Lawatan American Tin Mission (1951)

Dirujuk oleh

- West Country Estate

Perihal

Sekitar 8-14 November 1951, The American Tin Mission (wakil pakar-pakar industri bijih timah kerajaan Amerika Syarikat) telah membuat lawatan rasmi ke kawasan-kawasan perlombongan di sekitar Malaya, sepanjang 2 minggu tersebut. Mereka telah dijemput oleh Kerajaan British Malaya atas cadangan Chamber of Mines of the Federation, bagi memaklumkan mereka mengenai isu-isu berkaitan pengeluaran dan pemasaran bijih timah di Malaya: *“An American tin mission invited to Singapore and Malaya by the British and Malayan Governments plans to leave next week. It will arrive in Singapore about a week later for a two-week tour of tin-producing areas. The invitation was extended to U.S. Government tin experts at the suggestion of the Chamber of Mines of the Federation. The idea is to give Americans “a better understanding of Malayan tin production and marketing problems.”* (The Singapore Free Press, 27 October 1951, Page 1:

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"American tin mission leaves U.S. next week").

Perbincangan

Pada pagi 8 November 1951, para delegasi telah membuat lawatan ke lombong H.S. Lee di Salak South, diikuti pertemuan serta makan tengahari bersama penggiat lombong berbangsa Cina di Persatuan Pelombong-Pelombong Cina Selangor: *“This morning the mission visited the H.S. Lee tin mine at Salak South and later met Chinese miners at the Selangor Chinese Miners' Association, where they were entertained to lunch.”*

Ketika lawatan delegasi American Tin Mission, para penggiat industri timah tempatan telah menyatakan kepada mereka bahawa harga timah perlu dinaikkan bagi memastikan kestabilan ekonomi Malaya, selain faktor ancaman pengganas yang berleluasa ketika itu: *“Malaya's top tin men today told the American tin mission at present touring Malaya that unless the price of the metal rises a slump would develop in the industry here which would have serious effects not only on the stability of Malaya, but also of South-East Asia. Chinese-owned mines, which produce 36? per cent of Malaya's tin and employ more than half the industry's 50,000? mine workers, would be the first affected. Attacks on these mines by terrorists were increasing and if the price of tin fall appreciably, many of them would stop production, thereby affecting the economic position of Malaya.”* (Cairns Post (Qld. : 1909 - 1954), Wed 14 Nov 1951, Page 3:

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"PRICE OF TIN MUST RISE").

Siri Lawatan

Di sebelah petangnya, mereka memulakan siri lawatan. Destinasi pertama ialah Kampung Baru Jinjang dan Sungei Buloh. Sebelum bertolak, mereka mengadakan perbincangan dengan pengarah operasinya, Sir Harold Briggs, bersama Ketua Setiausaha Pertahanan: *“Travelling about 50 miles in an armed convoy, the U.S. tin mission this afternoon visited two resettlement areas - the Jinjang resettlement camp (the largest in the Federation) and the Sungei Buloh agricultural resettlement camp. The party was accompanied by the British Adviser, Selangor, Mr. A.N. Ross, and the District Officer, Kuala Lumpur. The Jinjang resettlement area, which is about 450 acres has about 2,500 houses with a population of 15,000, while the Sungei Buloh resettlement area is about the same size but has only about 530 houses. … Before visiting the resettlement areas in the afternoon, they had discussions with the Director of Operations, Sir Harold Briggs, and the Secretary for defence.”* (Singapore Standard, 9 November 1951, Page 9:

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"US Tin Group Visits Mine And 2 Camps").

“November 1957(1951): Members of the American Tin Mission, escorted by an armoured vehicle, walk along the barbed wire fence at the Sungei Buloh Agricultural Resettlement Camp, Selangor. This is the second resettlement camp they visited during the day.” (New Straits Times, September 3, 2015:

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"Throwback Thursday: The work continues").

Kira-kira seminggu selepasnya, iaitu pada 14 November 1951 (hari terakhir lawatan), para delegasi makan tengahari bersama perwakilan Rubber Producers' Council. Selepas itu, mereka dibawa ke West Country Estate, dengan diiringi oleh Mr. H.H. Facer (pengerusi Council), Mr. H.K. Dimoline (setiausaha Council), Inche Mohamed Aris bin Ahmed Fathil (presiden Persatuan Pekebun Kecil Johor), dan disambut oleh pengurus estet ketika itu, Mr. D.C. Green. Mereka menyaksikan keseluruhan pemprosesan getah, dari penorehan susu getah, sehingga menjadi kepingan getah krep. Setiap ahli delegasi kemudiannya dihadiahkan dengan sekeping getah krep sebagai cenderamata. Selepas minum petang di situ, mereka bertolak ke Singapura: *“The American tin mission which has been touring the Federation tin producing areas left for Singapore today, having completed their work. Yesterday, after lunch with the Rubber Producers' Council, they visited the West Country Estate at Kajang, accompanied by Mr. H.H. Facer, Mr. H.K. Dimoline and Inche Mohamed Aris bin Ahmed Fathil,*

President of the Johore Smallholders' Association. They were shown how rubber is tapped and saw latex being converted into crepe rubber sheets, cured, trimmed and packed. Each member of the mission was presented with a crepe rubber sheet by the manager, Mr. D. C. Green, who entertained them to tea before they left the estate." (Singapore Standard, 16 November 1951, Page 9:

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"US Tin Mission Pays Visit To Rubber Estate").

Latar Peristiwa

Sebulan sebelum lawatan delegasi ini, editor The Straits Times telah pun menyiarkan artikel yang mengkritik tindakan ini, dan menyangkal dakwaan Amerika Syarikat berkenaan pengawalan harga jualan timah oleh kartel tempatan. Di samping itu, pihak editor turut menyatakan kemungkinan manipulasi pasaran timah oleh pihak Amerika Syarikat, melalui simpanan lambakan stok mereka: *"One reason for sending the mission, Reuter reports from Washington, is the desire to explore the possibility of persuading Indonesia to sell directly to the United States instead of, "as at present, sending tin to Malaya to be smelted." About two-thirds of all Indonesian concentrates is sent to Holland for smelting; the rest goes to the American smelter in Texas. There is not much there for the mission to explore. It is also said that the mission will be prepared to negotiate contracts "if Far Eastern producers are amenable." … Bolivia is holding out for 1.50 (U.S.) a pound. The Americans will not offer more than $1.12, and are now selling tin out of the stockpile to prove they can hammer the price if they try hard enough. … Washington was invited to send a mission to Malaya to disprove the charges of "gouging". The Americans have asserted that the price of tin is rigged, and the industry controlled by a cartel. But in Malaya there is no cartel, no control and no "gouging.""* (The Straits Times, 2 November 1951, Page 6:

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"The Tin Mission").

Suatu hasil kajian berkenaan industri timah semasa ketika itu telah memperincikan lagi isu manipulasi pemasaran oleh Amerika Syarikat melalui simpanan stoknya, serta turut menyentuh hal dakwaan kawalan harga oleh kartel di Malaya ini:-

"For the first half of 1950, there was little fluctuation in price - from £590-620 per ton. But with the Korean War, the U.S.A. once more began to stockpile tin and when other countries followed suit, great fluctuation in price occurred. On November 8, 1950 the price reached £1,280 per ton. This seemingly fantastic price was exceeded many times in 1951. It seems that the highest price ever recorded was in the Singapore market on February 14, 1951 when it reached $783 per picul or about £1,540 per ton. This is and will be the highest price ever, say the experts.

Such fluctuations breed uncertainty and is unhealthy for the stability of the industry. The U.S.A. which is Malaya's chief customer, has accused Malayan miners of "gouging". About half of Malaya's tin output is sold to the U.S.A. Besides having a large stock pile, the U.S.A. also has an agreement with Bolivia, so that her supplies are assured. As an indication of its monopsonistic power, when the Reconstruction Finance Corporation announced its intention to cease stockpiling purchases in March 1951, Singapore tin prices fell from $675 per picul on the 6th to $541.75 per picul on the 9th of March. Talks between the representatives of the chief tin producing countries and the United States representatives in Washington in March 1951 brought no agreement. Malaya was represented by Colonel H. S. Lee in the British delegation. However, in the early part of 1952, a team of U.S. representatives visited Malaya and the price has been fixed at $1.18 (U.S.) per lb or about $587 (Straits) per picul."

(Sumber: Nim Chee Siew, 1953:

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"Labour and tin mining in Malaya", m.s.18).

Isu-isu pertikaian ini turut disahkan oleh

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Charles Franklin (F.) Baldwin, Duta Amerika Syarikat di Malaysia mulai tahun 1961 hingga 1964, di dalam sesi temuramah beliau dengan Dennis J. O'Brien, hampir 20 tahun selepas peristiwa ini. Menurut beliau, lawatan American Tin Mission ini telah dicetuskan oleh suatu insiden di Washington, US, selepas tamatnya Perang Dunia Kedua. Di dalam insiden tersebut, William Stuart Symington (ketika itu pengarah Reconstruction Finance Corporation), mendakwa bahawa wujudnya sebuah kartel di Malaya yang mengawal serta menetapkan harga pasaran bijih timah, lalu merugikan kerajaan Amerika Syarikat. Antara misi lawatan ini ialah untuk menyiasat hal ini, dan pada akhirnya, mereka gagal memperolehi sebarang bukti dakwaan tersebut. Sementara itu, pihak penggiat industri timah Malaya pula mendakwa kerajaan Amerika Syarikat telah mengumpul simpanan stok bijih timah yang besar, yang boleh digunakan untuk memanipulasi pasaran:-

“O’BRIEN (Dennis J. O’Brien): Well, in those years the price of rubber was decreasing, but yet, as I understand, the production of rubber was increasing in Malaya. And there was some resentment on the part of the Malayans in regard to the sale of stockpile items in the United States. Did you ever enter into those…

BALDWIN (Charles F. Baldwin): Oh, yes, I was involved. Some of the most serious difficulties we had in Malaya were in this area. In some ways tin was a more troublesome problem, although in magnitude, it wasn’t as great as the matter of the rubber price. There was an unpleasantness that had crept into the tin situation, which was really an outgrowth of some remarks made by Stuart Symington [(William) Stuart Symington] before he became a Senator, when he was, I think, Director of the RFC, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation.

O’BRIEN: Right, after World War II.

BALDWIN: Yeah. I was then in Singapore. Symington made statements in Washington to the effect that a gigantic tin cartel was in existence; that it was fixing prices, and the American tin user was being victimized by the development. This caused an outpouring of indignation in Malaya. One result was the first American tin mission to Singapore and the Federation. Tin people there are still exultant over what they claim was the inability of the mission to prove that a cartel was in operation, but the scars of the accusation lasted for a long time. The Malayans resented it; they thought it was an unnecessarily harsh and ill-founded accusation. It did some damage to our relations.

The stockpile problem was, however, the big problem, both with respect to rubber and tin. It was on my plate all the time I was in Singapore and later, for three years as Ambassador. Periodically, the stockpile would rear it’s ugly head, and I would have trouble. It always seemed to me to be an excellent illustration of the manner in which our domestic interests and problems can collide with our foreign policy objectives. It followed a sort of stereotype pattern, almost like a ballet, the way the choreography developed. Pressure would be put on by various private interests, or by members of Congress, or officials of the Treasury Department, which looked at the stockpile from the financial standpoint. As our strategic concepts changed, more and more of the strategic stockpile materiel became disposable, and proposals would be made to dispose of them at what were called “concessional” prices. When rubber and tin became involved, a chain reaction of resentment would be set off in Malaya.”

(Sumber: JOHN F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM, 14 March 1969:

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"BALDWIN, CHARLES F.: ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW - JFK #2, 3/14/1969").

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Last update: **2022/02/09 10:58**