, the period under the present study.³ The coincidence of the rapid growth of labour organizations with rising labour unrest suggests a definite relationship between the need to strength the bargaining power of labour and the emergence of their organizations. In Penang, for example, "it was noticeable that after each dispute, Chinese labourers, if they had no such society, proceeded to form one."⁴ These organizations conducted collective bargaining with the employers, promoted reform of working conditions, looked after the welfare of labourers, and, last but not the least, participated in the anti-Japanese campaign.

Artisans and handicraftsmen were the group best covered by labour organizations. There were 43 labour associations for the artisans and handicraftsmen, including tailors, goldsmiths, silversmiths, shoemakers, engineering mechanics, etc.⁵ The majority of these associations were employees' guilds with a long history behind them. Seamen, land and water transport labourers had 39 associations.⁶ Land transport workers' unions included a number of taxi drivers'

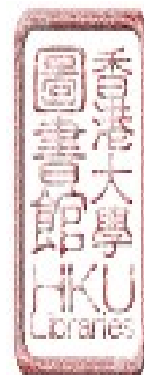
2. See Appendix C, Table I, Table II, pp.

3. See Appendix C, Table III, p

4. Labour Department Annual Report, 1940, p. 9.

5. See Appendix C, Table II, p

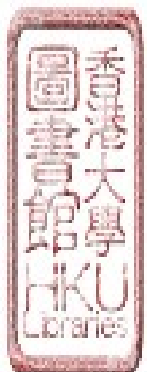
6. Ibid.



associations, traction company employees' associations and rickshaw pullers' associations. The railway workers and Chinese bus company employees were unorganized. Dockers and other waterfront labourers in Singapore were fairly well covered by unions of lightermen, stevedores, wharf labourers in addition to the Kee Hee Hong, which included the skilled artisans on the dockyards among its membership. The third largest group of labour associations comprised shop assistants in commercial firms, retailer shops, restaurants, coffee shops, hairdressing saloons and laundries. Most of the shop assistants' associations were formed after 1933 to bring the scattered shop assistants together for the improvement of labour conditions. There were not more than 10 factory workers' unions in the pineapple canning, rubber milling and manufacturing, oil-milling and sawmilling, and cigarette making industries.⁷ Factory workers' unions were numerically much weaker than other unions chiefly because there were less factory workers than in other sectors of the economy and not all factory workers were organized.

Rubber estate labourers' associations began to make their appearance in 1940 and 1941. There were five rubber estate labourers' associations, whose membership was predominantly Chinese. The very weak organization of estate labourers was due to the isolation and discipline of labourers on the estates, the opposition of the rubber planters, and the late and unsuccessful attempts of Indian estate labourers to

7. Ibid.

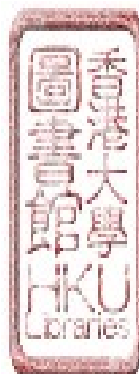


organize. Prior to the formation of the Kinta Mining Employees' Association in 1940, only four associations for oil-engine drivers and tin-ore washers existed.⁸ The Kinta Mining Employees' Association had a membership of 8,000 mining labourers in the most important tin-producing belt in Malaya. The Selangor Batu Arang Labour Association was formed at the Malayan Collieries in 1940 and quarrymen in Singapore had their own association, but labourers on the Japanese-owned iron mines had never had any association.

The industrial distribution of labour associations shows the anomaly of organized labour in Malaya. The most important and numerous group of workers, i.e., the estate and mining labourers, were scarcely organized, whereas the best organized group of labourers clustered in the economically less important, predominantly Chinese-owned workshops, factories and business firms. Furthermore, the large group of labourers employed by government departments remained totally beyond the pale of labour organization. These vital weaknesses came to be overcome only in the post-war period.

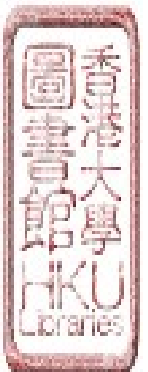
In terms of geographical coverage, there were labour organizations in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States with the exception of Perlis, a tiny agrarian state, and Trengganu, where the iron-mining labourers remained unorganized. Singapore had over 70 workers' associations in Malaya, befitting her position as the hub of trade and

8. These were the Kinta and Batang Padang Diesel Oil-Engine Drivers' Association, the Perak Oil-Engines Drivers' Association, the Tin-Ore Washers' Benevolent Association, Tanjong Tualang, and the Ampang Oil-Engine Drivers' Association.



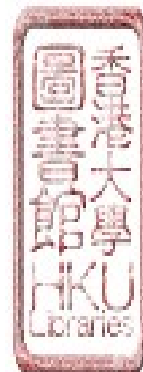
industries. Perak had 36 labour associations, half of them were in the Kinta Valley, and Penang had over 30 workers' associations. Selangor had 17 workers' associations, which concentrated in the Kuala Lumpur-Klang area. The geographical distribution of organized labour was related to the degree of industrial development in each area. Organized labour tended to concentrate in the more developed areas, and, conversely, the less developed areas had little or no organized labour.

The racial composition of organized labour shows a lopsided emphasis on Chinese labourers. There were only a few purely Indian labour associations for drivers and shop assistants. But some of the multi-racial unions, e.g., the S.T.C. Employees' Association, the Batu Arang Labour Association, the Klang Rubber Manufacture Workers' Association, and the Central Tobacco Workers' Association, Kedah, included a significant number of Indian labourers. The underdeveloped state of Indian labour organization was out of all proportion to the numerical strength and economic importance of Indian labourers in Malaya. However, the significant thing was that the Indian labourers had become aware of the importance of organization and a beginning had been made. The Malays had several drivers' unions and a seamen's union, and some Malays were included in the multi-racial unions. The paucity of Malay labour associations was quite normal in view of the small number of Malay wage labourers. No organization was known among the Javanese immigrant labourers.



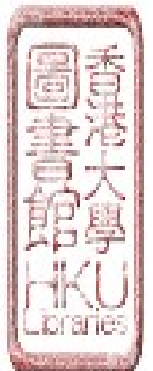
With the exception of the G.L.U. there was no labour organization constituted on a country-wide basis nor labour association comprising workers in many trades and industries. The labour associations had not developed beyond the boundary of a single colony or state nor beyond the confines of a single trade or industry. Only such employees' guild as the Kee Hee Hong with local guilds bearing a similar name in different parts of Malaya approached some semblance of a country-wide labour association. But it was a collection of virtually independent guilds rather than a national union. The limitation of labour associations to one area and to a single trade or industry constituted another weakness of organized labour.

A comparison between the labour associations formed before and during the period 1934-41 shows that all the employees' guilds were formed before the period and all the labour associations formed during the period were mutual aid associations. The latter may be regarded as new-type labour associations in contrast to the older employees' guilds. The employees' guilds were essentially craftsmen's guilds. The Kee Hee Hong, for example, comprised all engineering mechanics no matter whether they worked in dockyards or foundries. The new-type labour associations were basically organized on an industrial rather than on a craft basis. The Kinta Mining Employees' Association, for example, organized all workers in the tin mining industry notwithstanding the differences in their individual skills.



The employees' guilds were often divided along linguistic or provincial lines but the new-type labour associations had overcome the earlier parochialism and included labourers of different dialects and provincial origins, and, in some cases, even different races of workers. The new-type labour associations as a whole were more prepared to engage in collective bargaining than the employees' guilds.

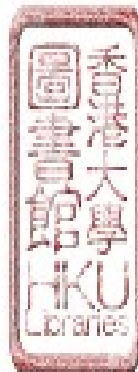
In Singapore and to a less extent in Penang there was a tendency for the new-type labour associations to replace the employees' guilds. New labour associations of building labourers, furniture-makers, tailors, goldsmiths, silversmiths, rattan-makers, and tea shop assistants in Singapore had largely replaced the older employees' guilds. Only the Kee Hee Hong had not been supplanted by a new labour association. In other parts of Malaya the employees' guilds still held their traditional ground. They had not become obsolete because they still had a useful function to perform. There were no new labour associations to take over their place. Whether in Singapore or in the rest of Malaya, no factory system had emerged to alter the old craft techniques of those trades covered by the employees' guilds. What engendered the change in Singapore and Penang was not the alteration of the technical basis of these trades but rather the workers' awareness of the need to overcome the old craft and parochial limitations in order to deal more effectively with their employers. As regards



the trade guilds with a mixed membership of employers and employees, they provided a framework in which relations between the employers and the employees could be adjusted. A number of wage disputes were settled between the 'east house' and the 'west house' within the trade guilds. In as late as 1941 the 'west house' of the Chinese Shoes Trade Association in Singapore represented 800 shoemakers in negotiation with the 'east house', and the 'west house' of the Singapore Sundry Goods Hong promoted the reform in regard to weekly rest-day.⁹ Although there were many trade guilds with a mixed membership of employers and employees, the 'west house' in most of these guilds had lain dormant and ceased to represent the interests of the employees. In some cases, the traditional function of the 'west house' had been taken over by new labour associations. The hairdressers, laundrymen, and shop assistants in Singapore, for example, had already broken away from the trade guilds to form their own associations.

Whatever their weaknesses the Malayan labour associations had advanced the interests of Malayan labourers through collective bargaining and friendly benefits. They were trade unions to all intents and purposes and recognized by the employers as such although in legal technicality they had not yet acquired the status of a trade union. Their immaturity and shortcomings were symptoms of growth rather

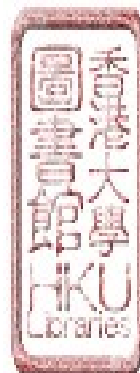
9. SCJP, June 18, 26, September 20, 1941.



than any basic malady. Experienced and mature trade union leadership could neither be transplanted from a different climate nor artificially created. They could only emerge from a long process of trial and error. The labour associations in Malaya were passing through the vital initial stage of their checkered history, and most of them were developing on sound lines.

No assessment of the strength of organized labour is complete without taking account of the G.L.U. and other extra-legal organizations. The G.L.U. was the only labour union which was pan-Malayan and not restricted to a single trade or industry. No sufficient data are available to throw light on its organization and much of its activities. It seems to have included both labour unions and individual workers in its membership. It was estimated that the G.L.U. had a total of 50,000 members in May, 1940. Its strength had probably increased further towards the end of 1941, when it came into the open and formed the Trade Unions Federation. To the G.L.U. must be added the various anti-Japanese organizations, which had included a large labour membership by the end of 1941. Organized labour in Malaya operated on both the legal and the extra-legal planes, and their total strength was much stronger than the registered labour associations might indicate.

The upsurge of trade unionism was so obvious that it could no longer be ignored. The Trade Unions Law, the Industrial Courts Law, and the Trade Disputes Law passed

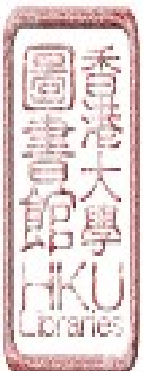


in 1940-41 were a belated legal recognition of fait accompli, but the intention of these laws were restrictive rather than pro-labour. Under the Trade Unions Law registration of a trade union was compulsory, and labour associations already functioning as trade unions had to apply for registration under the new law. The Registrar might refuse to register any trade union if any of the union's objectives or rules were deemed to be in conflict with the provisions of the law, or the union was likely to be used for unlawful purposes.¹⁰ In contrast, registration of a trade union in Great Britain was optional. Registration was obtained by those trade unions aspiring to the status of a persona juridica, whilst an unregistered union might apply to the Registrar for a certificate that the union was a trade union.¹¹ Although a registered union enjoyed some additional privileges, the basic rights and immunities of a trade union were equally assured in both cases. The Malayan law prohibited government officers or servants from membership of any trade union unless exemption was granted by the Governor, thus barring an important section of employees from trade unionism.¹² In Britain civil servants were barred only from those trade unions affiliated to a

10. Supplement to the Laws of the Straits Settlements, 1941 (Singapore, 1941), pp. 291-293.

11. Charles Gamba, Labour Law in Malaya (Singapore, 1957), pp. 17-18.

12. Supplement to the Laws of the Straits Settlements, 1941, p. 296. This clause was repealed by amendments after World War II.



Trades Union Congress or a Labour Party.¹³ The law prohibited union funds being applied in payment of court fines or for political purposes, whereas under the United Kingdom Act of 1913 political levy of a trade union was lawful.¹⁴ Two-thirds of the total number of officials of a union were required to be 'actually engaged or employed in an industry or trade with which the union is concerned'.¹⁵ On the other hand, the rights, privileges and immunities of a trade union were recognized for the first time in law. A trade union, for example, enjoyed immunity from civil suit over breach of contract arising from a trade dispute and the right to raise strike funds.¹⁶ The rights accorded, however, changed reality very little because labour organizations or their executives had never been prosecuted on such grounds as breach of contract arising from a trade dispute.

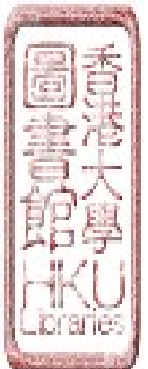
The Industrial Courts Law provided for the establishment of an Industrial Arbitration Court, which consisted of independent persons and representatives of employers and employees, to which industrial disputes might be referred by the Governor or the Controller of Labour with the consent

13. Gamba, Labour Law, p. 16.

14. Ibid., pp. 20-22; Supplement to the Laws of the Straits Settlements, 1941, p. 301.

15. Supplement to the Laws of the Straits Settlement, 1941, p. 296.

16. Ibid., p. 295.



of both parties to the dispute. A Court of Inquiry and an Arbitration Board were also provided under the law.¹⁷ The employers and employees were free to exercise their option either to accept or reject the arbitration award. The industrial arbitration machinery purported to play only a supplementary role in the settlement of industrial disputes.

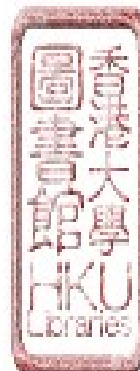
Under the Trade Disputes Law strike as such was not unlawful but "whenever any strike has any other object than the furtherance of a trade dispute within the trade or industry in which the strikers are engaged, or is a strike designed to coerce the government either directly or by inflicting hardship upon the community", such a strike would be illegal.¹⁸ A class of unlawful strikes, including general strike, sympathy strike, or strike over specific political issues, was thereby created. Any organizer of an unlawful strike was punishable with fine or imprisonment up to one year.¹⁹ The law provided that picketing would be lawful 'merely for the purpose of peacefully persuading or inducing any person to work or abstain from working, but it would be unlawful to picket in such numbers or in such manner calculated to intimidate any person, or to obstruct the approach to or egress from the place picketed, or to lead to the breach of the peace'.²⁰ The law defined

17. Ibid., pp. 309-314.

18. Straits Settlements Government Gazette, December 5, 1941, p. 2110.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., p. 2111.



'intimidation' as 'to cause in the mind of a person a reasonable apprehension of injury to him or to any member of his family or to any of his dependents or of violence or damage to any person or property'. The term 'injury' was defined as including, among other things, 'any actionable wrong'.²¹ The legal implication of this clause is explained as follows:

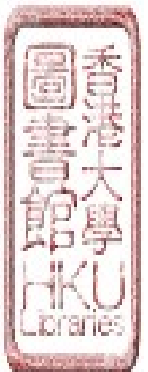
"...if any householder told a magistrate that he was afraid one of the pickets might open his garden gate, which would constitute the 'actionable wrong' of trespass to his property, or might call him a 'blackleg' in the hearing of others, which would constitute the 'actionable wrong' of slander, the picket would be sent to prison for three months although he had not even touched the garden gate or give any description of the occupant."²²

The Trade Disputes Law was modelled after the United Kingdom Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act, 1927, introduced in the wake of the defeat of the 1926 General Strike in Britain. Designed to curb strikes and cripple the bargaining power of British trade unions, the United Kingdom Act of 1927 removed most of the gains made by British workers in the field of labour legislation in 1906 and 1913.²³ Had the Trade Disputes Law been enforced to the letter, it would have banned a large proportion, if not all, of the strikes and thus seriously impaired the capacity of Malayan labourers to improve their position through collective bargaining.

21. Ibid., p. 2109.

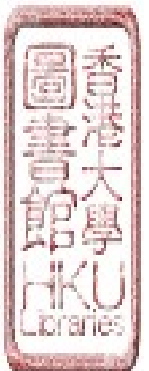
22. D.N. Pritt and Richard Freeman, The Law versus the Trade Unions (London, 1958), p. 84.

23. Gamba, Labour Law, pp. 15-16.



Trade unionism in the West had advanced the interests of labour through mutual benefits, collective bargaining, and legislation. In Malaya mutual benefits and collective bargaining had been the well-established methods to improve labour conditions by 1941, but the workers had not yet ventured into the field of legal enactment. This had not been done because there was neither popular franchise nor representative institution to enable the workers to bring their influence to bear on legislation. The Chinese labourers were legally regarded as 'aliens', and the Indian labourers were no less politically disabled. The labour laws of 1940-41 were passed without soliciting the views of labour, but the opinions of the employers heavily influenced the course of their enactment. Among the upper classes no reform group existed which might seek to mitigate the conditions of labour through legislation. The complete absence of effort in the legislative field was one of the characteristics of Malaya's trade unionism at this stage of its history.

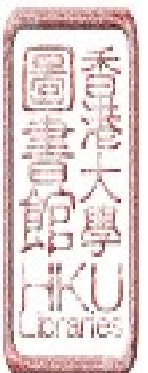
The lack of labour influence on legislation does not mean labour had abstained from politics. Rather, it means labour politics found its expression in diverse forms through other channels. Collective bargaining itself is not a simple extension of individual bargaining and has never been a purely economic phenomenon. Power relationships are involved when both parties to a dispute have resort to coercion to enforce their demands, which is akin to the



'diplomatic use of power'.²⁴ Moreover, when the employer solicited the backing of the authority of the state to put down the challenge from labour, a new dimension of conflict between the workers and the state was added. The coercion of state power became the overriding factor which set the course and outcome of many an industrial conflict. Thus it was largely through industrial conflict that the Malayan labourers came to acquire their first and primary experience in political conflict.

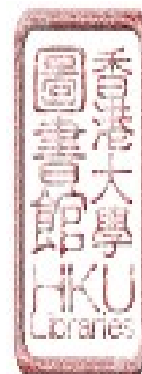
The fundamental political demand of labour at this stage was for civil rights, which were essential for their economic advancement. There was no guarantee of these rights either in law or in practice, and labour had perforce to carry their fight beyond immediate economic issues under the circumstances. As labour leaders were constantly arrested and banished, the demand for assuring the safety of labour representatives was frequently raised. In the big strikes of the Chinese rubber tappers in 1937 and some other strikes, the demand for the freedom of association, assembly, speech and publication was raised besides economic claims. The strikes of the Singapore building and pineapple

24. A revision of the classical view on collective bargaining as expounded by Sidney and Beatrice Webb was put forward by Allan Flanders at the first World Congress of the International Industrial Relations Associations, Geneva, 4-8 September, 1967. See Allan Flanders, "Bargaining Theory: The Classical Model Reconsidered" in B.C. Roberts (ed.), Industrial Relations: Contemporary Issues (London, 1968), pp. 3-33.



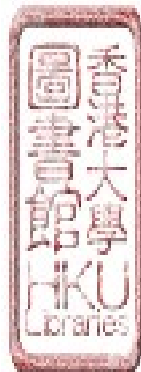
factory workers in 1936 revolved round the registration of their unions as one of the most important issues, and by 1941 the fight for the right to organize had not yet ended. The big strikes of the Indian estate labourers in May, 1941, were essentially a demonstration of protest against the suppression of incipient trade unionism among Indian estate labourers. The fundamental political orientation of labour was therefore anti-establishment and anti-colonial.

The M.C.P. and its labour arm the G.L.U. were instrumental in injecting politics into labour agitation. In the Marxist doctrine the working class is the vanguard of revolutionary social change, but they are incapable of playing this role before they put an end to the want of cohesion among themselves and become conscious of their own political mission. To the Marxist, trade unionism on an economic plane is necessary to foster working class unity in the first place, but in order that the working class might go beyond purely trade union consciousness to attain political consciousness it is essential that they go through the crucible of political action. The Marxist doctrine provides the key to an understanding of the G.L.U.'s policy. The G.L.U. did not start off with purely political strikes after its formation in 1934, but rather it supported the drive for higher wages, shorter hours and better working conditions and gradually built up its own strength in the process. The strike at the Malayan Collieries in 1936,



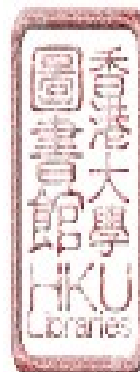
for example, was called over specific economic issues but the political elements were so conspicuous that it was clearly regarded as a challenge to the government. After the outbreak of the European War, the G.L.U. stepped up political agitation among the labourers. The result was an increase of politically motivated strikes and demonstrations, but even then the G.L.U. did not cease to render support for purely economic demands. This was the tactics which led to the tremendous growth of the G.L.U.'s strength towards the end of the period.

Few other countries were comparable to Malaya in the tremendous influence exerted by foreign politics on local events, and this was possible only where the population was largely immigrant and their country of origin was in the throes of great social upheavals. The political influence of China in Malaya was the most strongly felt between the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July, 1937, and the Japanese invasion of Malaya. In the anti-Japanese campaign which engulfed the entire Chinese community, the labourers played a prominent role. They took part in all aspects of the campaign, including boycott of Japanese goods, disruption of Japanese investment, contribution to the China Relief Fund, and service on the China front. The political orientation of the Chinese labourers was veered further to the left as the prestige of the C.C.P. grew at the expense of the Kuomintang in the battle for the hearts and minds of the overseas Chinese.



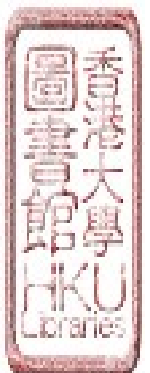
A large number of labourers came into the fold of anti-Japanese political organizations. Organized labour was strengthened and labour militancy was enhanced as a result. A political mutual understanding was gradually built up between the Chinese employers and employees, as was evidenced by the common acceptance of the idea of 'employer-employee cooperation', and this contributed to better industrial relations in the Chinese community towards 1940-41.

The pressure of the Indian Government was consistently felt. The period began with the Indian Government requesting the Malayan Governments to raise Indian wages and ended with the Malayan Governments asking the Indian Government to lift the ban on Indian labour emigration. As a whole Indian diplomatic pressure produced little results during the period. In 1937 Indian wages in the rubber industry were raised to the pre-depression rates partly as a result of the recommendation of the Sastri deputation. But the increase was short-lived, and the Sastri report itself came under vehement criticism by the Indian community in Malaya for its inadequacies. The ban on assisted Indian emigration was imposed in June, 1938, in reaction to the wage cut in the rubber industry. The strong recommendations of the Agent of the Government of India in Malaya and the representation of the C.I.A.M. led the Indian Government to take the decision. It was intended primarily to exert pressure on the Malayan Governments to improve Indian wages and the status of Indians in Malaya, but it failed to achieve



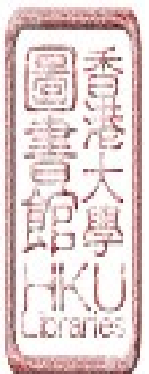
the intended objective. The Indian Government had allowed Indian labour emigration to continue for three years before it imposed the ban, thus enabling the Malayan authorities and private employers to build up a sufficient pool of local Indian labour. After the outbreak of the European War, the Malayan authorities and rubber planters tried to import more Javanese labourers to resolve labour shortages rather than budge under Indian diplomatic pressure. The disappointment with the Sastri report and the negative result of the ban contributed to an increasing realization among the Indian labourers that they had to fight for their own rights instead of relying passively on the Indian Government.

Indian nationalists exerted a more potent political influence on the Indian labourers from 1937 onwards. Jawarhalal Nehru's visit to Malaya in that year made a tremendous impact. He urged the Indian labourers to rely on their own strength and organization instead of on state aid to improve their own conditions. His message was that the Indian labourers must form their own trade unions. It gave a clear direction to the Indian labourers just at a time when the Sastri report came under severe criticism from the Indian community. Indian nationalist influence was also disseminated through the C.I.A.M., the Tamil press, and the educated elements among the estate population. The net result was to encourage the Indian labourers to more independent assertion, greater militancy and attempts at labour organization. Indian nationalist influence was



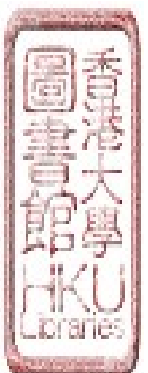
palpable in the attempt to organize Indian estate labourers and the eruption of protest strikes in May, 1941.

A phase of transition from an unstable and transitory labour population to a more permanent and stable one began after the Great Depression. The post-depression period saw both Indian and Chinese immigration put under increasing restriction. Indian labour immigration was put on a quota basis in 1934-35 and it was completely halted after the ban was imposed in June, 1938. Chinese labour immigration came under the control of the Aliens Ordinance and was further affected by the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July, 1937. The sex ratio of the labour population, especially the Chinese, was improved, and the resultant increase of working-class families also contributed to a more settled labour force. The local-born grew proportionately in importance, and many labourers had in fact lost their ties with their native countries. A sense of Malayan identity was growing among both the Indian and Chinese labourers. This was as yet something inchoate and ill-defined, and was no doubt over-shadowed by the allegiance to their own country of origin. This conflicting tendencies of loyalty to their own country of origin and a growing sense of Malayan identity had not yet been resolved by the end of this period. Only when the labourers had come to regard Malaya as their permanent homeland were they prepared to make long-term commitment to social change. It was vital, therefore, for their own interests to shift their allegiance

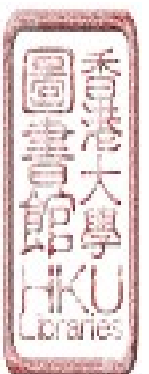


from their country of origin to their country of domicile. This required time, a congenial social and political climate, and above all, conscious effort at the re-orientation of their loyalty.

The period under the present study was the formative years of trade unionism in Malaya. Labour had succeeded in a short span of eight years in expanding from an extremely weak organizational base to an impressive show of organized strength. They had also managed to rise from the Great Depression and secure improvement in working conditions through sustained and widespread collective bargainings. Their consciousness was enhanced through these and diverse forms of political activism. Inadequacies and shortcomings there were in almost all fields of labour endeavour, but these could be overcome in the long run. Most of the achievements of labour were of lasting value. Post-war trade unionism was not a fortuitous growth without historical antecedents; on the contrary, it was built upon the groundwork laid by labour agitation and organization before the war. It was through those turbulent years that the Malayan labourers made significant advance towards the goal of socio-economic justice and a fundamental change in their conditions of living.



APPENDICES



Appendix A

Table I

NUMBER OF LABOURERS EMPLOYED AT THE END OF EACH YEAR ON
ESTATES IN THE STRAITS SETTLEMENTS AND THE FEDERATED
MALAY STATES, 1929-1933

(thousands)

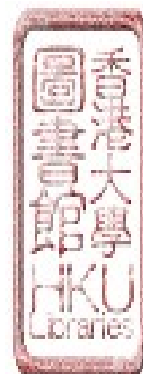
Year	Indians	Chinese	Javanese	Others	Total
1929	205	42	6	5	258
1930	154	42	5	4	205
1931	121	37	3	3	164
1932	104	35	3	3	145
1933	111	39	3	7	160

Table II

WORKERS EMPLOYED AT THE END OF EACH YEAR ON MALAYAN
RUBBER ESTATES, 1934-1940

Year	Indians	Chinese	Javanese	Others	Total
1934	179	86	12	25	302
1935	175	62	9	18	264
1936	184	65	10	18	277
1937	236	77	13	23	349
1938	209	61	9	17	296
1939	214	75	12	23	342
1940	218	88	14	31	351

Note: Table I and Table II are compiled by P.T. Baur in The Rubber Industry (pp. 225, 236) from the Malayan Rubber Statistics and the Annual Report of the Labour Department, F.M.S. and Malaya. Table I refers to employment on estates employing ten or more workers in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, and table II refers to employment on rubber estates of 100 acres or more in the whole of Malaya. P.T. Baur said, "For various reasons the official figures of the Chinese estate population considerably understate the number of Chinese estate labourers According to the statistics of the Labour Department, Chinese estate labourers numbered 64,000 at the end of 1931. But according to the 1931 Malayan census the total number of Chinese gainfully employed in rubber cultivation in all



capacities totalled some 182,000, while another 39,000 were engaged in 'other and multifarious' forms of agriculture, a term which certainly included many people connected at least part-time with rubber cultivation, e.g. tapioca and rubber, or pineapple or rubber cultivators. The census figures included the owners and tappers of Chinese small-holdings; but even allowing for this, the figures of Chinese estate employment are seriously incomplete." He continued, "Malayan labour statistics improved considerably after 1933; in particular, reports covering the whole of Malaya were issued by the Labour Department, and rubber estate employment came to be shown separately after 1934." See Baur, The Rubber Industry, pp. 225, 236.

Table III

NUMBER OF LABOURERS EMPLOYED AT THE END OF EACH YEAR ON
ESTATES, IN MINES, AND FACTORIES,
1929-1940

Year	Indians	Chinese	Javanese	Others	Total
1929	282	110		26	418
1930	257	115	13	18	403
1931	169	115	11	16	311
1932	143	101	10	16	270
1933	154	105	11	22	292
1934	195	127	13	26	361
1935	194	123	11	21	349
1936	204	146	13	23	386
1937	262	172	16	30	480
1938	230	133	11	24	398
1939	234	157	16	36	443
1940	241	153	16	48	456

Note: Table III is compiled by P.T. Baur in The Rubber Industry (p. 396). P.T. Baur said, "The figures, which cover the whole of Malaya, refer to workers at places of employment with ten or more labourers. The Chinese employment figures were revised in 1930 and 1931; hence the rise in employment figures during the slump. Indian employment figures were by far the most reliable throughout." See Baur, The Rubber Industry, p. 396.

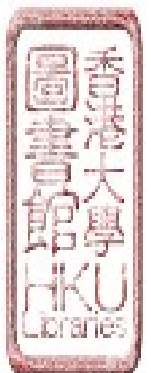


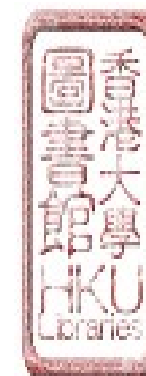
Table IV

INDUSTRIAL CLASSIFICATION OF MALAYAN WORKERS, 1931*

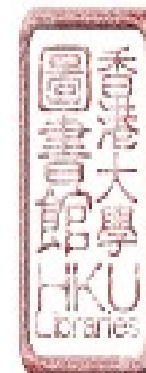
	Straits Settlements	Federated Malay States	Unfederated Malay States	Total
A. Estates				164,000
B. Mining, Quarrying and Treatment of Non-Metalliferous Mine and Quarry Products				
a. Tin Mines				57,403
b. Workers in Other Mines and Quarries	2,337	4,569	3,522	10,428
c. Kilnmen and Lime-burners	133	418	43	594
d. Makers of Coal-gas, Coke, etc.	107	21	25	153
e. Other Workers	308	375	135	818
Total				69,396
C. Preparation, Supply and Work in Material Substances and Electricity Supply				
1. Makers of Bricks, Pottery and Glass	717	717	320	1,754
2. Workers in Chemical Process:				
a. Makers of Vegetable Oils, Soap and Candles	405	147	95	647
3. Metal Workers:				
a. Tin-smelters and Smelting Coolies	455	50	-	505
b. Foundry Workers	183	534	4	721
c. Smith and Forge Workers	1,485	1,901	1,046	4,432
d. Mechanical Engineers	306	312	31	649
	316			



	Straits Settlements	Federated Malay States	Unfederated Malay States	Total
e. Motor Mechanics	1,384	1,100	353	2,837
f. Other Mechanics and Fitters	5,957	4,007	425	10,389
g. Cycle Repairers	482	898	164	1,544
h. Tin, Brass and Copper Smiths	982	785	532	2,299
i. Other Workers	102	91	106	299
4. Workers in Precious Metal and Electro- plating:				
a. Goldsmiths and Silversmiths	3,929	2,668	2,235	8,832
b. Electro-platers	44	12	1	57
5. Electrical Apparatus Makers, Fitters and Electricians:				
a. Electrical Engineers	114	135	8	257
b. Electricians, Fitters and Wiremen	1,652	1,300	168	3,120
c. Telegraph and Telephone Mechanics	222	185	118	525
d. Other Workers	67	420	53	540
6. Makers of Clocks, Watches and Scientific Instruments:				
a. Watch, Clock and Instrument Makers and Repairers and Opticians	445	493	95	1,033
7. Workers in Skin and Leather, and Makers of Leather Goods:				
a. Tanners	148	7	-	155
b. Other Workers	24	1	-	25
	317			



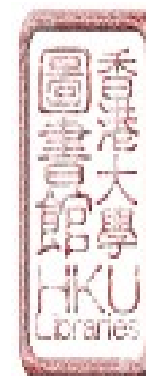
	Straits Settlements	Federated Malay States	Unfederated Malay States	Total
8. Textile Workers:				
a. Weavers	253	147	4,511	4,911
b. Rope and Net Makers	128	259	760	1,147
c. Dyers and Cleaners	238	17	35	290
d. Other Workers	389	401	1,601	2,391
9. Makers of Textile Goods and Articles of Dress:				
a. Tailors, Dressmakers and Seamstresses	6,514	5,930	2,878	15,322
b. Makers of Boots, Shoes and Clogs	2,697	1,447	518	4,662
c. Other Workers	6	79	8	93
10. Makers of Food, Drink and Tobacco:				
a. Makers of Foodstuffs	1,573	397	855	2,825
b. Makers of Prepared Food	1,979	1,349	1,091	4,419
c. Makers of Drinks	280	82	283	645
d. Makers of Tobacco, Cigars and Cigarettes	287	860	391	1,538
11. Workers in Wood and Furniture:				
a. Basketry (Rattan) Workers	1,698	1,020	709	3,427
b. Carpenters, Joiners and Cabinetmakers	13,575	11,117	3,380	28,072
c. Sawyers	1,778	2,951	733	5,462
d. Boat and Ship Builders	431	101	151	683
e. Other Workers	1,302	926	1,584	3,812
	318			



	Straits Settlements	Federated Malay States	Unfederated Malay States	Total
12. Workers in Paper and Cardboard:				
a. Bookbinders and Workers in Paper and Cardboard	411	159	40	610
13. Printers and Photographers				
a. Printers, Compositors and Other Workers in Printing	1,245	638	190	2,073
14. Builders, Bricklayers, Stone and Slate Workers:				
a. Bricklayers, Masons, and Other Workers	5,407	3,821	2,242	11,470
15. Painters and Decorators	2,097	1,229	259	3,585
16. Workers in Other Materials:				
a. Vulcanisers and Other Workers in Rubber	2,781	90	35	2,906
17. Workers in Mixed or Undefined Materials:				
a. Workers in Material Substances not elsewhere enumerated	68	219	304	601
Total				141,564
D. Transport and Communication				
1. Railway Locomotive Drivers, Firemen and Cleaners	240	1,098	343	1,681
2. Railway Labourers	782	4,237	1,614	6,633
3. Other Railway Workers	431	2,210	390	3,031
	319			

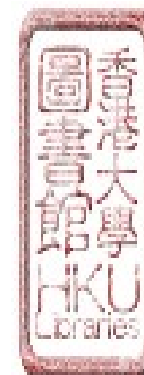


	Straits Settlements	Federated Malay States	Unfederated Malay States	Total
4. Drivers, Conductors and Cleaners of Motor Vehicles and Trams	14,202	13,144	4,789	32,135
5. Drivers of Horse-Vehicles	606	341	41	988
6. Dock Labourers	7,974	567	41	8,582
7. Boatmen and Lightermen	13,432	2,280	2,160	17,872
8. Other Workers in Water Transport and Communication	5,004	2,312	2,113	9,429
9. Postmen and Post Office Sorters	555	418	210	1,183
10. Telegraph Operators	188	126	45	359
11. Telephone Operators	255	391	176	822
12. Messengers and Peons	3,777	2,239	369	6,385
13. Other Workers in Transport and Communication	123	164	28	315
Total				89,415
E. Commerce, Finance, and Personal Service				
1. Salesmen, Shop Assistants, Mercantile Accountants, Travellers	24,985	21,866	17,347	64,198
2. Laundry Workers	3,289	2,767	1,088	7,144
3. Barbers	3,810	4,063	2,379	10,252
Total				
F. Others and Indeterminate				
1. Warehousemen, Store Keepers and Packers	7,145	802	227	8,174
	320			



	Straits Settlements	Federated Malay States	Unfederated Malay States	Total
2. Stationary Engine Drivers, Dynamo and Motor Attendants	1,364	3,040	361	4,765
3. Other and Undefined Workers:				
a. Labourers (General and Indeterminate)	37,336	45,891	62,226	145,453
b. Gatekeepers and Watchmen	4,272	4,290	1,627	10,189
c. Other Workers	2,767	6,172	565	9,504
Total				178,085
Grand Total				<u>724,054</u>

*This classification does not include the population of Brunei, which are included in the statistics for the Unfederated Malay States in the 1931 Census.



Note: The main source for Table IV is Vlieland, C.A., British Malaya: A Report on the 1931 Census. The attempt at compiling an accurate industrial classification of Malayan workers is vitiated by the shortcomings of the 1931 Census. No classification of the gainfully employed population according to their occupational status (e.g. 'wage-earner' or 'own account worker') was given in the Census. Thus it is impossible to arrive at the number of wage-earning labourers in the estate population or in the whole population engaged in agriculture. In other industries the wage-earning labourer and own account worker were often mixed up in one single item. It is impossible, for example, to separate the wage-earning labourers from the own account workers or other elements in 'makers of food, drink, and tobacco'. Another shortcoming of the 1931 Census is the lack of precision in the industrial classification. The number of 'general and indeterminate labourers' was unnecessarily large. In this compilation the number of estate labourers is based on the figure in Table I. The figure is a serious under-estimation of the total number of workers in the rubber industry because the Unfederated Malay States were left out and the number of Chinese rubber tappers were under-estimated. The number of tin mining labourers is based on the Annual Report of the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, F.M.S., 1931. The rest of the information is entirely derived from Table 121, 129, and 137 in the 1931 Census. Wherever possible, own account workers are excluded from this compilation, but the inclusion of a fair proportion of own account workers in the manufacturing and processing industries (Preparation, Supply and Work in Material Substances and Electricity Supply) cannot be avoided. Rickshaw pullers are not included among transport workers because as a whole they were not wage-earning labourers. Domestic servants are not included because their conditions of employment were different from those of the general labourers, and 'clerks, typists, and draughtsmen', whose status was more akin to the lower middle class than to the labourers, are also not included in this compilation. As far as the grand total of labour population is concerned, the serious under-estimation of workers in the rubber industry is offset to some extent by the unavoidable inflation of the figures for the manufacturing and processing industries. The grand total amounts to about one-third of the total gainfully occupied population and seems to give an approximate indication of the relative size of the Malayan labour population in 1931.

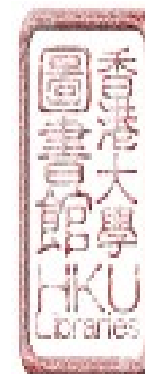


Table V

TOTAL POPULATION BY INDUSTRIAL GROUP IN BRITISH MALAYA,
1931*

Industrial Group	Numbers	Percentages
Fishing	54,819	1.26
Agriculture	1,148,501	26.38
Mining and quarrying	91,707	2.11
Manufacture, etc.	151,204	3.47
Transport and communication	124,128	2.85
Commerce and finance	212,329	4.88
Public Administration and Defence	29,357	0.67
Professional service	34,552	0.79
Entertainment and sport	5,333	0.12
Personal service	127,433	2.93
Other or Indeterminate Industries	197,118	4.53
Total gainfully employed	2,176,481	49.99
Total population	4,353,715	100.00

(Source: M.V. Del Tufo, A Report on the 1947 Census of Population, p. 102).

*Including Labuan but excluding the unlocated population.

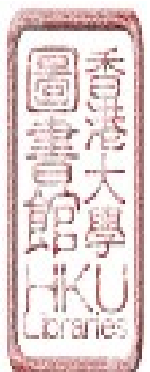


Table VI
COST OF LIVING, ASIATIC STANDARD

<u>Year</u>	<u>Index Number</u>
1914	100.0
1928	157.3
1929	155.6
1930	147.5
1931	125.0
1932	108.6
1933	99.3
1934	103.2
1935	108.1
1936	106.0
1937	112.5
1938	109.2
1939	n.a.
1940	n.a.
1941	n.a.

(Source: F.M.S. Annual Report, 1929-1940; Straits Settlements Blue Book, 1929-1938).

n.a. = not available

Note: The official cost-of-living indices for 1939-41 were not published.

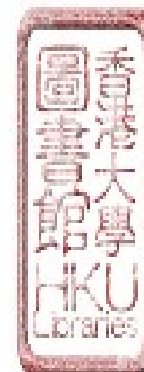


Table VII

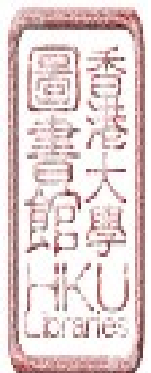
INDIAN AND CHINESE RUBBER TAPPERS' DAILY WAGE RATES,
FEDERATED MALAY STATES, 1925-1940

Year	Indians (Males Only)	Chinese Employed Through Contractors	London Average Rubber Prices	
	₹	₹	s.	d.
1925	0.40-0.65	0.80-1.50	2	11
1926	0.40-0.60	0.80-2.00	2	0
1927	0.45-0.60	0.80-2.10	1	6
1928	0.45-0.65	0.70-2.00		11
1929	0.50-0.70	0.70-2.00		10
1930	0.40-0.55	n.a.		6
1931	0.30-0.50	n.a.		3
1932	0.26-0.47	n.a.		2
1933	0.32-0.40	n.a.		3
1934	0.35-0.64	0.40-0.65		6
1935	0.35-0.60	0.40-0.65		6
1936	0.40-0.50	0.50-0.65		8
1937	0.45-0.50	0.75+		10
1938	0.40-0.50	n.a.		7
1939	n.a.	n.a.		9
1940	0.50-0.55	0.70-1.00	1	0

(Source: J.N. Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy and Administration, Appendix, Table 8, p. 277. Wage data from Labour Department Annual Report, F.M.S. and Malaya, 1925-1940. Rubber prices are rounded figures and are from Sir Andrew McFadyean (ed.), The History of Rubber Regulation 1934-1943, p. 239).

n.a. = not available.

Note: "Some employers offered Indian rubber tappers payment by results. The Labour Department reported that wages of such labourers in the mid-1920's ranged between 60 and 90 cents per day. Chinese wage rates are probably the gross amounts paid to the labor contractor and not the net amounts paid to the laborers. The official reports do not say. Chinese wage rates for 1930-1931 were reported as being 'slightly higher' than the rates paid to Indians; for 1932-1933, as being 'practically the same' as those paid to Indians." See Parmer, Colonial Labor Policy, Appendix, Table 8, p. 277.



MALAYAN MIGRATION STATISTICS (1931-1941)

(I) ARRIVALS FROM FOREIGN (OVERSEAS) PORTS

Year	Europeans	Eurasians	Japanese	Chinese	Malaysians	Northern Indians	Southern Indians	Others	TOTAL
1931 ...	20,366	573	2,968	191,690	53,281	18,435	33,141	9,692	339,146
1932 ...	18,668	665	2,414	138,328	50,378	17,918	26,945	9,422	264,738
1933 ...	19,805	712	2,330	124,460	48,087	17,235	27,928	9,569	250,126
1934 ...	24,314	1,078	2,727	223,892	90,748	22,287	102,292	27,415	494,753
1935 ...	28,289	995	2,817	278,168	106,402	20,846	80,089	30,733	548,339
1936 ...	31,464	962	2,883	282,299	110,787	18,199	55,482	23,545	528,621
1937 ...	34,510	1,093	3,188	402,563	139,473	22,689	135,353	21,584	760,453
1938 ...	36,241	902	2,059	228,669	102,915	20,436	55,864	18,478	465,564
1939 ...	29,311	881	1,756	160,448	114,755	21,056	35,135	20,396	383,738
1940 ...	17,897	464	1,439	147,016	82,353	19,167	25,010	13,390	306,736
1941 (Jan.-Oct.)	14,694	438	480	117,426	50,629	18,060	22,948	5,743	230,418

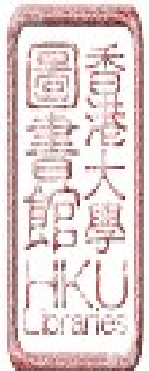
(II) DEPARTURES TO FOREIGN (OVERSEAS) PORTS

Year	Europeans	Eurasians	Japanese	Chinese	Malaysians	Northern Indians	Southern Indians	Others	TOTAL
1931 ...	20,861	597	2,584	304,655	56,391	17,179	104,952	10,456	517,675
1932 ...	19,237	726	3,212	235,846	54,374	16,238	88,265	9,818	427,716
1933 ...	19,504	784	2,460	155,638	47,783	13,478	39,103	9,825	288,575
1934 ...	22,715	815	2,304	162,253	87,323	15,155	35,626	26,473	352,664
1935 ...	26,615	850	2,452	187,182	109,462	16,998	47,044	32,530	428,333
1936 ...	28,691	892	2,454	205,498	115,113	16,138	47,573	25,453	442,112
1937 ...	33,843	925	2,980	222,061	143,323	17,409	50,988	21,718	493,247
1938 ...	33,711	912	2,276	175,489	108,663	17,295	79,115	17,065	434,526
1939 ...	27,757	658	2,290	146,109	123,313	17,828	49,506	18,989	386,450
1940 ...	17,257	364	1,773	143,694	87,205	15,366	36,406	12,970	315,035
1941 (Jan.-Oct.)	14,468	319	2,264	110,826	44,123	17,052	33,231	5,254	227,537

(III) MIGRATIONAL SURPLUS OR DEFICIT (FOREIGN (OVERSEAS) PORTS)

Year	Europeans	Eurasians	Japanese	Chinese	Malaysians	Northern Indians	Southern Indians	Others	TOTAL
1931 ...	-495	-24	334	-112,965	-3,110	1,256	-71,811	-764	-187,529
1932 ...	-569	-61	-798	-97,518	-3,996	1,680	-61,320	-396	-162,978
1933 ...	301	-72	-130	-31,178	304	3,757	-11,175	-256	-38,449
1934 ...	1,599	263	423	61,639	3,425	7,132	66,666	942	142,089
1935 ...	1,674	145	355	90,986	-3,060	3,848	33,045	-1,797	125,306
1936 ...	2,773	70	429	75,891	-4,326	2,061	7,909	-1,908	82,869
1937 ...	567	168	208	180,502	-3,850	5,280	84,365	-134	267,206
1938 ...	2,530	-10	-217	53,180	-5,748	3,141	-23,251	1,413	31,038
1939 ...	1,554	223	-534	14,339	-8,558	3,228	-14,371	1,407	-2,712
1940 ...	640	100	-334	3,322	-4,852	3,801	-11,396	420	-8,399
1941 (Jan.-Oct.)	226	119	-1,784	6,600	6,506	2,008	-10,283	489	3,881
Total Migrational surplus (+) or deficit (-) for the period ...	+10,900	+921	-1,988	+244,708	-27,265	+37,192	-11,622	-584	+252,262

(Source: M.V. Del Tufo, A Report on the 1947 Census of Population, p. 597.)



Appendix B

This appendix consists of the estimated annual man-days lost through strikes in the period 1934-1941. The information is based on the Labour Department Annual Report, 1934-1941, and Sin Chew Jit Poh, 1934-1941. No strike statistics were compiled by the Labour Department before 1946. The information contained in the Annual Report is incomplete; strikes were not fully recorded, and details were given only for major strikes. Sin Chew Jit Poh gave a fuller coverage on strikes; the date of the beginning and end of a strike and the number of strikers were usually given. The Straits Times and the Malaya Tribune are used as a supplementary source. The man-days lost are obtained by multiplying the number of days on strike by the number of strikers involved.

A strike which lasted less than a day is not included in the estimation. Neither is a 'go-slow' included. There were very few lock-outs enforced by the employers during this period, but whenever there was one, the man-days lost through the work stoppage are included in the estimation because of the practical difficulties in drawing a distinction between a lock-out and a strike. Whenever the number of strikers is recorded as, for example, 'over 300', the round figure 300 is given in the estimate. No attempt is made here to estimate the total number of strikes.

In a number of cases neither the duration of strike nor the number of strikers are known, and it is likely some strikes were not recorded either in the Labour Department Annual Report or the newspaper reports. The margin of error of the estimates, therefore, lies in all probability in under-estimation. These estimates claim no exactitude. They are compiled mainly for the purpose of illustrating the broad trend of labour unrest during the period and in the hope that they are better than none.

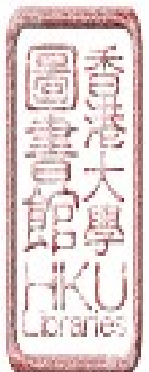
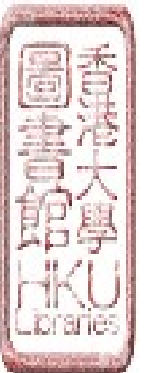


Table I

AN ESTIMATE OF MAN-DAYS LOST IN 1934 STRIKES

<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
PLANTATIONS:				
Two Rubber Estates	Perak	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
4 Strikes on Estates	Selangor	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2 Strikes on Estates	Johore	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total				n.a.
MINING & QUARRYING:				
Batu Pahat Iron Mine	Johore	n.a.	2	n.a.
Total				n.a.
GOLDSMITHS, SHOEMAKERS, TAILORS, etc.:				
Shoemakers	Selangor	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Shoemakers	Penang	n.a.	1	n.a.
Shoemakers ⁽¹⁾	Penang	40/200	25	3,080
Ipoh Shoemakers	Perak	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Taiping Shoemakers	Perak	n.a.	10	n.a.
Shoemakers	Singapore	n.a.	10	n.a.
Tailors	Selangor	300	9	2,700
Tailors	Kedah	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Silk Dress Makers	Penang	40	3	120



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
Tailors	Negri Sembilan	n.a.	4	n.a.
Tailors	Penang	n.a.	5	n.a.
Rattan Workers	Negri Sembilan	n.a.	1	n.a.
Rattan Workers	Malacca	17	1	17
Rattan Workers	Negri Sembilan	n.a.	5	n.a.
Total				5,917
ENGINEERING MECHANICS:				
Ipoh Engineering Mechanics	Perak	n.a.	2	n.a.
Taipng Engineering Mechanics	Perak	n.a.	2	n.a.
Total				n.a.
HARBOUR, LAND & WATER TRANSPORT:				
Central Workshops	Selangor	1,500	5	7,500
Singapore Railway	Singapore	100	2	200
Other Railway Workers	F.M.S.	n.a.	4	n.a.
Total				7,700
OTHERS:				
Washermen	Negri Sembilan	n.a.	4	n.a.
Toddy Tappers	Perak	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Toddy Tappers	Selangor	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total				
GRAND TOTAL				

(Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1934; SCJP, 1934)

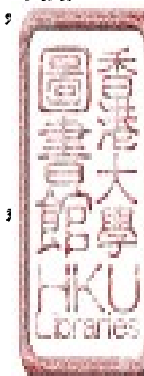
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Note (1) 40 shoemakers started a strike on October 31, and from November 12 onwards the number of strikers increased to 200. The strike ended on November 25.



Table II
AN ESTIMATE OF MAN-DAYS LOST IN 1935 STRIKES

<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
PLANTATIONS:				
Chinese Rubber Tappers	Johore	500	2	1,000
Serapoh Estate	Perak	130	2	260
Behrang River Estate	Perak	n.a.	3	n.a.
Strathmashie Estate	Perak	150	3	450
Bukit Munchong Estate	Selangor	15	2	30
Sendayam Estate	Negri Sembilan	n.a.	1	n.a.
Total				1,740
MANUFACTORY & PROCESSING FACTORY WORKERS:				
Ban Ho Bee Rubber Factory	Penang	30	14	420
Cigar Rollers	Perak	100	7	700
Naina Sahib's Cigar Factory	Perak	35	n.a.	n.a.
Total				1,120
GOLDSMITHS, SHOEMAKERS, TAILORS, etc.:				
Shoemakers	Penang	130	12	1,560
Tailors	Penang	48	5	240
Total				1,800
		330		



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>	
ENGINEERING MECHANICS:					
Guan Chong Foundry	Selangor	30	8	240	
Total					240
OTHERS:					
Sin Hwa China Goods Co.	Penang	n.a.	1	n.a.	
Toddy Tappers	Selangor	50	1	50	
Total					50
GRAND TOTAL					<u>4,950</u>

(Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1935; SCJP, 1935).

n.a. = not available

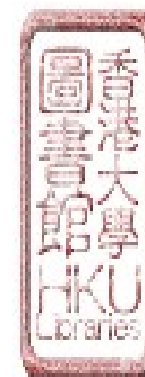
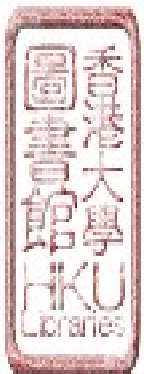
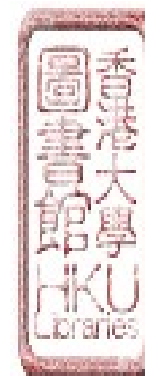


Table III
AN ESTIMATE OF MAN-DAYS LOST IN 1936 STRIKES

<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
PLANTATIONS:				
1 Rubber Estate	Johore	200	1	200
Yong Ek Ling Estate	Negri Sembilan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1 Rubber Estate	Johore	200	1	200
1 Rubber Estate	Negri Sembilan	70	2	140
2 Rubber Estates	Negri Sembilan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Nova Scotia Estate	Perak	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Selamat Estate	Perak	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Sungei Bilut Estate	Pahang	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total				540
MINING & QUARRYING:				
Malayan Collieries	Selangor	7,000	6	42,000
Sungei Besi Tin Mine	Selangor	1,300	5	6,500
Tung Sang Tin Mine	Selangor	400	1	400
Hong Fatt Tin Mine	Selangor	2,400	1	2,400
French Tekka Mines	Perak	n.a.	2	n.a.
Dungun Iron Mine	Trengganu	500	5	2,500
I.S.K. Iron Mine	Trengganu	300	1	300
		332		



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>	
8 Quarries, Pulau Ubin	Singapore	700	7	4,900	
Mandai Quarry	Singapore	300	3	900	
Total					59,000
MANUFACTORY & PROCESSING FACTORY WORKERS:					
Chuan Seng, Sin Heng, Huat Heng Pineapple Factories	Singapore	1,000	8	8,000	
Nam Ek Pineapple Factory	Johore	300	24	7,200	
Malayan, Hock Huat Pineapple Factories	Selangor	1,000	3	3,000	
Sawmills	Singapore	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	
4 Sawmills, Anson	Perak	220	10	2,200	
8 Printing Firms	Singapore	130	2	260	
1 Cigar Factory, Klang	Selangor	50	3	150	
2 Cigar Factories, K.L.	Selangor	150	1	150	
Total					20,960
ENGINEERING MECHANICS:					
16 Engineering Workshops, Ipoh	Perak	600	33	19,800	
Wing Hup, Taiping	Perak	n.a.	3	n.a.	
United Engineers Boiler Makers	Singapore	100	29	2,900	
United Engineers Artisans	Singapore	600	25	15,000	
Engineering Workshops, Anson	Perak	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	
		333			



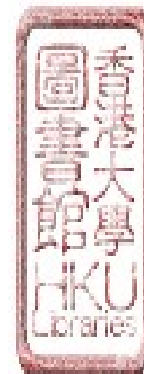
<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
Engineering Workshops, Kampar	Perak	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total				37,700
BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION:				
Naval Base Construction Site	Singapore	200	10	2,000
Changi & Seletar Sites	Singapore	900	1	900
Gammons & Co.	Singapore	50	7	350
Pasir Panjang Barracks under Cantonese Contractors	Singapore	400	1	400
4 Construction Sites	Singapore	250	1	250
Pasir Panjang Barracks under Hokkienese Contractors ⁽¹⁾	Singapore	400	9	3,600
Various Construction Sites	Singapore	2,000	1	2,000
Various Construction Sites	Singapore	4,000	3	12,000
R.A.F. Base Construction Site	Singapore	400	1	400
Naval Base Construction Site	Singapore	50	1	50
Johore Bahru Construction Site	Johore	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Batu Pahat Government Quarters	Johore	100	1	100
Total				22,000
		334		



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
HARBOUR, WATER AND LAND TRANSPORT:				
Singapore Harbour Board	Singapore	800	18	14,400
Singapore Traction Co.	Singapore	800	2	1,600
Lorry Drivers, Klang	Selangor	n.a.	3	n.a.
Lorry Drivers	Pahang	n.a.	3	n.a.
Lorry Drivers, Anson	Perak	n.a.	3	n.a.
Total				16,000
MUNICIPAL LABOURERS: (2)				
Sewerage Construction, Municipal Cleaning, Water & Gas, Civil Aerodrome (3)	Singapore	8,500	3	25,500
Municipal & Other Indian Labourers	Singapore	13,000	9	117,000
Total				142,500
GRAND TOTAL				<u>299,650</u>

(Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1936; SCJP, 1936).

n.a. = not available



- Notes:
- (1) The strike of building labourers under Hokkienese contractors started on September 15 and ended on the 28th. On the 10th day of their strike they were joined by other building labourers in a general strike. The number of building labourers involved in the general strike is given in the next two items.
 - (2) Some of the Indian labourers involved in the Singapore municipal labourers' strike were not municipal labourers. Since it is not possible to separate them from the rest of the strikers, their number is included in this item.
 - (3) On the fourth day of the strike the number of strikers swelled from 8,500 to 13,000. The man-days lost from the fifth day onwards are given in the next item.

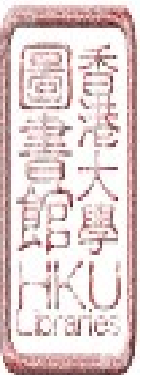
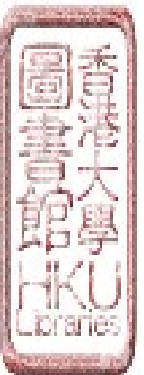
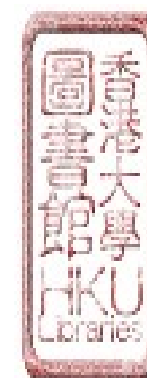


Table IV
AN ESTIMATE OF MAN-DAYS LOST IN 1937 STRIKES

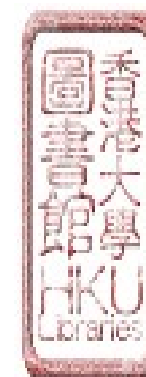
<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
PLANTATIONS:				
Ulu Langat Estates	Selangor	220	6	1,320
Hawthorden, Wardieburn Estates	Selangor	400	5	2,000
Various Rubber Estates, including the Above	Selangor	3,000	4	12,000
Various Rubber Estates, including the Above	Selangor & Negri Sembilan	20,000	12	240,000
Various Rubber Estates	Selangor	8,000	3	24,000
1 Estate in Kuala Pilah	Negri Sembilan	550	9	4,950
1 Estate in Kuala Pilah	Negri Sembilan	3,000	9	27,000
1 Estate in Bahau	Negri Sembilan	600	8	4,800
1 Estate in Rompin	Negri Sembilan	100	7	700
1 Estate near Segamat	Johore	400	1	400
Pahang Estates	Pahang	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Kluang Estates	Johore	1,000	4	4,000
Transkrian Estate	Penang	100	5	500
Melintang Estate	Perak	n.a.	3	n.a.
Jong Lantau Estate	Perak	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.



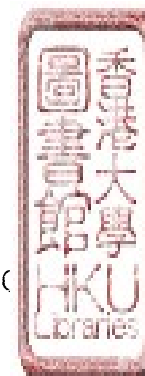
<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
Vimy Estate	Selangor	25	1	25
Johol Estate	Negri Sembilan	n.a.	1	n.a.
Sue Betong Estate	Negri Sembilan	60	1	60
3 Estates	Negri Sembilan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total				317,755
MINING & QUARRYING:				
The Malayan Collieries	Selangor	4,700 ⁽¹⁾	4	18,800
Tung Sang Tin Mine	Perak	160	1	160
Chia Eng Sai Quarry	Singapore	100	2	200
Chia Eng Sai & Another Quarry	Singapore	160	9	1,440
2 Quarries	Singapore	150	8	1,200
8 Pulau Ubin Quarries	Singapore	700	14	9,800
Total				31,600
MANUFACTORY & PROCESSING FACTORY WORKERS:				
Sam Yip Leong	Selangor	400	11	4,400
Overseas Chinese	Selangor	400	6	2,400
Overseas Chinese	Selangor	400	1	400
Ho Ho	Singapore	400	5	2,000
Khiem Ek	Singapore	800	4	3,200
Tai Hong & Ching Ek	Singapore	200	3	600
Tai Hong	Singapore	200	6	1,200
Tai Hong & Ching Ek	Singapore	400	14	5,600
		338		



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
Fook On	Singapore	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Lee Kim Siak	Selangor	200	3	600
Malayan & Hock Huat	Selangor	400	2	800
Hume Pipe Co. Ltd.	Penang	130	1	130
Chinese-owned Printing Firms	Singapore	130	26	3,380
London & Eastern Co.	Singapore	200	1	200
A.M.S. Nainan Sahib & Co.	Penang	88	14	1,232
Indian Cigar Firms	Perak	n.a.		n.a.
Total				26,142
GOLDSMITHS, SHOEMAKERS, TAILORS, etc.:				
Batu Pahat Tailoring Firms	Johore	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Mentakab Tailoring Firms	Pahang	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
17 Dressmaking Firms	Singapore	70	9	630
13 Cantonese Gold Firms	Singapore	500	101	50,500
Total				51,130
ENGINEERING MECHANICS:				
United Engineers	Singapore	100	7	700
40 Chinese Engineering Firms	Singapore	400	12	4,800
40 Iron Workshops	Singapore	200	6	1,200
12 Motor Workshops	Perak	200	5	1,000
Kampar Tin-plate Workshops	Perak	n.a.	4	n.a.
United Engineers	Perak	60	18	1,080
Wing Fatt	Selangor	100	38	3,800
		339		



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>	
16 Engineering Workshops	Selangor	1,000	37	37,000	
Chinese Foundries	Penang	390	2	780	
Yu Lien	Malacca	n.a.	4	n.a.	
Total					50,360
BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION:					
Yeo Chu Kang Construction Site	Singapore	200	2	400	
3 Construction Sites	Singapore	200	2	400	
2 Construction Sites	Singapore	150	1	150	
Several Construction Sites	Singapore	1,000	12	12,000	
Batu Pahat Government Project	Johore	200	6	1,200	
Total					14,150
HARBOUR, WATER & LAND TRANSPORT:					
Singapore Harbour Board	Singapore	500	18	9,000	
Penang Stevedores	Penang	100	2	200	
Total					9,200
HAIRDRESSERS & SHOP ASSISTANTS:					
Hokkienese Hairdressing Firms	Singapore	250	9	2,250	
Hokkienese Hairdressing Firms	Malacca	n.a.	3	n.a.	
Dyeing Firms	Singapore	200	9	1,800	
Total					4,050
		340			



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
OTHERS:				
Godown Labourers	Penang	300	3	900
Indian Toddy Tappers	Selangor	80	1	80
Total				980
GRAND TOTAL				<u>505,367</u> =====

(Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1937; SCJP, 1937).

n.a. = not available

Note: (1) Initially 4,700 coal miners were involved in the strike. The number of strikers increased considerably in the next few days. The number of increase is not known.

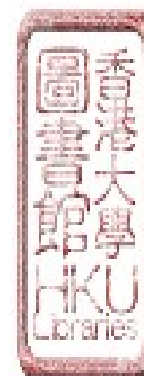
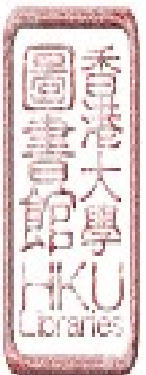


Table V
AN ESTIMATE OF MAN-DAYS LOST IN 1938 STRIKES

<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
PLANTATIONS:				
Sabrang Estate	Perak	n.a.	n.a.	1,400 ⁽¹⁾
Sungei Reyla Estate	Perak	47	1	47
Bikam Estate	Perak	88	1	88
Landerdale Estate	Perak	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total				1,535
MINING & QUARRYING:				
Hong Fatt Tin Mine	Selangor	4,370	6	26,220
Hong Fatt Tin Mine	Selangor	500	1	500
1 Small Mine	Penang	n.a.	16	n.a.
Malayan Collieries	Selangor	25	1	25
Mandai Quarry	Singapore	30	29	870
Chia Eng Sai	Singapore	200	1	200
5 Pulau Ubin Quarries	Singapore	400	1	400
Total				
MANUFACTORY & PROCESSING FACTORY WORKERS:				
Hiap Chuan Joo Box Factory	Singapore	200	3	600
Heap Ho Box Factory	Singapore	n.a.	1	n.a.
Hiap Guan Box Factory	Singapore	n.a.	1	n.a.
		342		



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>	
Hup Guan Bucket Factory	Singapore	n.a.	21	n.a.	
Yee Sin Factory	Selangor	60	2	120	
Eastern Smelting Company	Penang	35	1	35	
Total					755
GOLDSMITHS, SHOEMAKERS, TAILORS, etc.:					
Diamond Cutters	Singapore	100	30	3,000	
Total					3,000
ENGINEERING MECHANICS:					
United Engineers	Singapore	230	1	230	
Total					230
BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION:					
Johore Bahru Construction Site	Johore	300	1	300	
4 Construction Sites	Singapore	650	1	650	
Various Construction Sites	Singapore	3,000	1	3,000	
Total					3,950
HARBOUR, WATER & LAND TRANSPORT:					
Singapore Traction Company	Singapore	1,500	46	69,000	
Tanjong Pagar Labour Company	Singapore	900	1	900	
Total					69,900
		343			



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
MUNICIPAL LABOURERS:				
Municipal Night-soil Removers	Singapore	300	9	2,700
Total				2,700
OTHERS:				
Sawyers from over 10 Baling Lumbering Firms	Kedah	300	1	300
Charcoal Burners	Perak	250	18	4,500
2 Rubber Godowns	Perak	n.a.	1	n.a.
Total				4,800
GRAND TOTAL				<u>115,085</u>

(Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1938; SCJP, 1938).

n.a. = not available

Note: (1) Labour Department Annual Report, 1938, p. 58.

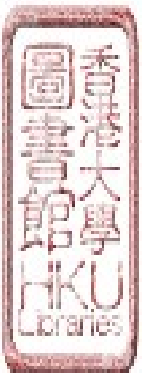


Table VI

AN ESTIMATE OF MAN-DAYS LOST IN 1939 STRIKES

<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
PLANTATIONS:				
San Wo Estate	Johore	2,000	2	4,000
1 Bahau Rubber Estate	Negri Sembilan	2,000	6	12,000
1 Bahau Rubber Estate	Negri Sembilan	400	4	1,600
1 Rubber Estate	Negri Sembilan	29	3	87
Total				17,687
MINING & QUARRYING:				
Sungei Besi Tin Mine	Selangor	900	4	3,600
Malayan Collieries	Selangor	4,700	4	18,800
Total				22,400
MANUFACTORY & PROCESSING FACTORY WORKERS:				
Hiap On Sago Factory	Singapore	100	1	100
Soon Heng Sago Factory	Singapore	20	1	20
Fook Kum Yuen Sago Factory	Singapore	100	1	100
Sugar Factory	Singapore	20	1	20
Nam Siang Copra Factory	Singapore	100	3	300
4 Copra Factories	Singapore	400	6	2,400
Yuet Seng Chong Rozin Factory	Singapore	100	3	300
Chip Seng Chong Rozin Factory	Singapore	100	1	100

345



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
Tan Eng Kee Rozin Factory	Singapore	150	1	150
Nam Huat, Chuan Seng	Singapore	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1 Rubber Factory	Singapore	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Ek Ho Rubber Factory	Singapore	500	6	3,000
1 Rubber Factory	Singapore	400	1	400
Sam Yip Leong Rubber Factory	Selangor	400	1	400
Eng Guan Seng Factory	Singapore	200	11	2,200
Eagle Aerated Water Factory	Singapore	30	5	150
Noodle Factories	Singapore	100	5	500
Tiger Balm	Singapore	400	11	4,400
Pulau Bukom Oil Refinery	Singapore	1,100	11	12,100
Telok Blanga Oil Refinery	Singapore	100	1	100
1 Sawmill	Singapore	100	1	100
12 Sawmills	Singapore	1,000	1	1,000
12 Sawmills	Singapore	1,200	40	48,000
Overseas Chinese Tobacco Co.	Singapore	100	10	1,000
Wing Mo Soap Factory	Singapore	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Golden Cup Biscuit Factory	Singapore	100	1	100
Total				
GOLDSMITHS, SHOEMAKERS, TAILORS, etc.:				
Masons	Singapore	100	1	100
Clog Makers	Johore	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

76,9



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
Ipoh Shoemakers	Perak	n.a.	3	n.a.
Total				100
ENGINEERING MECHANICS:				
Kinta Iron Factories	Perak	350	50	17,500
Engineering Workshops	Singapore	1,000	28	21,100 ⁽¹⁾
United Engineers	Singapore	100	1	100
Wing Hup Iron Workshop	Perak	40	6	240
14 Iron Workshops	Perak	40	1	40
40 Tin-plate Workshops	Singapore	300	11	3,000 ⁽²⁾
Kampar Tin-plate Workshops	Perak	20	1	20
United Engineers	Perak	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1 Iron Factory	Singapore	150	1	150
Total				42,150
BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION:				
Johore Bahru Construction Site	Johore	300	3	900
Seletar Construction Site	Singapore	300	1	300
Thomson Rd. Construction Site	Singapore	100	1	100
Fook Loon Construction Site	Singapore	1,300	1	1,300
Fook Loon Construction Site	Singapore	700	1	700
Sembawan Construction Site	Singapore	700	6	4,200
Great Nanyang Construction Site	Singapore	300	1	300



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
1 Construction Site	Singapore	20	1	20
Liang Brothers	Singapore	20	1	20
Ch'ua Ch'u Kang Construction Site	Singapore	n.a.	1	n.a.
17 Construction Sites	Singapore	3,400	11	37,400
Fook Loon Construction Site	Singapore	800	1	800
Naval Base Construction Site	Singapore	100	1	100
1 Construction Site	Singapore	100	1	100
4 Construction Sites	Singapore	n.a.	1	n.a.
Total				46,240
HARBOUR, WATER & LAND TRANSPORT:				
F.M.S. Railways Central Workshops	Selangor	2,500	25	62,500
Guan Soon Lorry Company	Singapore	100	1	100
3 Trade Guilds' Stevedores	Singapore	400	1	400
New Market Stevedores	Singapore	n.a.	1	n.a.
3 Trade Guilds' Stevedores	Singapore	400	2	800
Total				63,800
HAIRDRESSERS & SHOP ASSISTANTS:				
Tai Chong Fishing Firm	Singapore	65	1	65
Coffee Shop Assistants	Penang	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Cold Storage	Singapore	200	1	200
3 Pepper Shops	Singapore	20	1	20



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
30 Sundry Shops	Singapore	200	1	200
Bicycle Shops	Singapore	200	1	200
Sundry Goods Hong	Malacca	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Restaurants	Singapore	700	5	3,500
Fish Hong	Singapore	n.a.	6	n.a.
Total				4,185
OTHERS:				
1 Rubber Godown	Singapore	200	1	200
Total				200
GRAND TOTAL				<u>273,702</u> ⁽³⁾

(Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1939; SCJP, 1939).

n.a. = not available

Notes: (1) The strike started on November 28. By December 3 three hundred workers had resumed work, leaving 700 workers to continue the strike until December 25.

(2) Among the 40 tin-plate workshops, 10 workshops resumed work after 7 days' strike.

(3) The four months from September to December accounted for nearly two-thirds of the total man-days lost in 1939. The Labour Department revealed that "there were about 80 reports of occurrences which could be regarded as strikes in Singapore after the outbreak of European War", but no details were given of these 'occurrences'. These probably included a number of lightning strikes which lasted no more than a day.

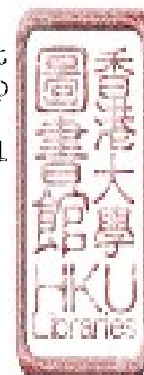
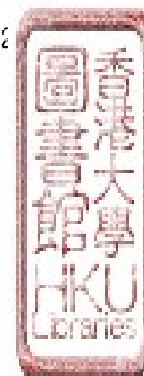


Table VII
AN ESTIMATE OF MAN-DAYS LOST IN 1940 STRIKES

<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
PLANTATIONS:				
Rubber Estates near Kuala Lumpur	Selangor	400	16	6,400
Japanese-owned Rubber Estates	Johore	2,000	31	62,000
1 Bahau Rubber Estate	Negri Sembilan	110	1	110
Muar Rubber Tappers	Johore	200	34	6,800
1 Rubber Estate	Selangor	100	1	100
Nanyang Rubber Estate	Johore	100	1	100
Rubber Tappers	Penang	1,000	1	1,000
Bahau Rubber Estates	Negri Sembilan	1,000	4	4,000
Rompin Rubber Estates	Negri Sembilan	3,000	5	15,000
Rubber Estates	Negri Sembilan	1,000	2	2,000
1 Rubber Estate	Negri Sembilan	500	5	2,500
Rubber Tappers	Negri Sembilan	200	16	3,200
Total				103,200
MINING & QUARRYING:				
Sungei Besi Tin Mines	Selangor	1,200	7	8,400
Hock Hup Nam Tin Co., Tualang	Perak	n.a.	1	n.a.



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
Chia Eng Sai Quarry	Singapore	100	5	500
Total				8,900
MANUFACTORY & PROCESSING FACTORY WORKERS:				
Government Opium Factory	Singapore	200	3	600
Rattan Factory	Singapore	150	15	2,250
Malacca Tobacco Co.	Malacca	100	19	1,900
Pineapple Factories	Singapore	1,500	2	3,000
Tobacco Factory	Kedah	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Alexandra Brick Work	Singapore	200	1	200
ABC Brewery	Singapore	n.a.	25	n.a.
Singapore Rubber Goods Factory	Singapore	400	1	400
Taiping Tobacco Factories	Perak	100	1	100
Ho Tai Pineapple Factory	Johore	300	1	300
Ho Tai Pineapple Factory	Johore	300	31	9,300
Pineapple Factories	Singapore, Johore	2,500	10	25,000
Rubber Packaging Factory	Malacca	350	19	6,650
Rubber Factories & Godowns	Singapore	4,000	1	4,000
Firestone Company	Singapore	300	14	4,200
Tan Eng Kee Rozin Factory	Singapore	400	1	400
Rubber Packaging Factories	Penang	1,000	7	7,000
Printing Workers	Penang	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Rubber Factories	Johore	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total				65,300



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
GOLDSMITHS, SHOEMAKERS, TAILORS, etc.:				
Taiping Shoemakers	Perak	20	1	20
Blacksmiths	Malacca	n.a.	14	n.a.
Blacksmiths	Singapore	n.a.	10	n.a.
Total				20
ENGINEERING MECHANICS:				
United Engineers	Singapore	400	7	2,800
Engineering Workshops	Penang	100	1	100
Engineering Workshops	Singapore	700	36	25,200
Boiler Makers	Singapore	100	1	100
1 Iron Workshop	Selangor	40	1	40
Boiler Repairers	Selangor	200	20	4,000
4 Engineering Workshops	Malacca	150	1	150
3 Motor Companies	Selangor	n.a.	5	n.a.
Total				32,390
BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION:				
Muar Building Labourers	Johore	n.a.	11	n.a.
Building Labourers	Penang	600	14	8,400
Hospital Construction Labourers	Johore	400	1	400
Total				8,8
		352		



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
HARBOUR, WATER & LAND TRANSPORT:				
Lightermen	Singapore	4,000 ⁽¹⁾	2	8,000
Stevedores	Penang	2,000	1	2,000
Dockyards	Singapore	1,500	74	111,000
Rice Transport Labourers	Singapore	500	5	2,500
Total				123,500
HAIRDRESSERS & SHOP ASSISTANTS:				
Hailam Coffee Shop Assistants	Singapore	n.a.	1	n.a.
Hairdressers	Singapore	1,200	5	3,300 ⁽²⁾
Sundry Shop Assistants	Singapore	200	16	3,200
Coffee Shop Assistants	Johore	100	10	1,000
Laundrymen	Singapore	2,000	20	33,200 ⁽³⁾
Sundry Shop Assistants	Perak	n.a.	1	n.a.
Hokchiu Hairdressers	Penang	20	5	100
Total				40,800
MUNICIPAL LABOURERS:				
Muar Night-soil Removers	Johore	40	3	120
Total				1
OTHERS:				
General Hospital	Singapore	200	2	400
Kim Kueh Traders' Employees	Singapore	n.a.	45	n.a.
Total				4
GRAND TOTAL				<u>383,4</u>



(Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1940; SGJP, 1940; Straits Times, 1940; Malaya Tribune, 1940).

n.a. = not available

- Notes: (1) The number is based on the membership of the Singapore Lightermen's Union.
- (2) Three-fourths of the hairdressers resumed work after two days' strike, and the rest resumed work after five days' strike.
- (3) The strike involving 300 laundries lasted from April 26 to May 15. About 50 shops had resumed work by May 2.

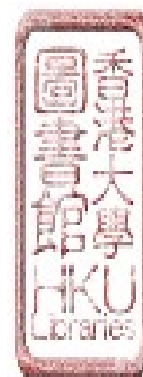
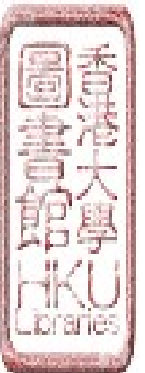


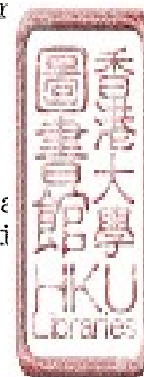
Table VIII

CASES OF DISPUTE SETTLEMENT WITHOUT STRIKE, 1940

<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Month</u>	<u>Result</u>
1. Hockchiu Coffee Shops	Singapore	January	Wage increase, shorter hours, Sunday rest, sickness benefit.
2. Piece-goods Shop Assistants	Penang	January	15% wage increase, Sunday rest.
3. Bakery	Singapore	January	Wage increase, 8 hours, Sunday rest, labour insurance.
4. 11 Shoe Firms	Perak	January	30% wage increase.
5. Naval Base Construction Labourers	Singapore	January	Wage claim settled.
6. Jurong Bus Company	Singapore	January	Wage increase, labour insurance.
7. Green Bus Company	Singapore	January	Wage increase, labour insurance.
8. Wharf Labourers	Singapore	January	10% wage increase, more over-time pay.
9. Rattan Workers	Negri Sembilan	January	25% wage increase.
10. Sampan Labourers	Penang	January	20% wage increase.
11. One Construction Firm	Singapore	January	10% wage increase.
12. Jurong Plantation	Singapore	January	Increased picce-rates.
13. Eastern Bus Company	Selangor	January	Wage increase, 9 hours.



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Month</u>	<u>Result</u>
14. Hairdressers	Malacca	January	10% wage increase, 12 hours, Sunday rest, higher share in tribute system, no dismissal of labour representatives in three months.
15. Hairdressers	Johore	January	15% wage increase, equal share with employers in tribute system, 12 hours.
16. Hairdressers	Selangor	January	Equal share with employers in tribute system.
17. Hairdressers	Negri Sembilan	January	10% wage increase, 11 hours, no dismissal without good reason, one week's notice for dismissal or resignation.
18. Coffee Shop Assistants	Selangor	February	10-15% wage increase, 13 hours.
19. Kinta Laundrymen	Perak	February	20% wage increase.
20. Coffee Shop Assistants	Malacca	February	10-15% wage increase, 13 hours, sickness benefit.
21. Taiping Coffee Shops	Perak	February	Wage claim settled.
22. Chinese Drug Shops	Malacca	February	5-20% wage increase on 1939 rates, Sunday rest, sickness benefit.
23. Building Labourers	Malacca	February	20% wage increase, 8 hours, labour in
24. Chinese Drug Shops	Johore	March	20-30% wage increase.
25. Batu Pahat Laundrymen	Johore	May	Wage increase.
26. Batu Pahat Sundry Shops	Johore	June	15-20% wage increase, Sunday rest, 12 hours insurance, one month's wages and notice of dismissal.



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Month</u>	<u>Result</u>
27. Ipoh Restaurants	Perak	September	Reduction from 16-17 hours to 10 hours, Sunday rest, sickness benefit, quarters, and holidays.
28. Sawmills	Selangor	October	Wage increase.
29. Laundries	Penang	November	20% wage increase.
30. Kampar Iron Workshops	Perak	December	20-60 cents increase in daily rates.

(Source: SCJP, 1940).



Table IX

AN ESTIMATE OF MAN-DAYS LOST IN 1941 STRIKES

<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
PLANTATIONS:				
8 Rubber Estates	Selangor	3,000	2	6,000
Indian Estate Labourers ⁽¹⁾	Selangor	4,000 to 15,000	18	116,000 ⁽²⁾
Total				122,000
MINING & QUARRYING:				
The Malayan Collieries	Selangor	5,000	8	40,000
Total				40,000
MANUFACTORY & PROCESSING FACTORY WORKERS:				
Ban Teck Bee Oil Mill	Penang	100	14	1,400
Wilkinson Process Rubber Co.	Selangor	450	4	1,800
Sawmills	Selangor	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
12 Sawmills	Singapore	1,500	18	27,000
Sam Yip Leong Rubber Factory	Selangor	400	1	400
Total				30,600
GOLDSMITHS, SHOEMAKERS, TAILORS, etc.:				
Shoemakers	Singapore	800	7	5,600
Shoemakers	Singapore	400	14	5,600
Shoemakers	Perak	n.a.	6	n.a.
Total				11,200



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Number of Strikers</u>	<u>Duration (Days)</u>	<u>Man-Days Lost</u>
ENGINEERING MECHANICS:				
40 Tin-plate Workshops	Singapore	300	14	4,200
6 Foundries	Penang	200	60	12,200
Total				16,200
BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION				
Building Labourers	Malacca	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total				n.a.
HARBOUR, WATER & LAND TRANSPORT:				
Stevedores	Penang	200	19	3,800
Total				3,800
MUNICIPAL LABOURERS:				
Indian Street Sweepers	Penang	450	6	2,700
Indian Night-soil Removers	Penang	200	3	600
Indian Sewerage Labourers	Penang	100	2	200
Taiping P.W.D. Labourers	Perak	100	3	300
Total				3,800
OTHERS:				
Taiping Charcoal Burners	Perak	200	1	200
6 Taiping Restaurants	Perak	n.a.	1	n.a.
Total				2
GRAND TOTAL				<u>227,8</u>

(Source: SCJP, 1941; Straits Times, 1941; Malaya Tribune, 1941).

n.a. = not available



- Notes: (1) The Indian estate labourers' strikes in May, 1941, included Klang municipal labourers, whose number cannot be separated from the total number of strikers.
- (2) From May 1 to May 9, 4,000 labourers were on strike on nine estates; from the 10th to the 14th some 7,000 labourers including Klang municipal labourers were on strike; from the 15th to the 17th the strikers were estimated to be over 15,000. From the 18th onwards the strikers were estimated to be over 15,000. From the 18th onwards the strikers began to return to work. On the 21st the strikes were almost over. The man-days lost from the 18th onwards are not included in the estimate because the number of labourers remaining in strike is not known.

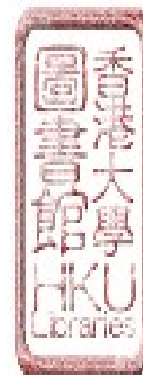


Table X

CASES OF DISPUTE SETTLEMENT WITHOUT STRIKE, 1941

<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Month</u>	<u>Result</u>
1. Seng Huat Iron Workshop	Selangor	March	20-45 cents increase in daily wages.
2. 59 Engineering Workshops	Singapore	March	Wage increase.
3. Sawmills	Singapore	April	\$2.80 increase in monthly wages, more rice provided.
4. Name Ek Biscuit Factory	Singapore	May	\$3.50 increase for male monthly-rated workers, 15% increase in piece-rates, sickness benefit, no dismissal without good reason.
5. Stevedores	Singapore	May	Increased piece-rates.
6. Pier Labourers	Johore	June	Increased piece-rates.
7. Twakow Labourers	Singapore	June	28 cents increase in daily wages.
8. Tailors	Johore	June	15-25% wage increase for monthly-rated workers, 15% increase in piece-rates, 9½ hours, Sunday rest, no dismissal without good reason.
9. Ipoh Tin-plate Shops	Perak	July	25% wage increase.
10. Goldsmiths	Penang	July	Wartime allowance.
11. Goldsmiths	Johore	August	Wartime allowance.



<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Month</u>	<u>Result</u>
12. Fulling Mills	Singapore	August	Wage increase.
13. Noodle Factory Workers	Singapore	August	15% wage increase.
14. Sundry Shop Assistants	Singapore	August	Wartime allowance.
15. Ipoh Restaurants	Perak	August	\$4.00 monthly wartime allowance.
16. Shoemakers	Selangor	September	Wage claim settled.
17. Kim Kueh Traders' Employees	Singapore	September	\$3.00 monthly allowance.
18. Lo Yang Printing Firm	Malacca	September	20% wage increase.
19. Fung Keong Rubber Factory	Selangor	September	10% increase in daily rates and piece rates, labour insurance, time-and-a-half for overtime and Sunday work, maternity benefit.
20. Hairdressers	Singapore	September	Allowance given.
21. Jewellery and Gold Firms	Penang	October	10-20% wage increase, reduced hours.

(Source: SCJP, 1941; Malaya Tribune, 1941).

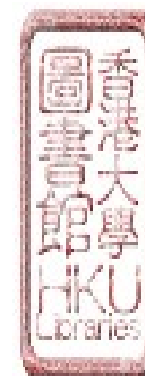


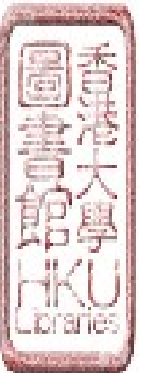
Table XI

AN ESTIMATE OF MAN-DAYS LOST IN STRIKES, 1934-1941

<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>1934</u>	<u>1935</u>	<u>1936</u>	<u>1937</u>	<u>1938</u>	<u>1939</u>	<u>1940</u>	<u>1941</u>
Plantations	n.a.	1,740	540	317,755	1,535	17,687	103,210	122,000
Mining & Quarrying	n.a.	nil	59,900	31,600	28,215	22,400	8,900	40,000
Manufactory & Processing Factory Workers	nil	1,120	20,960	26,142	755	76,940	65,300	30,600
Goldsmiths, Shoemakers, Tailors, etc.	5,917	1,800	nil	51,130	3,000	100	20	11,200
Engineering Mechanics	n.a.	240	37,700	50,360	230	42,150	32,390	16,200
Building & Construction	nil	nil	22,050	14,150	3,950	46,240	8,800	n.a.
Harbour, Water and Land Transport	7,700	nil	16,000	9,200	69,900	63,800	123,500	3,800
Hairdressers & Shop Assistants	n.a.	n.a.	nil	4,050	nil	4,185	40,800	n.a.
Municipal Labourers	nil	nil	142,500	nil	2,700	nil	120	3,800
Others	n.a.	50	nil	980	4,800	200	400	
Total	13,617	4,950	299,650	505,367	115,085	273,702	383,440	227

(Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1934-1940; SCJP, 1934-1941; Straits Times, 1940-1941; Malaya Tribune, 1940-1941).

n.a. = not available

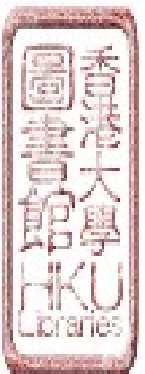


Appendix C

Table I

WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS IN MALAYA, 1934-1941

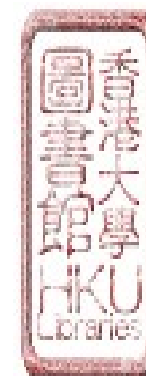
	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
SINGAPORE					
1.	Pak Seng Hong		1860	60*	
2.	Ku So Shang Keng Tong		1886	300*	
3.	Lu Seng Hong		1890	n.a.	
4.	Man Wah Hong		1891	n.a.	
5.	Heng Woh Goldsmiths' Hong		1908	350*	
6.	Keng Hai Kok		1911	50*	
7.	Yit Chuen Printers' Association		1912	200*	
8.	Tong Lok Shoemakers' Hong		1914	100*	
9.	Malay Seamen's Association	1916		n.a.	
10.	The Clerical Union	1920		n.a.	
11.	Singapore Municipal Service Club	1926		n.a.	
12.	Tong Huat Sailors' Association	1927		n.a.	
13.	Keng Lun Shuen		1929	30*	
14.	Kee Hee Hong (Engineering Mechanics' Association)	1929		7,000 ⁽¹⁾	
15.	Chinese Drivers' Association	1929		n.a.	



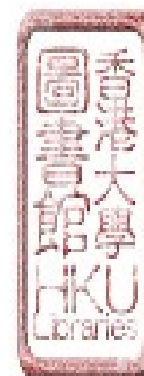
	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
16.	Chinese Rice Dealers Staff Association	1929		n.a.	
17.	Singapore Shipping Clerks' Association	1930		n.a.	
18.	Mohammedan Drivers Benevolent Association	1932		n.a.	
19.	Khek Pineapple Can-makers' Association	1932		n.a.	
20.	Indian Drivers' Association	1933		n.a.	
21.	Java Trade Staff Study Association	1934		n.a.	
22.	Kaan Lok Tongkang Sailors' Association	1936		n.a.	
23.	Persakutuan Driver Melayu Perak, Singapore	1936		n.a.	
24.	Pineapple Cutters Mutual Help Association	1936		1,500 ⁽²⁾	dissolved in 1940
25.	Singapore Chinese Building Workers Mutual Aid Association		1936	n.a.	application not approved
26.	Chinese Stewards' Association	1937		n.a.	ceased to exist in 1941
27.	Singapore Traction Company Employees' Association	1937		1,500 ⁽³⁾	
28.	Singapore Chinese Tailors' Union		1937	1,500 ⁽⁴⁾	
29.	Singapore Quarry Workers Mutual Aid Association		1937	n.a.	



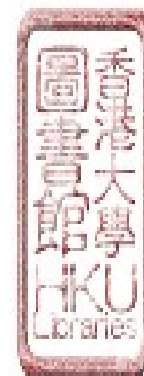
	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
30.	Chinese Clerks' Association	1938		n.a.	
31.	Chinese Goldsmiths and Silversmiths Association	1938		n.a.	
32.	Employees of Dye Pressers Association	1938		n.a.	
33.	Indian Merchants' Employees Association	1938		n.a.	
34.	Singapore Chinese Electrical Mutual Help Association	1938		n.a.	
35.	Chinese Salesmens' Association	1938		n.a.	ceased to exist in 1940
36.	Singapore Tin-smiths' Association	1938		n.a.	
37.	Teashop Employees Mutual Help Society	1938		n.a.	
38.	Singapore Chinese Female Servants Mutual Aid Association		1938	n.a.	
39.	Chinese Drivers Mutual Help Association	1938		400*	
40.	Chinese Spray-Printing Workmen's Mutual Help Association	1939		n.a.	
41.	Singapore Chinese Bookshops Employees' Club	1939		n.a.	
42.	Singapore Chinese Laundrymen's Mutual Help Association	1939		n.a.	
43.	Singapore Chinese Sail-makers Mutual Help Association	1939		n.a.	



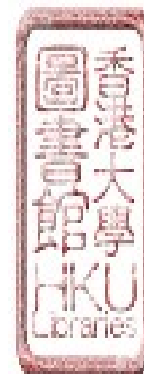
	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
44.	Singapore Lightermen's Union	1939		4,000 ⁽⁵⁾	
45.	Singapore Oil and Soap Employees' Association	1939		n.a.	
46.	Singapore Oil Millers' Employees Benevolent Society	1939		n.a.	
47.	Singapore Rickshaw Pullers Mutual Aid Association	1939		7,000 ⁽⁶⁾	
48.	Singapore Sawmill Workers' Association	1939		2,000 ⁽⁷⁾	
49.	Singapore Wharf Workers Mutual Help Association	1939		n.a.	
50.	Singapore Cantonese Labour Syndicate Stevedores Mutual Help Association	1939		n.a.	
51.	Singapore Piling Workers' Union		1939	n.a.	
52.	Singapore Rubber Workers' Association	1939		n.a.	dissolved in 1940
53.	Singapore Chinese Restaurant Workers Mutual Aid Association		1939	n.a.	
54.	Singapore Chinese Import and Export Staff Mutual Aid Association		1939	n.a.	
55.	Singapore Rattan Workers Mutual Help Association		1939	n.a.	
56.	Singapore Stone-cutters' Association	1939		n.a.	
57.	Singapore Chinese Bicycle Workers Mutual Aid Association		1939	n.a.	



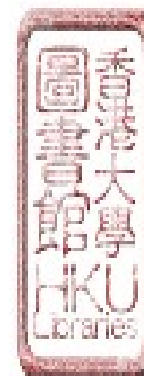
	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
58.	Singapore Chinese Hairdressers' Association	1939		1,200 ⁽⁸⁾	
59.	Chinese and Western Drug-Shop Employees Mutual Aid Association	1940		2,000 ⁽⁹⁾	
60.	Singapore Betel-nut Coolies Mutual Help Association	1940		n.a.	
61.	Singapore Chinese Furniture Shop Workers Mutual Help Association	1940		n.a.	
62.	Singapore Chinese Newspaper Distributors' Association	1940		n.a.	
63.	Singapore Chinese Provision-shops Assistants' Association	1940		n.a.	
64.	Singapore Harbour Board Coal Labourers Mutual Help Association	1940		n.a.	
65.	Singapore Foochow Seamen Mutual Help Association	1940		n.a.	
66.	Singapore Rice Transport Workers Mutual Aid Society	1940		n.a.	
67.	Singapore Stevedores' Association	1940		n.a.	
68.	Tan Tock Seng Hospital Attendants Benevolent Society	1940		n.a.	
69.	Singapore Chinese Entertainment Workers Mutual Aid Association		1940	n.a.	
70.	Singapore Godown Labourers' Association	1940		n.a.	
71.	Singapore Chinese Club Workers Mutual Help Society	1941		n.a.	



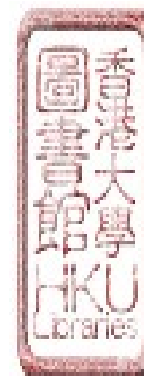
	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
72.	Singapore Rope and Hardware Employees Mutual Help Association	1941		n.a.	
73.	Singapore Chinese Quarry Workers' Union	1941		n.a.	
74.	Hongkong-Swatow Trade Stevedores' Association		1941	n.a.	
75.	Singapore Chinese Pork-Butchers' Employees' Association	1941		n.a.	
76.	Singapore Chinese Bee Hoon Workers Mutual Help Association	1941		n.a.	
PENANG					
77.	Lo Pak Hong	1891		n.a.	
78.	Lo Seng Hong	1891		n.a.	
79.	Pak Seng Hong		1891	100*	
80.	Lo Gi Hong		1891	100*	
81.	Kee Hee Hong		1891	100*	
82.	Lo Chong Hong		1899	100*	
83.	Hing Woh Goldsmiths' Hong		1911	250*	
84.	Aw Ching Goldsmiths' Hong		n.a.	300*	
85.	Penang Chinese Washermen's Guild	1924		n.a.	
86.	Ta Thit Hong (Blacksmiths' Guild)	1926		n.a.	
87.	Building Hong		1928	100*	



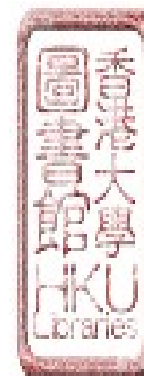
	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
88.	Boatmen's Union	1928		n.a.	
89.	Khoo See Shui Teik Thong	1931		n.a.	
90.	Khoo See Toon Keng Tong Kongsu	1931		n.a.	
91.	Persekutuan Deriver Melayu	1936		n.a.	
92.	Penang Chinese Tailoring (Employees') Association	1937		n.a.	
93.	Rattan Workers' Association	1937		n.a.	
94.	Penang Shop Assistants' Association		1938	200*	
95.	Chinese Salesmen's Association	1938			
96.	Printing Employees' Association	1938		n.a.	
97.	Indian Drivers' Union	1938		n.a.	
98.	Quarry Workers' Association	1938		n.a.	
99.	Penang Industrial Workers' Union		1939	n.a.	
100.	Penang Rickshaw Pullers' Association	1939		n.a.	
101.	Penang Chinese Harbour Labourers' Association	1940		n.a.	
102.	Chinese Cooks' Association	1940		n.a.	
103.	Chinese Artisans' Association	1940		n.a.	
104.	Chinese Lorry Drivers' Association	1940		n.a.	
105.	Penang Chinese Ship Workers' Association (Peng Hoa Loon Choon Kang Yeo Kang Huay)	1941		n.a.	



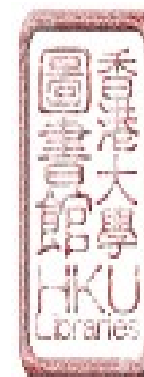
	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
106.	Penang Chinese Sundry Shop Employees' Association	1941		n.a.	
107.	Penang Chinese Coffee Shop Employees' Association	1941		n.a.	
108.	Chinese Shop Employees' Association, Bukit Mertajam	1941		n.a.	
MALACCA					
109.	Malacca Rubber Workers' Association	1940		n.a.	
110.	Malacca Tamil Labourers' Association	1940		n.a.	
111.	Malacca Brickmakers' Labour Union	1941		n.a.	
112.	Malacca Building Workers' Union	1941		n.a.	
113.	Malacca Overseas Chinese Tobacco Industry Female Workers' Union	1941		n.a.	
PERAK					
114.	Ku So Seng Yuen Hong, Taiping		1887	70*	
115.	Ku So Seng Chuen Hong, Ipoh		1889	300*	
116.	Man Wah Hong, Ipoh		1905	150*	
117.	Kee Hee Hong, Ipoh		1909	250*	
118.	Kee Hee Hong, Taiping		n.a.	n.a.	



	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
119.	Dat Yau Shoemakers' Hong, Ipoh		1914	40*	
120.	Dat Yau Shoemakers' Hong, Taiping		n.a.	n.a.	
121.	Man Wah Hong, Taiping		1915	60*	
122.	Lo Chew Hong, Taiping		n.a.	200*	
123.	Goldsmiths' Hong, Anson		1917	140*	
124.	Building Hong, Ipoh		1924	477*	
125.	Commercial Staff's Association, Ipoh		1926	200*	
126.	The Kinta and Batang Padang Diesel Oil Engine Drivers' Association	1926		n.a.	ceased to exist in 1935
127.	The South Indian Muslim Workmen's Association	1934		n.a.	ceased to exist in 1938
128.	Persekutuan Deriver Melayu Perak, Ipoh	1934		n.a.	
129.	Perak Sawmill Labour Association, Telok Anson	1935		n.a.	ceased to exist in 1936
130.	Forest Labourers' Association, Telok Anson	1935		n.a.	
131.	Tin-Ore Washers' Benevolent Association, Tanjong Tualang	1935		n.a.	
132.	Perak Tamil Motor Car Drivers' Association, Ipoh	1936		n.a.	



	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
133.	Kinta Washermen's Association, Ipoh	1938		n.a.	
134.	Perak Salesmen's Association, Ipoh	1938		n.a.	
135.	Chinese Coffee Shop Employees' Association, Ipoh	1939		n.a.	
136.	Kinta Lo Ban Hong, Ipoh	1940		n.a.	
137.	Ipoh Cigar Factory Female Workers' Association, Ipoh	1940		n.a.	
138.	Perak Rattan Makers' Association, Ipoh	1940		n.a.	
139.	Kinta Mining Employees' Association, Pusing	1940		8,000 ⁽¹⁰⁾	
140.	Kuala Kangsar Chinese Shop Assistants' Association	1940		n.a.	
141.	Ipoh Chinese Shop Assistants' Association, Ipoh	1940		n.a.	
142.	Lower Perak Indian Drivers' Association, Telok Anson	1940		n.a.	
143.	Kinta Rubber Estate Employees' Association, Tronoh	1940		n.a.	
144.	Taiping Chinese Shop Assistants' Association, Taiping	1941		n.a.	
145.	Sungei Siput Rubber Estate Labourers' Association	1941		n.a.	
146.	Ipoh Earthenware Labourers' Society, Ipoh	1941		n.a.	



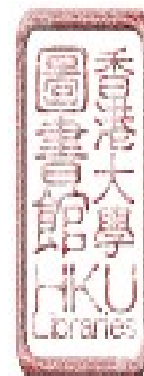
	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
147.	Commercial Employees' Association, Telok Anson	1941		n.a.	
148.	Perak Oil-Engines Drivers' Association, Kampar	1941		n.a.	
149.	Kinta Building Labourers Mutual Aid Association		1941	n.a.	
SELANGOR					
150.	Pak Seng Hong, Kuala Lumpur		n.a.	100*	
151.	Ku So Seng Chong Hong, Kuala Lumpur		circa 1893	500*	
152.	Man Wah Hong, Kuala Lumpur		circa 1900	300*	
153.	Kee Hee Hong, Kuala Lumpur		1916	100*	
154.	Dat Yau Shoemakers' Hong, Kuala Lumpur		1916	100*	
155.	Building Hong		1928	400*	
156.	Commercial Staff's Association, Kuala Lumpur		1936	300*	
157.	Selangor Malay Drivers' Association, Kuala Lumpur	1936		n.a.	
158.	Malay Motor Drivers' Society	1937		n.a.	
159.	Association of Non-government Employees, Selangor	1938 (recorded)		n.a.	
160.	Indian Shop Assistants' Association of Selangor	1939		n.a.	



	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
161.	Selangor Tamil Motor Workmen's Association	1939		n.a.	ceased to exist in 1941
162.	Construction Workers Mutual Help Association, Klang	1939		n.a.	
163.	Ampang Oil-engine Drivers' Association		1939	n.a.	
164.	Selangor Batu Arang Labour Association	1940		n.a.	
165.	Selangor Coffee Shop Assistants Mutual Help Association, Kuala Lumpur	1940		n.a.	
166.	Klang Rubber Manufacture Workers' Association		1940	n.a.	
NEGRI SEMBILAN					
167.	Sepang Valley Estate Indian Labourers Reform Association, Nilai	1940		n.a.	
168.	Persekutuan Deriver Melayu, Negri Sembilan	1937		n.a.	ceased to exist in 1939
169.	Negri Sembilan Rubber Tung Yip Mutual Aid Association		1940	n.a.	
PAHANG					
170.	Lo Ban Hong, Kuantan		1929	150*	
171.	Persatuan Pelayan-Pelayan Melayu, Pahang, Pekan Lama	1941		n.a.	



	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
JOHORE					
172.	Muar Pak Seng Haw Kin Cho Hong	1927		n.a.	ceased to exist in 1939
173.	Drivers' Association		1937	240*	
174.	Indian Auto Drivers' Association, Pontian, Johore Bahru, Kota Tinggi	1939		n.a.	
175.	Indian Labour Association, Johore Bahru, Kota Tinggi	1940		n.a.	
176.	Mohammedan Drivers Benevolent Association, Batu Pahat	1940		n.a.	
177.	Chinese Building Labourers Mutual Aid Association	1940		n.a.	
178.	Muar Rubber Workmen's Association	1941		n.a.	
179.	Muar Barbers' Association	1941		n.a.	
180.	Chinese Shop Assistants' Association, Muar	1941		n.a.	
KEDAH					
181.	Building Hong, Sungei Patani		1925	n.a.	
182.	Lo Chong Hong Club, Kulim		1936	n.a.	
183.	Chinese Traction Company Employees' Association		1938	200*	
184.	Central Chinese Traction Company Employees' Association, Sungei Patani		1938	n.a.	



	<u>Name</u>	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Formation</u> ⁺	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remark</u>
185.	Kedah Rice Mills Labourers Mutual Aid Association	1941		n.a.	
186.	Central Kedah Cigar Rollers' Union, Sungei Patani	1941		n.a.	

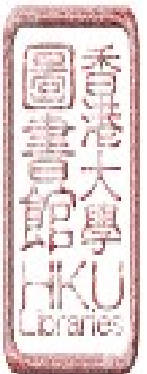
KELANTAN

187.	Hing Woh Hong		1927	125*	
188.	Building Hong		1930	120*	

(Source: F.M.S. Government Gazette, XXVI-XXXIII, 1934-1941; Straits Settlements Government Gazette, LXXV-LXXVI, 1940-1941; Johore Government Gazette, 1939-1941; Report of Singapore Labour Department, 1946, Appendix D, pp. 48-49; SCJP, 1934-1941; Nan-Yang Nien-Chien, 1939, Appendix, pp. 81-130).

Note: This list does not include labour unions which did not apply for registration as required under the Societies Ordinance, nor does it include the Estate Asiatic Staff's Associations, guilds or associations with a mixed membership of employers and employees, or recreation clubs. Owing to the lack of a complete official record of workers' associations and the difficulties involved in compiling from different sources, this list may not yet be complete.

n.a. = not available



+In cases where the association was formed before the Societies Ordinance came into force in 1890, or where the date of its registration is not available, or where the association's application did not seem to have been approved by the Registrar of Societies, the year of its formation was given.

*Membership in 1939. See Nan-Yang Nien-Chien, 1939, Appendix, pp. 81-130.

- (1) Membership in 1941. See SCJP, April 30, 1941.
- (2) Membership in early 1940. See SCJP, January 8, 1940.
- (3) Membership in 1938. See SCJP, May 15, 1938.
- (4) Nan-Yang Nien-Chien, 1939, (II) p. 292.
- (5) Membership in 1941. See SCJP, April 30, 1941.
- (6) Ibid.
- (7) Ibid.
- (8) Membership in 1940. See SCJP, January 10, 1940; Nan-Yang Nien-Chien, 1939, (II) p. 291. The Association was formed in 1937 but it was registered in 1939.
- (9) Membership in 1941. See SCJP, May 9, 1941.
- (10) Membership in 1941. See SCJP, January 30, 1941.

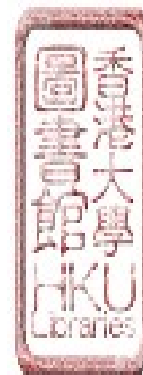


Table II

A CLASSIFICATION OF WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS IN 1941

<u>Industry/Occupation</u>	<u>Number of Associations</u>
1. Artisans and Craftsmen (including mechanics, carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, tinsmiths, shoemakers, rattan-makers, tailors, and wiremen)	43
2. Seamen, Waterfront and Land Transport Labourers	39
3. Shop Assistants (including commercial staff, retailer shop assistants, hairdressers, laundrymen, restaurant and coffee shop assistants)	37
4. Building and Construction	11
5. Factory Workers	10
6. Rubber Estates	5
7. Tin-mining	4
8. Others	29
Total	<u>178</u> =====

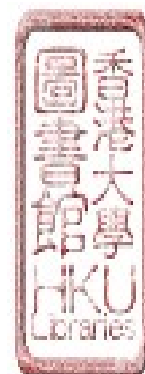
(Source: Ibid.)

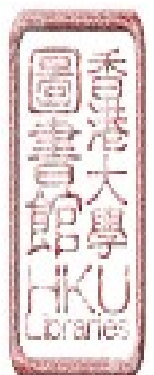
Table III
ANNUAL REGISTRATION/FORMATION OF WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS,
1934-1941

Place	Before 1934	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1934- 1941	Total
Singapore	20	1	0	4	4	10	19	12	6	56	76
Penang	14	0	0	1	2	5	2	4	4	18	32
Malacca	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	5	5
Perak	13	2	3	1	0	2	1	8	6	23	36
Selangor	6	0	0	2	1	1	4	4	0	12	18
Negri Sembilan	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	2
Pahang	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Johore	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	3	8	9
Kedah	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	2	5	6
Kelantan	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total	58	3	3	9	9	20	26	34	25	130	

(Source: Ibid.)



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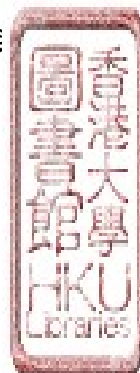
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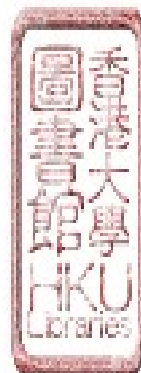
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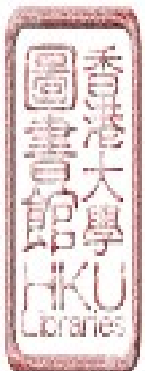
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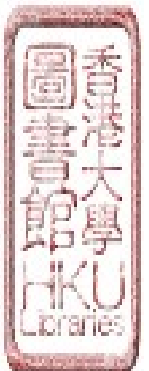
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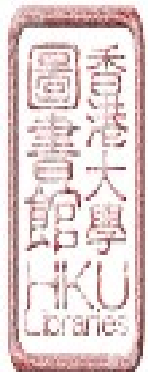
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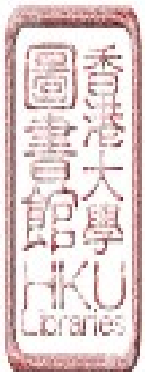
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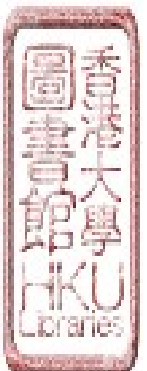
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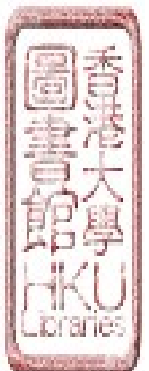
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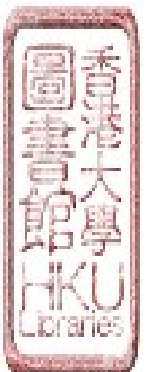
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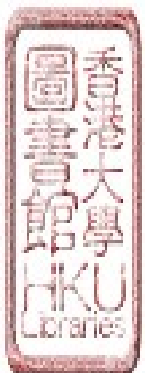
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