

Cathay Pacific navigated a complex process that restructured its ownership to allow for greater Chinese investment, taking the British-based investment to below 50 percent.

The Cold War also positioned Hong Kong as a key connection point between not only Asia and Europe, but also Asia and the United States. Hong Kong's unique position as a western colony located on the Chinese mainland had made it an important shipping center in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The city built on that history both during the early years of aviation and during the emerging jet age. In the early years of the Cold War, as noted, Hong Kong provided important air traffic connections to nationalist China. The PRC's closing of China to western air traffic initially had a devastating effect on air transportation through Hong Kong. That downturn, however, proved temporary as Hong Kong's location attracted passenger traffic not only from Europe, but from the United States. It then became a key global exporter. By the waning years of the Cold War, once the PRC again opened to international air traffic, Hong Kong, already re-established as a major global air passenger and cargo hub, again emerged as a key node in the new connections being forged between the PRC and the West.

Although it might have benefited from greater detailed attention to both the city and its airport, Wong's study of Hong Kong is a valuable addition to aviation history. It reflects a growing scholarship focused not on planes and pilots, but on aviation's infrastructure and its larger role in globalization process since World War II.

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Workers and democracy: The Indonesian labour movement 1949–1957

By John Ingleson. Singapore University Press and University of Hawai'i Press, 2022. 392 pages. Cloth, \$68.00 USD, ISBN: 978-0824893606.

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Workers and Democracy is John Ingleson's third monograph chronicling the history of the labor movement in what we know today as Indonesia. The first, *In Search of Justice: Workers and Unions in Colonial Java, 1908–1926* (Ingleson, 1986) analyzed the "first stage" of Indonesia's labor movement, which ended with the PKI rebellions of late 1926 and early 1927. Almost 30 years later, Ingleson published the second monograph, *Workers, Unions, and Politics: Indonesia in the 1920s and 1930s* (Ingleson, 2014), which examined the period after the PKI rebellions until the Japanese occupation of March 1942. *Workers and Democracy* skips ahead to 1948.¹ It is the first of Ingleson's three

¹For an analysis of developments in the early independence period see Suryomengolo (2013).

books to deal with post-independence Indonesia. Thus, while the first two books dealt with the challenges that workers faced organizing under colonial rule, *Workers and Democracy* investigates how workers and unions navigated the new terrain under parliamentary democracy.

The first four chapters provide an overview of the historical context of the early 1950s: prominent labor organizations, the challenges that workers faced, and the relationship between the state and labor. The next four substantive chapters focus on workers in several important parts of the economy: the public sector, plantations, shipping and ports, and industry and transportation. As with his previous work, Ingleson deftly pieces together fragments of evidence from many sources to create an impressively rich portrayal of working-class organizations and their activities. The absence of a dedicated union archive – many of which the police and military seized in the 1950s and the 1960s or destroyed in the bloody aftermath of September 30, 1965 – might have daunted a less resourceful scholar. Miraculously, some of the archives of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia) and its affiliated union Sobsi (Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia) survived because the army had kept hold of them. Though incomplete, they are now accessible in the Indonesian National Archives. Ingleson also consulted archives in Australia, Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States, as well as Indonesian and Dutch-language newspapers, Indonesian government records and publications, and union magazines and pamphlets preserved in libraries and archives.

Workers and Democracy aims to contribute to the project of reevaluating the parliamentary democracy period. Echoing the laments of Ruth McVey and Daniel Lev that this era is both understudied and often misrepresented, Ingleson seeks to both illuminate and correct the historical record. With regard to organized labor specifically, *Workers and Democracy* challenges portrayals of unions as mere appendages of political parties. Although major unions did indeed have links to political parties, Ingleson insists that they were “first and foremost industrial organizations” (3). They campaigned tirelessly and successfully to improve wages and working conditions and to eradicate exploitative colonial labor relations. The greater freedoms that workers enjoyed during the parliamentary democracy period, moreover, were crucial to making these gains. By the end of the period under study, Indonesia’s Ministry of Labor estimated that there were about 2.3 million union members, and more than half of them belonged to Sobsi affiliates.

These gains were hard fought. Although democratic politics created conditions that allowed unions to expand their activities in the workplace and the public sphere, economic and political developments worked against them. The resurgence of the PKI and Sobsi’s dominant position in the labor movement inspired growing fears of communist influence among Indonesia’s ruling elite, while the parlous state of the economy gave rise to concerns about the detrimental effects of working-class militancy on the economy. Greater restrictions on working class mobilization organized by militant unions ensued, which included the jailing and fining of hundreds of labor activists for engaging in illegal industrial actions.

However, government authorities also recognized that Indonesian workers were poorly paid and treated unjustly at work. Dutch companies continued to dominate in many important sectors of the economy and sought to perpetuate colonial labor practices. None of the six governments during this period were especially sympathetic to perpetuating exploitative colonial era labor relations. But they did not have the appetite for the economic disruption that would ensue should workers engage in the sort of large-scale industrial action that would be necessary to force employers to concede to workers’ demands. The government therefore tried to restrict industrial action, initially by banning strikes in essential industries and later by establishing an industrial dispute resolution system that imposed strict procedures for mounting legal strikes. In response, workers began to rely more on forms of industrial action such as go-slows, demonstrations, sit-down protests, and overtime bans.

Simultaneously unions learned to navigate and take advantage of the labor dispute resolution system, which initially heard most disputes (Panitya Penjelesaian Pertikaian Perburuhan Daerah, P4D), but since their decisions were nonbinding, employers or workers typically appealed to the central labor dispute resolution committee (Panitya Penjelesaian Pertikaian Perburuhan Pusat, P4P). Employers sought to protract the dispute resolution process, while unions hoped to win more favorable decisions.

Unlike the P4D, the P4P issued binding decisions that were appealable to the Minister of Labor. Unions, eager to win favorable decisions, exerted political pressure on governments to side with workers. The government could influence P4P decisions through both their representatives on the tripartite committee and via the Minister of Labor. This system, Ingleson argues, delivered “better results for workers than they would have otherwise achieved” (126). Among the gains that workers won were Lebaran allowances, industry and regional minimum wages, and the gradual elimination of race-based and discriminatory practices.

Workers and Democracy succeeds in its goal of demonstrating that unions were more than appendages of political parties. But in foregrounding unions as industrial organizations, Ingleson also gives short shrift to their role as political actors, and risks unintentionally reinforcing elements of New Order labor historiography (see Ford 2010). As Ingleson argues, working class gains depended on the freedoms that organized labor gained with the transition to parliamentary democracy. These expanded freedoms affected not only what workers could do in the workplace – e.g., organize unions – but also, and perhaps more importantly, how unions could participate in the public sphere. In contrast with Dutch colonial rule and even the early years of independence, unions could now directly influence politicians through democratic politics. Political maneuvering was a key element in union strategies to win better compensation and working conditions from the labor dispute resolution institutions. Indonesian governments unquestionably supported improvements in labor conditions based in part on principle, but they were also undoubtedly making cold political calculations, especially once the PKI’s and Sobsi’s stars began to rise. The extent to which unions were involved in elections also remains a question, as is the extent to which unions leveraged their links to political parties to win pro-labor policies. A more robust analysis of unions as political actors would have strengthened Ingleson’s analysis of Indonesia’s labor movement during the parliamentary democracy era.


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Thai Politics in Translation: Monarchy, Democracy and the Supra-constitution

By Michael Connors & Ukrist Pathmanand. NIAS Press, 2021. 256 pages. Hardback, £65.00 GBP, ISBN: 9788776942847. Paperback, £22.50, ISBN: 9788776942854

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Saying that conservatism, both as an ideology and a political project, plays a major role in Thai politics is an understatement to any observer of Thai politics. There has been rich research in the English language