

also, in the person of the Iban, Dato Ningkan, the position of Chief Minister of Sarawak. However, tensions between the Federal and State policy-makers quickly escalated. Resistance to attempts to introduce a new Land Bill in 1965, which threatened to further weaken *adat* rights, was followed a year later by an attempt to refuse to have Malay as an official State language. Unable to tolerate such independent Sarawakian power, elements in the Federal Government swiftly intervened, by unconstitutional means, to remove the native Chief Minister from his post. SNAP was forced into opposition (Wong, 1983, pp. 17–18). Since 1971, the post of Chief Minister in Sarawak has been occupied by members of the Malay-Melanau elite.

Yet, even in opposition, SNAP was perceived as a threat to Malay hegemony, with Malay sensitivities sharpened by SNAP's 1970 election slogan 'Sarawak for the Sarawakians'. As SNAP's power base expanded, its enemies on the Peninsula and their Malay-Melanau allies in Sarawak embarked on a sustained campaign of vilification, with accusations that members of the party were plotting to secede parts of Sarawak to Brunei. Finally, when this attempt to discredit SNAP failed, the Federal authorities decided to invoke anti-terrorist laws and locked up the opposition leader for a period of 15 months.

As the principal victim of this shabby misuse of democracy himself claimed 'I was plainly the victim of political opponents who saw me as a threat and who abused their power... (and) who trumped up accusations of disloyalty... just as an excuse to get me out of the way' (Wong, 1983, pp. xi–xii). For all that, the move was effective. SNAP soon passed back into the 'National Front' coalition and, denuded of native support, gradually became a political vehicle for Chinese commercial interests and for an emerging native elite that was increasingly distant from its grassroots (Leigh, 1974).

As this example reveals, the alliance of Malay forces in Sarawak with those on the Peninsula has led to a progressive distortion of the State's democratic process, effectively frustrating native attempts to gain control of their destinies through the ballot box. The result has been to reinforce the profound feelings of powerlessness, already so well established in the native longhouses through the colonial and post-colonial manipulation and control of their community leaders.

Moreover, while the Government has progressively limited popular involvement in politics in the name of

security and stability, it has also prevented the emergence of unofficial movements of a political character. Restrictive legislation on the creation of public interest groups discourages them from making any overt comment on Government policies.

As Leigh points out, the net result of this approach to politics has been to institutionalize 'a pattern of operating that eschews popular participation in decision-making and substitutes the threat of force' (Leigh, 1979, p. 372). What the long-term political costs of this repression may be is hard to judge. Denied political and legal means of redress the only option for the people is direct action. Since 1987 the logging industry has experienced, to its cost, exactly what that means.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SARAWAK

Politics in Sarawak is concerned essentially with the control of land, timber and minerals. A consequence of the quest to attain power is the accretion of wealth from these natural assets. This quest leads to conflicts which can be expressed in crude communal terms (Leigh, 1979, p. 371).

Sarawak's main exports are petroleum and oil, which together comprise 60.4% of its foreign earning power. However, the vast majority of the revenues from these products is syphoned off into the Federal coffers: only 5% of the total revenue drawn from the State's oil and gas is appointed to the State's finances. Thus, for the year 1985, Sarawak exports of oil, gas and petroleum products was valued at M\$ 5,946,100,000. During the same period the total Federal Government expenditure on Sarawak was M\$ 860,546,000 (Department of Statistics 1986).

By contrast, 'all the royalties collected from logging operations go to Sarawak's treasury, making logging the single largest source of revenue for the state government' (INSAN, 1986, p. 3). By 1991, Sarawak was exporting over 18 million m³ of timber per year (World Bank, 1992). About 93% of this timber leaves the country in the form of whole logs, the rest being locally processed.

Thus, the principal sources of wealth in Sarawak are in the hands of the State (Malaysian and Sarawakian) in the form of forest estate (timber) and minerals. Since most of the oil wealth leaves Sarawak and does not return, it is the control of timber which lies at the heart of Sarawak's political economy.

Consequently, an understanding of the links between the political process and the control of the timber industry are central to an understanding of the fate of the native peoples and forests of the country.

Like many Third World economies, in Sarawak the pattern has been 'for the state to assume political leadership of the capitalist revolution given the relative weakness of the domestic capitalist class. The bourgeoisie has... developed within the framework of state-led capitalism in which political ascendancy lies with the officials of the state itself'. Having full control over access to the State's natural resources, state officials are able to dispense favours as they choose, thus perpetuating the social relations inherent in the Sultanates of the pre-colonial era. In those times, as Robison has noted, the 'networks of political loyalties focused around personal attachment to individual leaders and dispensers of benefices, whose political fortunes decided the fate of a host of clients' (Robison, 1986, pp. viii, 13). In recent years the anatomy of this political economy has been clearly revealed to the public gaze.

By 1983, many Dayaks felt so frustrated by the Federal/Malay-Melanau manipulation of the SNAP leadership that they abandoned SNAP to form a new party, the Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS). At first the Chief Minister of Sarawak sought to cocoon this new expression of native political aspirations within the 'National Front' coalition but, by 1986, it was clear that this was no longer possible. In early 1987 a rift within the dominant family of the ruling elite itself led to a political crisis, with a majority of the State assembly expressing a loss of confidence in the Chief Minister. To avoid having to resign from power, the Chief Minister promptly called an election. The opposition faction of the Malay-Melanau elite led by the Chief Minister's own uncle, himself an ex-Chief Minister, created its own new party, PERMAS, and forged an opportunistic alliance with the PBDS.

What the election clearly demonstrated was that a new sense of unity among the Dayak peoples, or at least the numerically superior Iban, had emerged. While the PBDS was an expression of this new unity, and temporarily attracted members of the native elite from many of the other parties, the Malay-Melanau defectors in PERMAS sought to ride this wave of ethnic strength into power. To take advantage of this, they chose a single rice stalk as their symbol, the *padi pun*, that was also incorporated in the PBDS flag.

What the Dayaks were seeking was a greater share in the wealth of the nation, which they felt that the

'National Front's' 'politics of development' was not giving them. As one Iban said to the author:

We don't want to be against the other races, we just want our rights to be respected. We want to be recognised as a community. We want to participate in the economy' (Langga Lias, 1987, pers. comm.).

April 1987 thus witnessed one of the most revealing and exciting political struggles in Sarawak's history, reminiscent of 150 years earlier, when internecine quarrels among the ruling Malays had been settled by recruiting the virile strength of Iban 'pirates'.

As the infighting between uncle and nephew grew more bitter Sarawak was treated to a famous public laundering of dirty linen. With the breakaway of the Chief Minister's uncle to form his new party, the Chief Minister, in his new capacity as Minister for Forestry, struck back by freezing 25 logging licences, with an estimated area of 1.25 million ha, valued at between M\$ 9 billion and M\$ 22.5 billion! (*New Straits Times*, 10 April, 1987; Apin, 1987, p. 187). This was followed by revelations in the press that the Chief Minister had taken advantage of his office to grant himself, his family and his nominees extensive areas as logging concessions. The opposition accused him of giving out logging licences as political favours. Counter-allegations immediately followed and the ex-Chief Minister was forced to admit that when he had been in office he too had given out concessions to all state assemblymen 'in order that they might help their constituencies' (*New Straits Times*, 15 April, 1987). He also defended this practice on the grounds that 'granting concessions to politicians would free them from being obliged to their sponsors' (*New Straits Times*, 10 April, 1987).

From these revelations it became clear that the practice of dealing out logging licences to members of the State legislature had been commonplace over many years, and had created a class of instant millionaires; 'nearly every state assemblyman over the years was one' (*New Straits Times*, 15 April, 1987). It was revealed, moreover, that while the former Chief Minister had given timber licences to each of his eight daughters, the sister and friends of the present Chief Minister had been similarly blessed. The Minister for the Environment and Tourism himself had especially massive interests in logging (Beard, 1987).

As in many ostensible democracies, access to cash is a major constraint to achieving political power,

especially as driving the campaign bandwagons during elections is a costly business. During the 1987 elections some M\$ 62 million was spent chasing the 625,000 voters (*Asiaweek*, 21 April, 1987). As one local observer of the political scene put it:

The whole electoral machinery is fairly expensive to operate because of the remoteness of many of the communities and their inaccessibility. Invariably, helicopters become necessary, so it is taken for granted that no politician can operate effectively in the context of Sarawak without having a tremendous amount of financial resources to call upon. That's where the timber comes in (Beard, 1987).

More importantly, money from logging holds together the patron–client relations that structure Sarawakian politics. As one study has noted:

The Sarawak political elites' control over awarding logging licences gives them the means to maintain and tighten their grip on state power—by alternately rewarding their cronies and followers, and buying off their political rivals and opponents. In short, the logging industry's role within the system of patronage politics in Sarawak is vital and cannot be underestimated (INSAN, 1986, p. 3).

The results of this kind of manipulation of representative democracy are, of course, dire. Popular aspirations are denied and power rests in the hands of those who can cannily control the process of Government to suit their own personal interests. The consequence, as Leigh notes, is that:

the benefits accrue to an ever increasing degree to an urban rich who model themselves on the 'international set' and who live in a world of palatial homes, air-conditioned Mercedes, and helicopters—a group characterised by highly conspicuous consumption. It is the choice of this set of political goals and practices that threatens to block development in the State (Leigh, 1979, p. 372).

It is no coincidence that the only car factory to have existed in Sarawak assembled BMWs.

THE LOGGING INDUSTRY

We are not saying that not a single tree should be cut down, we only demand that logging

should be managed in such a way that it genuinely benefits the local peoples (Harrison Ngau, 1987, pers. comm.).

Although timber extraction has long been an important part of the Sarawak economy, until the Second World War such commercial logging as took place was largely confined to the swamp forests along the coast. Here, felled timbers could be easily slid down to the maze of waterways and floated out to ships for loading and export, without the need for complex technology.

After the war, however, the situation changed dramatically, as mechanical logging commenced in Sarawak in 1947 (WWF(M), 1985, p. 84). The new machinery, in the form of light and efficient chainsaws, powerful tractors and winches, made possible the extraction of timber from the much less accessible upland forest of the interior. A pioneer in this process was James Wong, later to become President of the Sarawak National Party and Minister of the Environment and Tourism. In 1949, with capital loaned by banks in oil-rich Brunei, Wong set a new direction for his three-year-old company, Limbang Trading, having obtained from the colonial authorities a licence to extract timber in the Upper Limbang district of Sarawak's Fifth Division (Wong, 1983). The course of the future 'development' of Sarawak was set.

By 1971, Sarawak was exporting 4.2 million m³ of logs per year, a figure which more than doubled to 8.7 million by 1981. By 1985, log production had reached 10.6 million m³, providing M\$ 1.6 billion in revenue and, according to the Government, employing 96,000 people (Apin, 1987, p. 187); others put the total employment somewhat lower, at 22,000 workers, some 9% of the total workforce (INSAN, 1986, p. 3). By 1991, total annual exports had exceeded 18 million m³ (World Bank, 1992). Well over half this timber was coming from the interior forests, the traditional lands of the Dayak peoples.

Although the State's forest policy explicitly prioritizes the 'prior claims of local demands' over the 'profitable export trade in forest produce' (ITTO, 1990, p. 16) and notes that 'the cultivation of essential foodstuffs by systems of settled agriculture, including properly managed bushfallow, on suitable soils will normally take precedence over forestry' (WWF(M), 1985, pp. 79–80), the reality is that Forestry Policy in Sarawak has been subverted to serve the interests of the ruling elite, who have used

the handing-out of logging concessions as political favours and as a source of personal wealth, to ensure their positions. Ever since 1966, all Sarawak's State Ministers of Forestry have been from the Malay-Melanau elite and members of the governing party PBB. Both between 1970–81 and since 1985, the Chief Ministers have jealously kept this portfolio in their own office: for it is a portfolio of extreme power. The power to grant or deny logging licences lies entirely with the Minister for Forestry (INSAN, 1986, p. 5).

Despite the fact that it is the rich and influential who secure logging licences, it is not their companies which actually extract the timber. On the contrary, in the main, it is Chinese companies who actually carry out the logging and who have both the necessary technical expertise and equipment. These relationships between political patron and sub-contractor are very common in the Malay world, dominating commercial transactions in both Malaysia and Indonesia, the so-called 'Ali Baba' system (c.f. May, 1978).

In theory, logging is quite carefully controlled in Sarawak, particularly in areas defined as 'Protected Forests'. But there are a number of means by which the loggers manage to get around these controls. In the first place, a great many of the forestry officials themselves have shares in the licensed companies, generally through relatives and nominees, and they thus have a vested interest in maximizing short term returns to the company rather than in assuring the careful management of State forest estate.

In startling contrast to Peninsular Malaysia, where there are strict controls on the export of whole logs (Ngau, Jalong & Chee, 1987, p. 175), in Sarawak fully 93% of exported timber leaves the country in unprocessed form, implying a massive loss of both revenue and employment to the state. All whole logs are exported through the company Archipelago Shipping, an import–export company part-owned by the State and part-owned by a relative of the Chief Minister. As one of the natives said to the author: 'from A to Z the logging is in the hands of the Chief Minister'.

THE IMPACT OF LOGGING

We aren't quite sure who is cutting our forests and who is going to flood our land, but we know they live in towns, where rich people are getting richer, and we poor people are losing what little we have. Iban statement (Sutlive, 1984).

Of the 9.43 million ha of Forest Estate in Sarawak, some 60% (5.4 million ha.) had already been licensed out to logging by 1985 (WWF(M), 1985, p. 110). Calculations based on total production in tonnage suggest that by 1985, some 270,000 ha of primary forest were being logged each year in Sarawak, while according to another estimate the rate of forest loss was 410 km² per annum (Ngau, Jalong & Chee, 1987, p. 175). By 1991, rates of logging had increased a further 40% and had penetrated to the most vulnerable headwater forests on the Indonesian border (World Bank, 1992).

In State forest (where 60% of all concessions have been granted), measures are rarely taken to protect the forest and clear cutting is permitted, with serious consequences. Yet even in areas of so-called Protected Forest where the cut is supposed to be controlled to ensure the regeneration of the forest cover, the effects are severe. Studies have shown that even where precautions are taken to protect the forest and regulations are observed, hill forest logging in Sarawak removes about 46% of the natural cover (WWF(M), 1985, p. 87).

Despite assertions to the contrary by individuals such as the Environment Minister James Wong, who claims that 'logging in Sarawak will go on for ever and ever', the consensus of botanists, foresters and conservationists alike is that if present trends and practices are not radically changed, the logging industry in Sarawak will not last another five years; by then there will be barely any primary forest left. The World Bank, in a report that has been suppressed by the Malaysian government, characterizes logging in Malaysia as a 'sunset industry' (World Bank, 1992).

The use of heavy machinery for the extraction of the logs is one of the principal problems of the timber industry. The machines churn up the soil, compacting the lower layers and rendering it impermeable. Logging thus not only exposes the soils direct to rain, by removing the protective canopy, but increases the run-off by reducing the soils' capacity to absorb water. The direct result is a vastly accelerated rate of erosion which besides seriously reducing soil quality and the capacity of the forest to regenerate, causes heavy pollution of rivers. There is a complete absence of legislation to control this (WWF(M), 1985, p.19). The Federal Government's own 5-year plan notes that 'soil erosion and siltation have now become (Sarawak's) main water pollution problem'; only 41% of Sarawak's rivers remain unpolluted (Malaysia, 1986, pp. 290, 285). In many parts of