

(Re)Locating conflictual state-labour relations: The case of Malaya(sia)

A Research Seminar presented by Donna Turner

State-labour relations in Malaya(sia) are generally characterised as repressive and the trade union movement politically excluded, leading to conclusions that labour has exerted little influence over government policies. Yet attempts by the Malaysian Government in the early 2000s to introduce labour reforms as part of the transition to a knowledge based economy (KBE) were protracted and uneven. Looking back at previous periods of tension, unrest and transition highlighted broad-ranging efforts by the state to manage contradictions and conflicts surrounding labour's participation in a post-colonial, multi-ethnic, market economy, highly integrated with international trading and labour migration arrangements. Strongly preferring not to intervene in the direct employer-employee relationship yet wanting to keep wages low, state-labour conflicts were frequently mediated beyond the production sphere. Over time, this has resulted in a myriad of cultural and financial transfers, concessions and subsidies to households that are here termed 'economic paternalism'. While economic paternalism has contributed to social stability, it has consumed considerable financial resources and created labour market outcomes that run contrary to the government's current plans to upgrade the economy. Using the example of Malaya(sia), this seminar argues the importance of looking beyond production arrangements to uncover the conflictual and transformative nature of labour's participation in capitalist societies.

Friday 24th August 2007

1:30 pm

Chancellery Building 3.1B

Murdoch University

All Welcome

Donna is currently a Research Associate with the Asia Research Centre. Her PhD research was undertaken during the early 2000s when the Government of Malaysia sought to bring about a transition to a knowledge based economy (KBE). She adopts a qualitative variant of *Régulation* Theory, a Marxist-inspired political economy approach more commonly used in the analysis of the United States and Western European economies but lately achieving some application in the examination of economic, industrial, social and political transitions and unrest in post-colonial capitalist economies.