

**Ethnic
Politics
in
Malaysia**

R K VASIL

ETHNIC POLITICS IN MALAYSIA

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R.K. VASIL

PERPUSTAKAAN NEGARA



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For my parents
Pushpa and Lal Chand Vasil

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PREFACE

THIS is a study of a polity in a multi-racial society which, when established in 1957 at the time of decolonisation in Malaya, was founded on the principles of multi-racialism and representative democracy and which over the next two decades has tragically declined into a virtually authoritarian *Malay* Malaysia controlled and managed largely by the indigenous Malays to promote their sectional interests. With great fanfare and immense joy and promise, the Federation of Malaya was launched as a member of the family of independent nations in August 1957. Its Constitution based on the paramount principles of multi-racialism and representative democracy, including one man one vote with equal value, had been recommended by a Constitutional Commission consisting of non-partisan overseas experts who, with remarkable success, had achieved a balance between the conflicting demands and interests of the various ethnic groups and had incorporated that into the Constitution that was then fully acceptable to indigenous Malays as well as the immigrant non-Malays as the fundamental law of the land and the foundation of the multi-racial polity of the country. The acceptance by all peoples had represented the high point of an era of admirable racial harmony, goodwill and cooperation that had begun in 1952 with the formation of the alliance including the United Malays National Organisation and the Malayan Chinese Association, the communal bodies of the two major ethnic groups. However, immediately after independence, with the removal of the British and their protective role, Malay fears of the Chinese began to intensify and the government instead of concentrating on the vital tasks of nation-building and strengthening the foundations of multi-racialism and representative democracy began to occupy itself increasingly with attempts to assuage Malay misgivings and concerns and in this launched the country to a course the culmination of which eventually had to be a

Malay Malaysia and not a Malaysian Malaysia where all its peoples, irrespective of their racial origins, enjoy the good things of life on an equal basis.

In Malaysia I am deeply indebted to many people without whose help and kindness I would not have gained the insights into Malaysian politics that have been presented in this work. They include persons of different ethnic origins from the various political parties, trade unions, newspapers, universities and government services. Many of them became dear personal friends and it is a matter of great sorrow for me that the present political climate in the country does not encourage continual contact and communication with them. They would, I am certain, understand the reason why I choose not to identify them individually. This, however, does not in any way reduce the debt of gratitude I owe them.

My special thanks are due to Professor Gary Hawke for his kind interest and useful comments on the manuscript. Finally I must express thanks to the Research Committee of the New Zealand University Grants Committee which made it possible for me to spend several months in Malaysia over two trips and the Publications Committee of Victoria University for its kind assistance in the publication of this work.

Wellington
27 June 1979

R. K. VASIL

I

INTRODUCTION

IN recent years ethnic confrontation and conflict has tended to manifest itself vigorously and has often overshadowed class contradictions as a dominant cause of political crises and turmoil all over the world, whether in the developing societies or the developed societies of the West. In the poorer countries of the world, sometimes one has the suspicion that ethnic confrontation and conflict is deliberately maintained, if not provoked, by political rulers as it keeps the masses of people excessively preoccupied and obsessed with ethnic contradictions and helps keep their attention away from the failure of social and economic policies. Low per capita incomes, rates of literacy and levels of urbanization and the general lack of adequate means of communication make these countries an ideal setting where fears and prejudices thrive and are easily exploited by irresponsible and opportunistic politicians and political organizations. Ethnic solidarity and exclusiveness are more easily established and sustained and directed towards ethnic confrontation and conflict. Problems—social, political and economic—and the failure of governments and leaders to solve them are readily presented in ethnic terms and blame is often put on ethnic adversaries. The political rulers, mostly from the upper and middle classes and primarily representing their interests, find it easier to maintain their support among the masses on the basis of primordial loyalties; they are fearful that the growth of modern secular politics would inevitably make their leadership position untenable and do severe damage to their own and their class's privileged position.

Malaysia is among the more unfortunate and tragic cases. In 1969, following the general elections, the country witnessed vicious communal riots which cost several thousand lives. More important, it did irreparable damage to inter-ethnic relations and intensified Malay fear of the non-Malays to a degree where

it became necessary for their political rulers to give up the pretense of their commitment to democracy and representative government and amend the country's laws and the constitution to ensure the continuation of Malay political paramountcy in perpetuity. Ethnic relations have been so severely damaged by the communal explosion that in all likelihood they may never again be the same as before the riots; bulk of the goodwill and understanding among the various ethnic groups created during the period Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister of the country, dominated the political scene seems to have disappeared. The country's Malay political rulers have given clear indication through their action and attitudes that they do not any more subscribe to the view that in a multi-ethnic society like Malaysia one can successfully build a united new nation based on mutual trust, understanding and goodwill. In their view, the country has to be dominated by one or the other ethnic group and in the circumstances why should they, the *bumiputra*, deny themselves this role if they can acquire it whether by constitutional or extra-constitutional means.

The two outstanding features of the Malaysian situation are: one, Malaysia is essentially, what may be called, a bi-racial society; and two, one of the two main ethnic groups in the country is indigenous and the other immigrant. These have determined in a significant manner the nature of politics and ethnic relationships.

1. Though the country's population consists of Malays, Chinese and Indians (and a number of other smaller ethnic groups), representing the three main peoples of Asia, it is only the Malays and the Chinese who have the numerical strength to play a central political role. The ethnic distribution of Malaysia's population is given in Tables 1 and 2.

The Malays and the Chinese together account for over 80 per cent of the population. And what is more important is that the difference between the size of the two groups is not large. They constitute the two "majority" communities of the bi-racial society of Malaysia; one could hardly designate the Malays as the majority and the Chinese as the minority. Unfortunately, the Malays and their leaders insist on asserting themselves as the "majority" and this, therefore, constitutes one of the fundamental causes of ethnic conflict in Malaysia.

TABLE I
Ethnic Distribution of Population in Malaysia, 1970

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Malays	4,891,393	46.80
Chinese	3,560 976	34.07
Indians	934,030	8.94
Other indigenous	908,616	8.69
Indonesians	39,607	0.38
Others	117,687	1.13

Malaysia 1973, Official Yearbook, pp. 24-5.

This population situation makes Malaysia significantly different from the general run of multi-racial societies. The latter are of two kinds: 1) where there is one dominant majority constituting a large part of the population of the country and one or more small minority groups and 2) where the country's population consists of a number of minority groups, none of them constituting an absolute majority or near-majority. In the first type, the relationship that prevails is that of majority-minority or that of ethnic subordination; the ruling majority is dominant and generally has little difficulty in coping with ethnic contradictions and conflict through the use of deterrent and threat systems. However, in societies which consist of more than two or three ethnic groups and where none of them forms a majority or near-majority of the population a state of ethnic co-existence is often to be found; a greater measure of ethnic harmony and the prevalence of an attitude of "live and let live" can be expected. It is significant that in such multi-racial societies relations among the various ethnic groups, on the whole, tend to remain fluid and are not easily frozen into a state of permanent hostility and conflict.

The situation in Malaysia, however, is radically different. Malaysia is a bi-racial society and ethnic relations, as a consequence, are not fluid; they have, by and large, remained frozen in a state of general hostility, distrust and fear. The Chinese and the Malays are very different peoples: their religions, food habits, languages and attitudes towards life are very dissimilar. The religion of the Malays, Islam, sets a strong barrier to inter-marriage among the various ethnic groups. Non-Malay men

TABLE 2
*Ethnic Distribution of Population in Peninsular and East
 Malaysia, 1970*

	Number	Per Cent	Per Cent
<i>Peninsular Malaysia</i>			
Malays	4,689,379	53.17	44.86
Chinese	3,126,336	35.44	29.91
Indians	934,030	10.59	8.94
Others	70,183	0.80	0.67
Total	8,819,923	100.00	
<i>Sarawak</i>			
Malays	183,218	18.75	1.75
Chinese	294,731	30.16	2.82
Sea Dayaks	303,118	31.01	2.90
Land Dayaks	83,288	8.52	0.80
Melanaus	53,304	5.45	0.51
Other indigenous	49,961	5.11	0.48
Others	9,818	1.00	0.09
Total	977,438	100.00	
<i>Sabah</i>			
Malays	18,796	2.67	0.18
Chinese	139,909	21.36	1.34
Kadazans	184,547	28.18	1.77
Muruts	31,299	4.78	0.30
Bajaus	77,466	11.83	0.74
Indonesians	39,607	6.05	0.38
Other indigenous	125,633	19.18	1.20
Others	37,686	5.75	0.36
Total	654,943	100.00	
	10,452,309		100.00

Malaysia 1973, Official Yearbook, pp. 24-5.

and women desiring to marry Malays first have to accept conversion to the Islamic faith. A lot of the cultural and social life of the various ethnic groups, excluding the English-educated among them, since the days of British rule has been organized around individual ethnic groups; they rarely meet, except in a

superficial way, in a common socio-cultural setting. The British made no special efforts to bring the various groups together; in fact, their policies had the effect of keeping them apart and not develop any substantial mutual understanding and appreciation. The Malays, by and large, have refused to consider the Chinese as citizens of equal worth. They view them as essentially their exploiters and the main cause of their own poverty and lack of economic power. Until recently the Malays rarely pointed the finger at foreign Western capital which has for long played a large exploitative role in Malaysian economic life. The Chinese being more numerous and visible and committed to securing an equitable share of political power and status for themselves (westerners being foreigners have never sought a formal political role), it has been easier to pin the blame on them.

2. The Malays are firmly committed to the view that as they are the only indigenous people the country belongs to them. Malaysia is *Tanah Melayu*¹ (Land of the Malays) and its national language, culture, religion and overall image must reflect this fundamental fact. And the Malays, as the *bumiputra*, must rule the country. But the Chinese are numerous enough not easily to accept this view and are inclined to press claims for an equal political status and voice for themselves. Moreover, many Chinese believe that they had contributed more than their share in the development of the country during the period of British rule and, therefore, they deserve a certain consideration. Either ethnic group does not take

any consolation from its own advantages, which each firmly believes are its natural right. The Chinese firmly believe that their wealth and Malay poverty are the natural consequences of Chinese industry, thrift, and adaptability to modern ways, and of Malay indolence, thriftlessness, and conservatism. The Malays believe that they ought to control the country's political life because they are the sons of the soil; that Malaya is their country, and that the Chinese were brought in as a result

¹ The official designation of the government of the country in the Malay language is *Persekutuan Tanah Melayu* (Government of the Land of the Malays).

TABLE 3
Distribution of Population by Strata and Race, Peninsular Malaysia, 1957 and 1970

	Urban*						Rural		
	1957		1970		1957		1970		%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Malays	349,605	21.0	694,935	27.4	2,775,869	60.2	3,976,939	63.4	
Chinese	1,042,668	62.5	1,491,871	58.7	1,291,088	28.0	1,639,449	26.1	
Indians	213,863	12.8	324,223	12.8	482,323	10.5	612,118	9.8	
Others	60,833	3.7	28,858	1.1	62,509	1.3	41,164	0.7	
Total	1,666,969		2,539,887		4,611,789		6,269,670		

*Urban means centres with population of 10,000 and above.

Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-75, Government Printer, Kuala Lumpur, p. 25.

of foreign rule, with which they collaborated to their own advantage and to the disadvantage of the Malays . . .²

The Malays are largely a rural people while the Chinese are substantially over-represented in the urban centres. Most Malays are *padi* farmers and fishermen and naturally, therefore, have a smaller share of economic power and urban economic activity. The Chinese are significantly concentrated in the port cities of Penang and Malacca and other urban areas in the rich west coast States of Johore, Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan. Tables 4, 5 and 6 give an indication of the extent of the disparity between the position of the Malays and the Chinese around the time of independence.

TABLE 4

Economically Active Population by Race and Industry (with selected sub-divisions), 1957 (in thousands)

	<i>Malays</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Indians</i>	<i>Others</i>
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	749	310	174	10
Rice	381	9	0.5	6
Market gardening	23	54	1	0.1
Rubber	260	200	150	2
Coconut	26	4	9	0.1
Mining, manufacturing	36	136	16	2
Commerce	32	127	32	3
Other industries and services	180	174	80	38
Government services	17	5	8	2
Police, home guard	43	4	2	1
Armed Forces	15	2	3	23

*Includes forces of other countries (Commonwealth) stationed in Malaya.

Population Census of the Federation of Malaya, 1957, Report No. 14.

² T. H. Silcock, "Communal and Party Structure," in Silcock and Fisk (Editors), *The Political Economy of Independent Malaya*, University of California Press, 1963, p. 5.

TABLE 5

Approximate Aggregate Individual Incomes by Race, 1957

	<i>Malays</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Indians</i>	<i>Total*</i>
Aggregate individual incomes (in million dollars)	1,125	1,975	475	3,675
Percentage of total	30	54	13	100
Average annual income per head (in dollars)	359	848	691	585
Average annual income per adult male (in dollars)	1,433	3,264	2,013	2,128

*Includes Europeans and others.

Household Budget Survey, Report of the Inland Revenue Department, 1958, quoted in T. H. Silcock and E. K. Fisk, *The Political Economy of Independent Malaya*, University of California Press, 1963, p. 3.

TABLE 6

Student Enrollment at the University of Malaya by Race, 1962-63 Session

	<i>Malays</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Indians</i>	<i>Ceylonese</i>	<i>Others</i>
Faculty of Agriculture	6	56	6	6	0
Faculty of Arts	247	319	90	42	25
Faculty of Engineering	5	185	24	9	5
Faculty of Science	16	228	41	25	8

University of Malaya, Document No. AR 344/62, p.2, quoted in Gordon P. Means, *Malaysian Politics*, University of London Press, 1970, p. 20.

This disparity has remained in existence since the time of independence and has naturally caused great concern and fears among the Malays of their country being taken over by the non-Malays, especially the Chinese. Since independence the Malays have lived under the over-powering fear of becoming what one of them called the dispossessed "back numbers" in their own country. During the period that the aristocratic Tunku Abdul Rahman

ruled the country this concern was largely reflected in the desire of the Malay political rulers to maintain and strengthen Malay control over the government and administration of the country. Not much effort was made to secure for the Malays an increased participation in the economic life of the nation, especially in the fields of trade and commerce. A sort of *quid pro quo* arrangement was operated which allowed the indigenous Malays political paramountcy and assured the Chinese substantially unfettered opportunities to pursue trade, commerce and industry. The levels of political articulation and participation among both the Malays and the Chinese still being rather low this arrangement allowed ethnic peace and harmony, at least on the surface. Those days Tunku Abdul Rahman used to frequently boast of himself being the happy Prime Minister of the happiest country in the world. Malaysia was presented by many as the model of a multi-racial society where people of different ethnic origins lived in complete harmony and peace.

However, all this began changing drastically from 1963 with the formation of the larger federation of Malaysia, including Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak. During the period from 1963 to 1969, political articulation and involvement of the masses, whether Malay or non-Malay, increased very significantly. Political and ethnic issues came to be debated and discussed widely and openly. Suppressed feelings and frustrations came to the surface with a new vehemence and vigour on both sides of the ethnic divide. The changed situation reflected itself in the rough campaign and the excitable results of the 1969 general elections. The tragic culmination was the bloody communal explosion which occurred immediately following the announcement of the election results. The old bases of politics and ethnic relationships organized around the time of independence in 1957, which had been under severe strain all along since late 1963, now came to be seen widely, both by the Malays and the non-Malays, as non-viable and unacceptable. The Malays and their leaders began to look for ways and means to entrench their community's paramountcy with regard to politics, government and administration in a manner that it could never again be questioned and threatened by the non-Malays through political action. Moreover, they began to show strong disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the idea that Malay political paramountcy by itself

was adequate to protect the Malays and maintain Malaysia as a Malay country, *Tanah Melayu*. Now it began to be viewed not only as an end in itself but also as an effective means to be used to give the Malays a fair share of economic power. On the side of the non-Malays, there was widespread frustration and stunned sadness that much of the progress, however limited in nature, made since the time of independence with regard to their political status, role and voice was being negated. Even their special economic role and power could no more be taken for granted; policies were being initiated to curb it.

The Malays, in virtual control of the government and the key instruments of power, were able to preempt and over the last few years have been laying the foundation of complete Malay rule. The non-Malays have lost much of the political leverage that they had possessed during the pre-1969 period. They now enjoy little political influence, voice and power.

II

THE CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

IN plural societies the Constitution, the supreme law of the land, is of more than usual importance as it provides the broad framework for the development of mutual relations among the various communities. It also indicates whether the dominant political group believes in the eventual economic and political integration of the various ethnic groups into a united new nation or that it is committed to the involuntary assimilation or absorption of the immigrant peoples and seeks to establish the paramountcy of the indigenous community through constitutional and political means. In this it is either used as a means to nation-building or is exploited as an instrument of ethnic oppression.

As was the case in most former colonies, the Constitution of independent Malaya and later of Malaysia did not make a break with constitutional development during the British period; continuity was maintained. It would be useful, therefore, to have a look at the origins during British rule of some of the features of the Constitution which have set the framework for politics in the plural society of Malaysia.

THE BRITISH PERIOD

During British rule Malaya consisted of the Malay States of Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Negri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak, Perlis, Selangor and Trengannu, and the Straits Settlements of Malacca, Penang and Singapore. The Straits Settlements were Crown colonies and were governed directly by the British. But the nine Malay States, which in the main constituted Malaya, were protectorates under a British High Commissioner. Though, in terms of power relationship, there was not a great deal to

distinguish between Malaya and, say, Ceylon, Trinidad and Guyana, other plural societies under British rule, the distinction was of especial significance. Malaya was never a Crown colony and the basis of Britain's control over the country was a whole set of treaties and agreements between the Malay Rulers and the British Government. One by one, the Malay Sultans had signed treaties which provided that each Malay Ruler would accept a British officer, "whose advice must be asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching on Malay Religion and Custom." This had formed the basis of the Protectorate System. The important point about this situation was that the Malay Rulers were recognized as independent sovereigns and their States as Malay States and the sum total of them all as the country of the Malays. "The theory behind the treaties of protection with the Malay Rulers was that the Malay States belonged exclusively to the Malays."¹ Under this the British accorded the Malays the status of the only *bumiputra*. Even though for all practical purposes the British administration was all powerful and operated much as it did in Ceylon, Trinidad and Guyana, the Malays enjoyed political paramountcy in relation to the non-Malay immigrants.

The non-Malays, most of whom had come in the wake of British rule, on the other hand, were treated as transient aliens. As Malaya during this period was largely "a glorified commercial undertaking" rather than a State, the non-Malay immigrants were considered by the British only as traders, artisans, and labourers essential for the benefit of Western trade and capitalist interests. The British followed the practice that so long as the non-Malays did not cause any threat to British authority and interests and did not interfere in the affairs of the *bumiputra* they were to be left alone to earn their livelihood; the British saw no special responsibility towards them. They had come to Malaya to earn a living (and had done far better than in the countries they had come from) and there was no question of the British having to worry about their political status, rights and obligations. "Although non-Malay Asians could in some states be naturalized by application; and could also secure passports

¹ Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Modern Malaya*, Donald Moore, Singapore, 1956, p. 9.

as British protected persons, they could have no such citizenship status in the country.”² This suited the non-Malays splendidly as it gave them maximum freedom to lead their lives without interference, according to the values and ways they had brought with them. As time passed, the British administration did feel constrained to intervene in the affairs of the non-Malays but only to protect them against the excesses of criminal elements among them and against some of the social evils that had emerged in their social systems as they operated away from their original setting.

An example of the British administration’s lack of concern for the non-Malays was the situation with regard to education in Malaya. “Sir Cecil Clementi [Governor of Malaya in the early thirties] laid it down that in the spirit of the treaties which regarded Malaya as a ‘Malay’ country, the only free education that could be provided by the Government was in the Malay language.”³ The only education available to the non-Malays (for which they had to pay) that was directly provided and maintained by the British was through the medium of the English language. This, however, did not attract large numbers of non-Malays, especially the Chinese, as they found that these schools charged higher fees than vernacular schools and that this system of education over-emphasized literary education suitable only for clerical occupations where unemployment was already common.⁴ Generally left to their own devices, non-Malay communities set up a large number of schools teaching through the medium of their own different languages and chiefly about the society, culture, and history of the countries they had come from. For long, these schools remained completely independent and secured the necessary financial support from the communities concerned. It was only from 1920 that they were brought under some Government supervision and given grants-in-aid by the administration.

Towards the Malays, however, the British attitude was quite different. The British were in Malaya as a result of the treaties

² B. Simandjuntak, *Malayan Federalism, 1945-1963*, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 175.

³ Victor Purcell, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

they had signed with the Malay Rulers and, therefore, they naturally had their primary responsibility towards the Sultans and their subjects, the Malays. Despite the drastic changes in the racial composition of the population, the British maintained Malaya as a Malay country and accorded the Malays a special position through the law. Large areas of land were designated Malay Reservations where non-Malays were not permitted to own or lease land. Free education was made available to the Malays including religious instruction through the Koran. From amongst the local people, only the Malays were appointed to higher government administrative positions thereby further ensuring their political paramountcy in relation to the other Asian people within the country. In all

the British Government had been firm in its insistence that the Malay States formed the country of the Malays and had maintained the position, consciously, subconsciously, and unconsciously, by preferential treatment. Its policy had been dictated by a conscientious regard for the binding quality of treaties, a recognition that its economic policies had flooded the country with aliens, and a realization that without protection Malaya would soon cease to be the country of the Malays and would in fact become, what casual observation had mockingly called it, another province of China.⁵

The system of indirect rule introduced by the British, which meant the superimposition of the colonial administration over the indigenous administrations headed by Malay Rulers, created especial difficulties. As part of their treaty obligations, the British were obliged to maintain the old form of government and its ruling class in the various States. At the same time, for the efficient exploitation of the country and its resources by Western trading and capitalist interests, political power and policy-making had increasingly to be centralized. This situation was to provide the framework for the major ethnic contradiction that emerged during the early part of British rule. The Malays considered this increasing shift to-

⁵ S.W. Jones, *Public Administration in Malaya*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1953, pp. 136-7.

wards centralization as not only a threat to the position and powers of the Malay Rulers, but to their own special position as the *bumiputra* and the status of Malaya as *Tanah Melayu* (Land of the Malays). To the Malays, the nine Malay States and their Rulers were the symbols of their separate identity and their special position. As far as the Malay *raayat* was concerned, at the time, there was no such thing as British Malaya or Malaya. Thus any obliteration of the identity of the Malay States and usurpation of their power and influence alarmed the Malays. The non-Malays, however, naturally thought quite differently. They had no sentimental ties to the various States and had no special reason to have a sense of respect and loyalty for the Malay Rulers. They certainly favoured the shift towards greater centralization as it ensured greater efficiency and better opportunities for trade and commerce.

The Malays and their Rulers maintained their pressure against centralization throughout. The result of this was that, as Ratnam puts it,

The year 1932 saw the adoption of a scheme which was aimed at maintaining the legitimate status and authority of the Malay Rulers and which, by encouraging a 'purer' form of indirect rule, hoped to prevent the political submersion of the Malays which would have resulted had the development of popular government on Western lines been permitted.⁶

The decentralization scheme, providing for greater autonomy to the Malay States, was instituted in stages. The gradual approach was a concession to the common opposition to the scheme by Western and non-Malay capitalist and trading interests.

The interesting point to note here is that up to this time, since the coming of the British, the relations between the Malays and the immigrant non-Malays had remained cordial; there was no special basis for rivalry. There was no occasion

⁶ K. J. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya*, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1965, p. 40.

for the two to confront each other. The Malays had either lived in their *kampongs*, cut off from the non-Malays, or had occupied privileged positions in the indigenous and British administrations where, at the time, there was no question of a challenge to their special position by the non-Malays. The non-Malays had lived in the urban centres and estates generally away from the Malays and engaged in activities, primarily in pursuit of wealth, which were looked down upon by the Malays and were left to be followed by the non-Malays. But this tranquil situation began changing in the thirties as a result of the controversy over the decentralization question. This was the first time that a definite basis for inter-communal rivalry had been introduced.

Then began the occupation of Malaya by the Japanese which drastically altered the political and communal scene. First, the years of occupation intensified communal antipathies. The Japanese treated the Chinese most brutally and inflicted a heavy loss of life and property among them. Often the predominantly Malay Malayan Police Force was used by the Japanese to control the Chinese community and suppress any resistance movement among them. This naturally caused serious anti-Malay feeling among the Chinese and was to result in serious communal disturbances after the Japanese surrender. Second, the war years changed the character of the non-Malay population from a basically transient group to that of a largely permanently settled one. This gave them a new stake in the political and constitutional changes in the country. There was also a significant change in the nature of the leadership of the Chinese community. It had passed from the hands of the old *Towkay* (businessman) to a younger set of radical left wing leaders whose politics, unlike that of the *Towkay*, was not subservient to their business interests. Third, the Malays who had not been particularly hostile to the Japanese for a while welcomed the Japanese occupation as "it promised to put an end to what they considered to be the economic and political encroachments of the Chinese on their preserves."⁷ The Japanese occupation, further, brought

⁷ Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Modern Malaya*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

the Malays increased political power and in the process dispelled their apathy and complaisance and gave them a new confidence and faith in their ability. "This was no doubt partly due to the fact that the Japanese had, in their own way, disregraded the non-Malay communities and shown that they did not have to be treated as indispensable to the welfare of the country."⁸ And finally, among the peoples of Malaya it was only the Chinese who offered any resistance to the Japanese and thereby they earned a certain sympathy and admiration of the British. It was thus a changed Malaya that confronted the British when they returned to the country after the War.

The Malayan Union

The Colonial Office had made plans with regard to constitutional reorganization of Malaya after the war. "A situation was envisaged in which British troops would have reconquered Malaya, and the Malay Rulers, appearing in an equivocal position, would not oppose the planned changes."⁹ Even though this circumstance did not materialize, the Colonial Office went ahead, more or less, as planned. It had been decided that as soon as the country had been recovered and the interim period of the military administration was over, a Malayan Union would be established with the principal aims to create a more efficient government organization and to promote a sense of unity and Malayanness among the different people of Malaya. In the post-war circumstances the British policy-makers were moved on the one hand by their desire to see the country progress towards independence and on the other to establish complete colonial control over the country so that they could utilize its primary products, principally tin and rubber, to plug the immense dollar gap between the United States and Britain after the war.¹⁰ Moreover, the role played by the Malays and their Sultans during the period of

⁸ K. J. Ratnam, *op. cit.*, p. 43,

⁹ J. Norman Parmer, "Malaya and Singapore," in George McT. Kahin, ed., *Governments and Politics of Southeast Asia*, Cornell University Press, 1959, p. 251

¹⁰ James de V. Allen, *The Malayan Union*, Monograph Series No. 10, Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University.

the Japanese occupation when they had little hesitation in collaborating with the Japanese had created a certain anti-Malay feeling among policy-makers in Britain. Along with this there "arose a more genuine admiration for the Chinese. They were the people, it was pointed out in London, who were bearing the brunt of the Japanese occupation and who were being executed *en masse*. Their reasons for doing so were not necessarily appreciative; it was simply felt that the predominantly Chinese Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) and its civilian supporters deserved some recognition, some share, after the war, of the colonial cake."¹¹

Under the new scheme, the Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca and the nine Malay States were to be brought under one centralized government, the Malayan Union. Sovereignty was to be transferred from the nine Malay Rulers to the Malayan Union under the Crown. To make this drastic change less unwelcome to the Malays, Singapore was excluded from the Malayan Union and was to be established as a separate Crown Colony. The worry was that the predominantly non-Malay, especially Chinese, population of Singapore would upset the racial balance in Malaya; with the inclusion of Singapore the Chinese would outnumber the Malays in Malaya.¹² As Ratnam has suggested: "The Colonial Office must have been well aware that, for the time being at least, the separation of Singapore would act as a guarantee that democratization could be effected without any immediate danger of the Malays being politically submerged by the Chinese."¹³

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹² Racial Composition of Population, 1957.

	<i>Malaya</i>	<i>Singapore</i>	<i>Malaya-Singapore</i>
Malaysians	2,427,834 (49.3%)	115,735 (12.3%)	2,543,569 (43.5%)
Chinese	1,884,534 (38.4%)	730,133 (77.6%)	2,614,667 (44.7%)
Indians	530,638 (10.8%)	68,978 (7.3%)	599,616 (10.3%)

Norton Ginsburgh and Chester F. Roberts, *Malaya*, University of Washington Press, 1958, p. 57.

¹³ K. J. Ratnam, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

One of the principal aims of the new scheme was to give the non-Malays a fair deal by abolishing the special position enjoyed by the Malays with regard to citizenship rights. Non-Malays claiming Malaya as their home (based on birth or domicile) were to be accorded equal citizenship rights with the Malays. This, despite the protection given through the exclusion of Singapore, was unacceptable to the Malays. To them the Malay States and the sovereignty of their Sultans were the symbols of their community's special political status and an affirmation of the fact that Malaya was a Malay country. The Malayan Union would destroy these. Moreover, the Malays could see that the Malayan Union would enable large numbers of non-Malays to acquire citizenship and thus any advance towards self-government and representative government, which was at the back of the minds of the policy-makers in Britain, would inevitably result in a sharing of political power between the Malays and the non-Malays.

The expected consequences of the plan and the high-handed manner in which it was forced on the Malay Rulers by Sir Harold MacMichael, sent to Malaya to secure the consent of the Malay Rulers, generated an unprecedented hostility and opposition to the scheme among the Malays. As observed by Jones: "The attack upon their ancient rights had made the Malays politically conscious" and had transformed them "from sleepy beneficiaries of a privileged position into champions of their rights."¹⁴ Dato Onn bin Jaafar,¹⁵ a prominent Malay from Johore, provided leadership and inspiration to the intense nationalism generated among the Malays. As we shall see later, he was instrumental in the formation of the first all-Malaya Malay organization, the United Malays National

¹⁴ S. W. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

¹⁵ A pompous British diplomat and writer has given the following description of Onn. Dato Onn "became Chief Minister of Johore and was related to the Sultan's family. His breadth of vision and cosmopolitan sophistication may have been partly due to this distinguished background which included some elements of Caucasian heredity." Richard Allen, *Malaysia, Prospect and Retrospect*, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 84.

Organization, whose principal aim was to mobilize and organize Malay opposition to the Malayan Union. Significantly, the non-Malays, who were to benefit immensely from the new constitutional arrangement as it offered them a legal status and accompanying political rights for the first time during their long residence in Malaya, showed little immediate enthusiasm for the Malayan Union. Possibly they were still shaken by what they, especially the Chinese, had gone through during the period of the Japanese occupation and were preoccupied with the task of reconstructing their lives and businesses. With the long history of not being accepted as Malaysians and being treated as aliens they were also unsure of themselves and did not make any serious attempts to counter Malay opposition to the Union plan. At the same time, a large group of British members of the Malayan Civil Service who had held "high appointments" publicly condemned the Malayan Union as "an instrument for the annexation of the Malay States."¹⁶ The Malay Rulers who had earlier signed the new treaties brought by Sir Harold MacMichael, now under pressure from the Malay *raayat* reversed their position and generally alleged that they had been forced to sign the treaties.¹⁷ Under the circumstances, the British Government did not take long to decide to abandon the Malayan Union although it had already been established and think afresh with regard to constitutional changes in Malaya.

¹⁶ One effective expression of their view was a letter signed by seventeen senior members of the Malayan Civil Service including several former Governors, and Chief Secretaries, which appeared in *The Times* on 16 April 1946. For the full text of the letter see James de V. Allen, *The Malayan Union, op. cit.*, p. 180.

¹⁷ The Sultan of Kedah alleged: "I was presented with a verbal ultimatum with a time limit, and in the event of my refusing to sign the new agreement, which I call the Instrument of Surrender, a successor, who would sign it, would be appointed Sultan. Members of the State Council were compelled to sign an undertaking that they would advise me to sign it. I was told that this matter was personal and confidential and was not allowed to tell my people what had taken place." See "Excerpts from the Letters of the Rulers concerning their Interviews with MacMichael" in James de V. Allen, *ibid.*, p. 169.

The Federation of Malaya Agreement, 1948

The British, however, were unwilling to abandon entirely the two main objectives of their policy in post-war Malaya—the establishment of a strong central government and the creation of a common citizenship to promote Malayanness among the different peoples. When the British decided to abandon the Malayan Union plan under pressure from the Malays it was seen as a great victory for the Malays; Malays were jubilant that they had been able to ward off this threat to their position and status in Malaya and had been able to secure the restoration of the separate identity and existence of the Malay States. What they did not realize, and what has proved to be of the greatest consequence, is that they did not achieve a fundamental change in British policy; they had only forced the British to realize that the two salient objectives of the Malayan Union plan could be broadly achieved without destroying the separate identity and existence of the Malay States.

The burgeoning Malay political consciousness made the British seek to effect the change in consultation with the Malays. A Working Committee was set up which included the representatives of the Government and those of the Malay Rulers and the United Malays National Organization (which by now had emerged as the chief spokesman of the Malay community). The Committee's recommendations were examined by a Consultative Committee, which consisted of representatives of non-Malay communities. The changes suggested by the Consultative Committee were referred back to the Working Committee, which made the final recommendations. And these were considered by a Plenary Conference of the Governor, the Malay Rulers and other Malay representatives. The final proposals, which were accepted by the British and were put together in a Federation Agreement, established a Federation consisting of the nine Malay States and the Settlements of Malacca and Penang. The Government of the Federation comprised a High Commissioner, a Federal Executive Council and a Federal Legislative Council. The Federal Executive Council with the function to aid and advise the High Commissioner was to consist of the High Commissioner, three

ex officio Members (the Chief Secretary, the Attorney General, and the Financial Secretary), and not less than five or more than seven Members (called Unofficial Members) appointed by the High Commissioner.¹⁸ The Federal Legislative Council was to consist of the High Commissioner, three *ex officio* members, eleven official members, the nine Presidents of the State Councils in the Malay States and one representative from each Settlement Council (all counting as unofficial members), and fifty other unofficial members, allocated in the following manner: Labor 6; Planting, rubber and oil-palms 6; Mining 4; Commerce 6; Agriculture and Husbandry 8; Professional, Educational and Cultural 4; Settlements 2; Malay States 9; Eurasians 1; Ceylonese 1; Indian 1; Chinese 2.¹⁹ It was estimated that this would be likely to give the Malays 22 seats, the Chinese 14, the Indians 5, the Europeans 7, the Ceylonese and the Eurasians 1 each.²⁰

The reasons for the feeling of great achievement and victory among the Malays and their communal organization, the UMNO, were the following. The new Constitution had provided for the separate existence and identity of the nine Malay States. The Malay Sultans were to enjoy the "prerogatives, power and jurisdiction which they enjoyed prior to the Japanese occupation."²¹ In the exercise of his executive authority, the High Commissioner was given "special responsibilities" with regard to, among others,

1. the protection of the rights of any Malay State or any Settlement and of the rights, powers and dignity of Their Highnesses the Rulers;
2. the safeguarding of the special position of the Malays

¹⁸ *The Federation of Malaya Agreement, 1948*, Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, p. 11. S. W. Jones further says that of the five to seven Unofficial Members not less than two to three (depending on the total number) were to be Malays. S. W. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

¹⁹ S. W. Jones, *ibid.*, p. 143.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

²¹ Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Federation of Malaya-Summary of Revised Constitutional Proposals*, Cmd. 7171, p. 5. Quoted in Ratnam, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

and of the legitimate interests of other communities.²²

English and Malay were accorded the status of official languages of the Federal Legislative Council. A *Majlis Raja Raja Negri Melayu* or Conference of Rulers was established with extensive provisions with regard to the Rulers' Seat, the Keeper of the Rulers' Seal, functions of the Conference of Rulers, Standing Committee of the Conference, etc., but without any real power.

However, in reality the sense of victory was only an illusion; it definitely had little real basis. In fact, the Malays should have commiserated each other. The British had been able to do what they had wanted to do with the only difference that they had to do it with the consent of the Malays; the Malayan Union plan had been discarded but the underlying principle of according a legal status with political rights and obligations to the non-Malays was incorporated into the new arrangement based on the federal idea. The significant point is that non-Malays were accorded a political status, it did not matter that at the time it was inferior to that of the Malays. The net effect of the change was that Malaya got launched, whether the Malays liked it or not, to a new course where it was inevitable that the Malay view of their position in the country and that of the country as *Tanah Melayu* would become untenable and it could only be sustained through an authoritarian political system. Once non-Malays had been accorded the right to vote through acquisition of citizenship it was impossible to sustain, in the long run, through representative government the notion that Malaya was a Malay country and that it belonged only to the Malays. Writing soon after the inauguration of Federation of Malaya, Silcock had warned :

so long as Malaya remains politically unsophisticated and is firmly controlled by British administrators backed by British troops, it is possible to call it a Malay country and assume that Chinese and Indians are aliens without implying any intention to take drastic action against them. But

²² *The Federation of Malaya Agreement, 1948*, Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, p. 10.

anyone with a rudimentary sense of political possibilities must realize that a self-governing Malay Malaya is an impossibility unless most drastic action is taken against the other two races over a period of years.²³

The most significant aspect of the new constitution was the provision regarding the acquisition of Federal Citizenship. In the preamble to the Federation Agreement it was stated as a matter of policy "that there should be a common form of citizenship in the said Federation to be extended to all those who regard the said Federation or any part of it as their real home and the object of their loyalty."²⁴ This introduced the significant new principle that Malaya belonged not only to the Malays but also to those who considered it "as their real home and the object of their loyalty." Under this, for the first time, large number of non-Malays were to be accorded citizenship of the Federation of Malaya. The significant features of the provisions were :

Acquisition of Federal Citizenship by Operation of Law

- (1) On and after the appointed day, the following persons shall be Federal Citizens:
 - (a) any subject, whether born before, on or after the appointed day, of His Highness the Ruler of any State;
 - (b) any British subject born in either of the Settlements before, on or after the appointed day who is permanently resident in the territories now to be comprised in the Federation;
 - (c) any British subject born before, on or after the appointed day, in any of the territories now to be comprised in the Federation, whose father either;
 - (i) was himself born in any of the territories now to be comprised in the Federation; or
 - (ii) was or is, at the date of the birth of such British

²³ T. H. Silcock, "Forces for Unity in Malaya", *International Affairs*, Vol. 25, 1949, pp. 455-6. Professor Silcock at the time was a Professor of Economics at University of Singapore.

²⁴ *The Federation of Malaya Agreement, 1948, op. cit.*, p. 2.

- subject, or thereafter became or becomes, permanently resident in such territories;
- (d) any person born before, on or after the appointed day in any of the territories now to be comprised in the Federation who habitually speaks the Malay language and conforms to Malay custom;
 - (e) any other person born before, on or after the appointed day in any of the territories now to be comprised in the Federation, both of whose parents were born in any of such territories and were or are, at the date of the birth of such person, or thereafter became or become, permanently resident in such territories;
 - (f) any person whose father is, at the date of that person's birth, a Federal Citizen.²⁵

Acquisition of Federal Citizenship by Application

(1) Subject to the provisions of this clause, the High Commissioner may grant a Certificate of Citizenship conferring the status of a Federal Citizen on any person not being a minor child who makes application therefor in the prescribed form and satisfies the High Commissioner:

- (a) that either
 - (i) he was born in any of the territories now to be comprised in the Federation and has been resident in any one or more of such territories for eight out of the twelve years preceding his application; or
 - (ii) he has been resident in any one or more of such territories for fifteen years out of the twenty years immediately preceding his application; and
- (b) that he is of good character; and

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41. The expression "subject of His Highness the Ruler of any State" here means any person who belongs to an aboriginal tribe resident in that State or any Malay born in that State or elsewhere of a father who was at the time of the birth of such a person a subject of the Ruler of that State or any person naturalized as a subject of that Ruler. The word "Malay" means a person who habitually speaks the Malay language, professes the Muslim religion and conforms to Malay custom.

- (c) that he has an adequate knowledge of the Malay or English language; and
- (d) that he has made a Declaration of Permanent Settlement in the form set out in the First Schedule to this Agreement; and
- (e) that, if his application is approved, he is willing to take the Citizenship Oath in the form set out in the First Schedule to this Agreement.²⁶

These provisions enabled many non-Malays to become citizens. The number of non-Malays who availed of the opportunity gives an indication of the significance of the provisions. In 1950, out of a total number of about 3,275,000 federal citizens, so many as 730,000 were non-Malays.²⁷ This was the first time that the Malays had given acceptance to opening up citizenship to non-Malays. It is important to note that what followed after this were only steps in the direction set by the 1948 Agreement.

Within four years citizenship regulations were further liberalized. The context of these changes was the increasing necessity to accord the non-Malays a Malayan identity essential for any advance towards independence (which by now seemed inevitable) and for successfully countering the communist insurrection which had begun in 1948 and had in the main attracted Chinese support and participation. These changes enacted in 1952 allowed the following categories of persons, in addition to those who had already acquired citizenship under the Federation of Malaya Agreement of 1948, to become citizens by operation of law :

- (a) any subject of His Highness the Ruler of any State;
- (b) any citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies born . . . in either of the Settlements;
- (c) any citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies born in

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁷ Federation of Malaya, *Annual Report, 1950*, p. 24. Quoted in Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya, op. cit.*, P. 84.

the Federation . . . one of whose parents was born in the Federation;

- (d) any person who is a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies, wherever born, and
 - (i) if he was born before the appointed day, whose father was born in either of the Settlements and had at the time of such person's birth, completed a continuous period of fifteen years residence in the Federation; and
 - (ii) if he was born on or after the appointed day, whose father was born in either of the Settlements and was, at the time of such person's birth a Federal citizen under the provisions of this Agreement . . . ;
- (e) any citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies, wherever born, whose father was, at the time of such person's birth, a Federal citizen, or a citizen of the Federation of Malaya, by the grant of a Certificate of Citizenship or a certificate of naturalization . . . ;
- (f) any other person who, immediately before the prescribed date, was by operation of law or otherwise a Federal citizen under the provisions of this Agreement . . . ;
- (g) any person to whom a certificate of naturalization as a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies has been granted under the British Nationality Act, 1948, and who has
 - (i) within the preceding twelve years resided in the Settlement for periods amounting in the aggregate to not less than ten years;
 - (ii) resided in the Settlements throughout the two years immediately preceding the date of his application for naturalization as a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies; and
 - (iii) taken within the Settlements the oath prescribed by section 10 of the said Act.²⁸

Such citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies who had liv-

²⁸ *The Federation of Malaya Agreement, 1948* (including amendments during 1949-55), Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1956 reprint, p. 46.

ed in the Federation for ten years immediately preceding their application²⁹ could secure citizenship of the Federation of Malaya on taking an oath of allegiance.³⁰ Further, any citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies who satisfied the following requirements could acquire citizenship by naturalization :

- (a) has within the preceding twelve years resided in the Federation for periods amounting in the aggregate to not less than ten years; and
- (b) has resided in the Federation throughout the two years immediately preceding the date of his application; and
- (c) is of good character; and
- (d) is not likely to become chargeable to the Federation; and
- (e) is able to speak the Malay or English language with reasonable proficiency or if he is unable to do so that such inability is due to the physical impediment of deafness or dumbness; and
- (f) has made a declaration that he intends, in the event of a certificate being granted to him, to settle permanently in the Federation.³¹

These changes enabled a very significant number of non-Malays to acquire citizenship of the Federation of Malaya. It was estimated that at 30 June 1953 out of a total of 4,139,000 persons who had acquired citizenship by operation of law, 2,727,000 were Malaysians (Malays and Indonesians), 1,157,000 Chinese, and 255,000 Indians and others.³²

The other important aspect of the new arrangement was that when it conceded the Malay demand that the Malay States must remain in existence and retain their separate identity, it gave few powers and accorded only a secondary status to the Malay States. The Second Schedule to the Agreement listed matters

²⁹ A person who had absented himself from the Federation for a continuous period of five years within the ten years was now entitled to be registered under this section unless he was certified by the High Commissioner to have maintained substantial connection with the Federation during that period. *Ibid.*, p. 47

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

³² K. J. Ratnam, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

with respect to which the Federal legislature had power to make laws; it contained a total of 144 items covering the entire range of governmental activity. According to Clause 100 of the Agreement the Councils of State could pass laws on any subject omitted from the Second Schedule. They could also legislate on matters relating to the Muslim religion or the custom of the Malays and on any other subject in respect to which by virtue of a law made by the Federal Legislative Council they were for the time being authorized to pass laws. The Agreement further gave very wide powers to the Federal Government which could, if it so desired, legislate against the wishes of the State Governments on almost all questions other than those touching the Muslim religion and Malay custom. There was also provision to enable the federal authorities to override the State Governments on administrative issues.³³ Moreover, the States were allocated only extremely limited sources of revenue. In all, the existence of the Malay States and their Rulers, under the Federation of Malaya Act of 1948, was significant much more in terms of their symbolic importance than the powers and status enjoyed by them.

It is important to note here that the Federation of Malaya Agreement, 1948, was the starting point of the critical contradiction to be faced by the country later. Hitherto, British policy had been based on the concept that Malaya was a Malay country and that it belonged only to the Malays. But the 1948 arrangement inaugurated a new concept, that is, Malaya belonged to all those who built it up and who were loyal to it (this certainly was the basis on which citizenship was to be made available to non-Malays). At the same time, however, it did include the notion that the Malays deserved and needed protection through an entrenched special position. It was this principle which was inherited by the Government of Malaya at the time of independence. But soon serious objections were to be raised by many within the Malay community. Firstly, that this concept had never been explicitly accepted by the Malay community; many were still committed firmly to the view that Malaya was a Malay country and that it belonged to the Malays. And secondly, that

³³ *Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission, 1957*, p. 11.

the special position and rights of the Malays could not be maintained in perpetuity except through an authoritarian system of government controlled by the Malays.

CONSTITUTIONAL COMMISSION AND THE CONSTITUTION OF MALAYA, 1957

The inauguration of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 was followed by very rapid and generally unexpected advance towards independence. The rank and file of the Malay community certainly did not consider the quick transition to independent nationhood as an unmixed blessing. Many of them were fearful of the non-Malays and believed that without British protection and proper preparation of the Malays the country would inevitably be taken over by the non-Malays. However, despite the misgivings among the Malays, the country proceeded rapidly towards independence. A sort of competitive nationalism had grown in the country in the early fifties; all major political organizations, the Independence of Malaya Party, the Alliance, and the Pan Malayan Labor Party, had begun demanding independence. The pace for the radical change in the nature of political demands by Malayan political organizations had been set by Dato Onn bin Jaafar when he founded the Independence of Malaya Party in September 1951 with independence as its major goal.³⁴ However, soon the Alliance, representing the three main communities, emerged as the chief spokesman of the Malayan national aspirations and displaced the IMP as the foremost champion of Malayan independence. Its overwhelming victory in the 1955 Federal Legislative Council elections had proved beyond doubt that it enjoyed the support of all the communities. This was significant as it was to satisfy the main precondition for the grant of independence by the British. Also, on the British side, their experience of the Communist Emergency had made them less averse to the idea of independence for multi-racial Malaya.

(The Alliance led a *Merdeka* Mission to London where talks

³⁴ See my *Politics in a Plural Society, A Study of Non-Communal Political Parties in West Malaysia*, Oxford University Press, 1971, Chap. 2.

were held from 18 January to 8 February 1956. There was no controversy with regard to independence and it was decided that Malaya would become an independent nation by August 1957. The most significant decision from our point of view was the one relating to the appointment of an independent Constitutional Commission to draft a constitution for independent Malaya. This was in line with the position of the Alliance which had been affirmed in a Petition to the Rulers on 31 August 1954 and emphasized in the Alliance Manifesto for the 1955 elections. The manifesto had stated :

In the petition to the Rulers, the Alliance urged that the members of the Special Independent Commission should be appointed from abroad.

We repeat this appeal to the Rulers, because the Alliance firmly believes that only such a Commission will be free from prejudices and other local influence. Only such a Commission will be able to exercise complete impartiality in the inquiry and in their recommendations. On the other hand, a Commission consisting of local people cannot be completely independent because they are bound to be influenced by local political and other interests.³⁵

As we shall see in the following chapter, this was affirmed during the honeymoon period of the Alliance. The years of 1954 to 1956 were a period of general euphoria among the leaders of the Malays and the Chinese. It was characterized by a genuine give and take and a regard for each other's interests. Mutual fears and suspicions were to poison the atmosphere only later after independence had been gained. It was in this context that the Malays and their leaders had accepted the arrangement that the constitution for independent Malaya should be recommended by an independent Constitutional Commission consisting of experts from outside the country. The procedure thus adopted was of the greatest significance and it was to have an immense influence on the nature of the political system in independent Malaya. As we shall see later the recommendations made by

³⁵ Alliance National Council, *Menuju K arah Kemerdekaan* (The Road to Independence), Manifesto for the Federal Legislative Council elections 1955, p. 36.

the Commission, a non-partisan body of experts from outside the country, provided a framework with a special prestige which could be altered only marginally. Even though the non-Malays had little bargaining power vis-a-vis the Malays, the recommendations of the Commission strengthened their position and, more important, they set a sort of limit to extremism on both sides. Once the recommendations came to be known, extremists on both sides came under heavy pressure to moderate their position; they found it difficult to make demands which were in complete conflict with the spirit and framework of the recommendations of the Constitutional Commission.³⁶

The talks in London, further, finalized the terms of reference for the Constitutional Commission. These are significant as they in no way made reference to the pre-Malayan Union basis of British policy, the treatment of Malaya as a Malay country. In fact, they did not basically distinguish between the different races, except that they sought to protect the special position of the Malays. These were:

To examine the present constitutional arrangements throughout the Federation of Malaya, taking into account the positions and dignities of Her Majesty the Queen and of Their Highnesses the Rulers; and

To make recommendations for a federal form of constitution for the whole country as a single, self-governing unit within the Commonwealth based on parliamentary democracy with a bicameral legislature, which would include provision for:

- (i) the establishment of a strong central government with the States and Settlements enjoying a measure of autonomy . . . ;
- (ii) the safeguarding of the position and prestige of Their Highnesses as constitutional Rulers of their respective States;
- (iii) a constitutional Yang di-Pertuan Besar (Head of State) for the Federation to be chosen from among Their Highnesses the Rulers;

³⁶ For a comparison of the situation in Fiji in very similar circumstances see my "Communalism and Constitution-Making in Fiji," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 45, No. 1, pp. 39-40.

- (iv) a common nationality for the whole of the Federation;
- (v) the safeguarding of the special position of the Malays and the legitimate interests of other communities.³⁷

Thus, significantly, the only directives that the Constitutional Commission was given with regard to the constitution of independent Malaya were that it must establish a strong central government, safeguard the position and prestige of Their Highnesses, provide for a constitutional head of state chosen from among Their Highnesses the Rulers, a common nationality, and safeguard the special position of the Malays and the legitimate interests of the other communities.

The Constitutional Commission headed by Lord Reid and consisting of well-known jurists from Britain, Australia, India and Pakistan arrived in Malaya during May-June 1956 and after holding large number of meetings and securing memoranda from all interested parties made its recommendations in early 1957. Even though these basically reflected the proposals put forward by the Alliance, the differences between the two were with regard to such important issues that there was very considerable controversy about them. There was great excitement within the Malay community which was considerably agitated about the Draft constitution, especially with regard to the provisions relating to language, state religion, and the special position of the Malays. Non-Malays, in general, received it with enthusiasm and a sense of relief.

The Draft Constitution prepared by the constitutional Commission was submitted for review to a Working Party consisting of four representatives of the Malay Rulers, four representatives of the Government of the Federation controlled by the Alliance, and the High Commissioners, the Chief Secretary, and the Attorney General, representing the British Government (all these were either British civil servants or Malays representing the Rulers and the Alliance government except for one Chinese representing the MCA.) The Working Party reviewed the Draft Constitution during March-April 1957 and made recommendations for revision of certain provisions which

³⁷ *Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission, 1957*, p. 2.

were incorporated into the Draft Constitution. The final discussions took place in London in May 1957 between the British Government and a Malayan delegation consisting of the High Commissioner, the Chief Minister, the Attorney General, and the representatives of the Malay Rulers and the Alliance controlled Government of the Federation. The London talks approved the Draft Constitution prepared by the Constitutional Commission with the amendments made by the Working party.

The Constitution thus produced, however, maintained continuity with the past and established a federal polity operating on the principles of parliamentary government. It relegated the Malay Rulers to the position of constitutional and ceremonial heads of state. As for the federal government, it devised a formula whereby the Conference of Rulers (consisting of the nine Malay Rulers) would elect from among their number on the basis of seniority a Paramount Ruler to act as the constitutional head of the federation for a term of five years. We can leave these aspects of the constitution at that as these are not the most important ones from our point of view. What we are interested in is the basic spirit or philosophy of the constitution vis-a-vis the fundamental communal problem of the plural society and its position on the contentious issues of citizenship, language, religion and the special position of the Malays and how this position was arrived at.

* *Citizenship*

Even though there was considerable controversy with regard to the question of citizenship, the task of the Constitutional Commission was facilitated by the fact that the three member parties of the Alliance had come to an agreement through negotiations among themselves and had presented this compromise in its memorandum to the Commission. As a result, the Commission took the position that "the best proposals for dealing fairly with the present situation are those put forward by the Alliance. The parties of the Alliance have given full consideration to this matter and apart from a few minor points they have reached agreement. We are satisfied that this agreement is a reasonable and proper compromise between the views of the parties, each of which has the most widespread

support from the race which it represents, and we are further satisfied that this agreement is a better way of doing justice between the races than any other that has been suggested or has occurred to us.”³⁸

In its recommendations the Commission divided all those affected into four categories:

- (i) those who already possessed rights of citizenship;
- (ii) those born in the Federation on or after *Merdeka* Day;
- (iii) those born in the Federation before *Merdeka* Day and resident there on *Merdeka* Day;
- (iv) those resident in the Federation on *Merdeka* Day but not born there.³⁹

There was no problem with regard to the first category. The Commission recommended that those who possessed rights of citizenship before *Merdeka* Day should continue to have them and those who were already entitled to citizenship by registration under the Federation of Malaya Agreement should retain the entitlement. With regard to the second category the Commission recommended the acceptance of the principle of *jus soli*, i.e. citizenship should be obtainable by the operation of law to all those born in the Federation on or after *Merdeka* Day. The Commission, however, was unwilling to recommend the principle of *jus soli* with retrospective effect as demanded by certain sections of the non-Malay communities. It said:

We are not satisfied that it is entirely possible or desirable to provide that all those who were born in Malaya, whatever be the date of their birth, wherever they may be now, and whatever be their present nationality, should be retrospectively made citizens of the Federation by operation of law.⁴⁰

With regard to such among them who were now resident in the Federation, i.e., the third category of persons, the Commission recommended that citizenship should be obtainable to them “without undue difficulty” provided they intended to reside in the Federation permanently and were prepared to take

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

an oath of allegiance and declared that they would not exercise any right or privilege which they might possess under the nationality laws of any foreign country. The only other conditions that such persons must fulfill were that they be over 18 years of age and of good character, that they should have resided in the Federation for five out of the preceding seven years, and that they should have an elementary knowledge of the Malay language.⁴¹ With regard to the controversial last category relating to those resident in the Federation on *Merdeka* Day but not born there the Commission recommended that

*citizenship should be open as of right but on somewhat different terms . . . Those to whom this recommendation applies are very numerous, and, in order that a sense of common nationality should develop, we think that it is important that those who have shown their loyalty to the Federation and have made it their permanent home, should participate in the rights and duties of citizenship.*⁴²

It further asserted that the only differences between conditions applicable to them and those applicable to the third category should be:

- (i) the applicant must have resided in the Federation for eight out of the preceding twelve years, and
- (ii) that the language test should be waived only if the applicant was over 45 years of age.

According to the recommendations of the Commission persons could further obtain citizenship by naturalization. For this they had to comply with the following conditions: that the

⁴¹ With regard to residence the Commission recommended that an unduly narrow interpretation should not be put to the term and that periods of temporary absence from the Federation should be included in the applicant's period of residence. In order to avoid delay it suggested that an applicant should be deemed to be of good character if he had not within the previous three years been in prison serving a sentence of imprisonment of more than one year. It further recommended that the language test should be waived in favour of all those who made their application within one year of *Merdeka* Day. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 15. Emphasis added.

person had attained the age of 21; that he was of good character; that he had resided in the Federation for ten out of the preceding twelve years; that he intended to reside there permanently; that he had "an adequate knowledge" of the Malay language; and that he was willing to take an oath of allegiance and declare that he would not exercise any right or privilege that he might possess under the nationality laws of any foreign country.

Despite substantial opposition to them amongst Malays not associated with the United Malays National Organization, all these recommendations of the Constitutional Commission were left unchanged by the Working Party and were incorporated into the final constitution adopted at the London talks in May 1957. Dato Onn bin Jaafar, the President of *Parti Negara*, alleged that the Commission's proposals had favored the non-Malays and if the Malays were to avoid being swamped in the future these had to be changed. He suggested three categories of non-Malays who could obtain citizenship: persons who already were subjects of any Malay Ruler; persons who already had become citizens of the Federation of Malaya; and those who were born in the Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca, provided they were willing to relinquish entirely all allegiance to the Queen. With regard to others he said: it "should be left for us [the Malays] to decide whether they can become Malayan citizens or not." And he added: "It should not be their right to be citizens." This, he believed, was necessary to maintain the Malay character of the country.⁴³

The crucial point to note here is that the provisions with regard to citizenship recommended by the Constitutional Commission and accepted both by the Working Party and the Malayan delegation to London talks of May 1957 were not based on the notion that Malaya was a Malay country and that it belonged only to the Malays. They were clearly geared to the aim of creating a multi-racial nation in Malaya and were a continuation or logical extension of the process inaugurated in 1948 that was based on the policy stated in the

⁴³ Federation of Malaya, Department of Information, *Daily Press Summary of Vernacular Papers*, 4 April 1957. Quoted in K.J. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

preamble to the Federation Agreement of 1948 "that there should be a common form of citizenship in the said Federation to be extended to all those who regard the said Federation or any part of it as their real home and the object of their loyalty."⁴⁴ The idea behind the citizenship provisions was certainly not what it was later to be alleged to be by Dr. Ismail, Dr Mahathir and other Malay leaders after the 1969 communal riots.

Language

The commission expressed its view clearly with regard to the question of the language of the new nation when it said that "we think that it is right that for all ordinary purposes Malay should in due course become the sole *official* language. Our recommendations are not intended to put obstacles in the way of that transition, but rather to regulate the transition so that it may take place in a manner fair to all communities."⁴⁵ It recognized the special claim of the Malay language and recommended that it should be the official language. But at the same time it suggested that for a period of at least ten years English should continue to be used as an official language. The Commission maintained that there were many citizens of the Federation who had no opportunity in the past to learn to speak Malay fluently and it would not be fair to them to make Malay the sole official language of the Federation "in the immediate future." It added: "After ten years it should be left to Parliament to decide when a change should be made and we have framed our recommendations so as to enable Parliament to proceed by stages if it thinks fit to do so. It may be found desirable first to discontinue the use of English for some purposes and then to discontinue its use for other purposes at some later date."⁴⁶ Concerning the languages of the non-Malay communities, the Commission recommended that none of them should be accorded the status of official language as this had not been found necessary in the past and that it would not lead to any great inconvenience. However,

⁴⁴ *The Federation of Malaya Agreement, 1948*, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission, 1957*, p. 74. Emphasis added.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

it was desirable that, as in the past, notices, announcements and other official documents should be published in Chinese and Tamil and that this practice should continue for "some considerable time."

With regard to the sensitive issue of multi-lingualism in the legislatures the Commission asserted that they had been impressed by the representations made to them that the existing law might be an obstacle in the way of election to the legislatures of persons whom the voters might want to elect. Consequently, it made recommendations for two changes:

- (i) that there should be no language qualification for candidates wishing to contest elections (".....we have drafted Article 41 in such a way as to abolish this qualification and prevent its reimposition."); and
- (ii) that for ten years there should be a limited right to speak in a legislature in a Chinese or Indian language.

The latter, however, was restricted to such persons who could not speak fluently in either Malay or English.

The final Constitution, by and large, followed the recommendations of the Constitutional Commission with regard to the designation of Malay as the official language and the continued use of English as an official language for a period of ten years after *Merdeka* Day and thereafter until the Parliament provided otherwise.⁴⁷ In fact, here the Constitution went beyond the recommendations of the Commission and gave a specific guarantee:

- (i) that no person should be prohibited or prevented from using (other than official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other language.
- (ii) that the establishment of Malay as the national language should not prejudice the right of the Federal Government or of any State Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community.⁴⁸

Further, the Constitution accepted the recommendation of the Constitutional Commission and did not prescribe any language

⁴⁷ Federation of Malaya, *Ma ayan Constitutional Documents*, Vol. 1, 1962, Article 152.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Article 152 (1).

qualifications for candidates wishing to contest elections. However, the Working Party was unwilling to provide for multi-lingualism and rejected the recommendation of the Constitutional Commission providing for limited right to speak in a legislature in a Chinese or Indian language for a period of ten years from *Merdeka* Day.

Religion

The Constitutional Commission, as a majority view, recommended that Islam should not be designated as the official religion of the Federation. Its argument was that there was universal agreement, including among those who sought to make Islam as the official religion, that if such a provision was made in the Constitution it must be made clear that it would not in any way affect the civil rights of non-Muslims. The Alliance, which had come to an agreement with regard to the issue, had stated in its memorandum to the Commission: "... the religion of Malaysia shall be Islam. The observance of this principle shall not impose any disability on non-Muslim nationals professing and practicing their religions and *shall not imply that the state is not a secular State.*"⁴⁹ The Commission, further, underlined the fact that the Counsel for the Rulers had stated to them: "It is Their Highnesses' considered view that it would not be desirable to insert some declaration such as has been suggested that the Muslim Faith or Islamic Faith be the established religion of the Federation."⁵⁰

However, this recommendation of the Constitutional Commission was rejected and, following the Alliance Memorandum to the Commission, Islam was designated as the official religion of the Federation. But at the same time the Constitution said that "other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation."⁵¹ Further,

⁴⁹ Quoted in *Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission, 1957*, p. 73. Emphasis added.

⁵⁰ The Rulers opposed this for the reason that it would have constituted an encroachment on the right of the States to have complete authority over matters affecting the Muslim religion.

⁵¹ Federation of Malaya, *Malayan Constitutional Documents*, Vol. 1, 1962, Article 3.

with a view to reassure non-Muslims, a whole article, under the title Freedom of Religion, was included in Part II of the Constitution relating to Fundamental Liberties. Here it was stated that no person should be compelled to pay any tax the proceeds of which were specifically allocated in whole or in part for the purposes of a religion other than his own.⁵² It also gave every religious group the right to manage its own religious affairs, to establish and maintain religious or charitable institutions, and to acquire and own property.⁵³ With regard to Muslims the Constitution prescribed that State law would be within its rights if it sought to control or restrict the propagation of any other religious doctrine or belief among them.⁵⁴

* *Special Position of the Malays*

With regard to the special position of the Malays the Constitutional Commission found itself in an awkward position. On the one side, it had been asked in its terms of reference that it must safeguard the special position of the Malays and the legitimate interests of the other communities, on the other it was required to provide for a common nationality for the whole of the Federation and a constitution that guaranteed a democratic form of government. In the circumstances, the basis on which it made up its mind was well expressed in its report:

In considering these requirements it seemed to us that a common nationality was the basis upon which a unified Malayan nation was to be created and that under a democratic form of Government it was inherent that all the citizens of Malaya, irrespective of race, creed or culture, should enjoy certain fundamental rights including equality before the law. We found it difficult, therefore, to reconcile the terms of reference if the protection of the special position of the Malays signified the granting of special privileges, permanently, to

⁵² *Ibid.*, Article 11 (2).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Article 11 (3).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 11 (4).

one community only and not to the others. The difficulty of giving one community a permanent advantage over the others was realized by the Alliance Party, representatives of which, led by the Chief Minister, submitted that "*in an independent Malaya all nationals should be accorded equal rights, privileges and opportunities and there must not be discrimination on grounds of race and creed*" The same view was expressed by their Highnesses in their memorandum, in which they said that they "look forward to a time not too remote when it will become possible to eliminate communalism as a force in the political and economic life of the country."⁵⁵

The Commission listed the four areas with regard to which the Malays had enjoyed a special position in the past, based on the original treaties between their Rulers and the British and reaffirmed from time to time. These were:

1. Reservations of land and the system of reserving land for the Malays in the States.
2. Quotas for admission to the public services.
3. Quotas in respect of the issuing of permits or licenses for the operation of certain businesses,
4. Preferential treatment in the grant of certain classes of scholarships, bursaries and other forms of aid for educational purposes.

The Commission emphasized that they had found little opposition to the continuation of the arrangement, but there was strong hostility among certain people to any increase in the existing preferences and to their being continued for "any prolonged period." The Commission asserted:

We are of the opinion that in present circumstances it is necessary to continue these preferences. *The Malays would be at a serious and unfair disadvantage compared with other communities if they were suddenly withdrawn.* But, with the integration of the various communities into a common nationality which we trust will gradually come about, the need for

⁵⁵ *Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission 1957*, p. 71. Emphasis added. It should be noted that the present Malay leadership has completely rejected that fundamental principle.

these preferences will gradually disappear. Our recommendations are made on the footing that *Malays should be assured that the present position will continue for a substantial period, but that in due course the present preferences should be reduced and should ultimately cease so that there should then be no discrimination between races or communities.*⁵⁶

With regard to land it recommended that, subject to two qualifications, no more land should be designated Malay reservations and that the States should reduce Malay reservations but at a time considered appropriate by them. The two qualifications were: first, that if any land reserved for the Malays ceased to be reserved, an equivalent area could be reserved provided that it was not already occupied by a non-Malay; and second, that if any undeveloped land was opened up, part of it could be reserved for Malays provided an equivalent area was made available to non-Malays.

As for the other aspects of the special position, the Commission recommended that no new quotas or other preferences should be created. With regard to the existing ones it asserted that the Malays "ought to have a substantial period during which the continuance of the existing quotas is made obligatory."⁵⁷ It further suggested that if in any year there were not enough Malay applicants with the necessary qualifications to fill vacancies, the number of appointments should not be reduced and other qualified applicants should be appointed to fill the their quota of vacancies. It also recommended that after fifteen years there should be a review of the whole question. The procedure it suggested for the review was that the Government of the time should prepare and present a report to the Parliament which in turn would decide either to retain or to reduce any quotas or preferences or to discontinue them entirely.

Further, the Commission concurred with the view of the Alliance given in its memorandum: "The Constitution should . . . provide that the Yang di-Pertuan Besar should have the special responsibility of safeguarding the special position of the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72. Emphasis added.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Malays."⁵⁸ But it added significantly that a majority in the Commission took the view that the Alliance intended that the Yang di-Pertuan Besar should act in this matter as in others as a constitutional head and should accept the advice of his Cabinet.⁵⁹ The Commission emphasized that in their view the intent of the Alliance was that the whole matter should be dealt with by the Government of the day, that is by the representatives of the people in Parliament.

It is important to note here that the sole basis on which the Constitutional Commission had accorded the Malays a special position was the fact that they had lagged behind the non-Malays in certain spheres and it was necessary to enable them to catch up. The Commission made no suggestion anywhere, implied or explicit, that the special position of the Malays was due to them as the *bumiputra*, the sons of the soil. The obvious intent was that it was only to be a transitional arrangement.

This was, however, one aspect of the draft constitution recommended by the Constitutional Commission where drastic changes were made by the Working Party. With regard to the reservation of quotas for admission to the public services, issuing of permits or licenses to operate certain businesses, and the grant of scholarships, bursaries and other forms of aid for educational purposes, the recommendation of the Constitutional Commission that the matter be left in the hands of the government of the day was rejected. The final Constitution reflected the minority view of Justice Abdul Hamid of Pakistan. It said:

... the Yang di-Pertuan Agong [Head of State] shall exercise his functions under this Constitution and federal law in such manner as may be necessary to safeguard the special position of the Malays and to ensure the reservation for Malays of such proportion as he may deem reasonable of positions in the public service (other than the public service of a State) and of scholarships, exhibitions and other similar educational

⁵⁸ Quoted in *Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission, 1957*, p. 73

⁵⁹ Justice Abdul Hamid of Pakistan dissented with the majority view and maintained that the words "special responsibility" in the Alliance memorandum implied that in this matter the Yang di-Pertuan Besar should act at his discretion and not on advice of his cabinet.

or training privileges or special facilities given or accorded by the Federal Government and, when any permit or license for the operation of any trade or business is required by federal law, then, subject to the provisions of that law and this Article, of such permits and licenses.⁶⁰

Further, the Constitution said nothing with regard to the question of unfilled quotas, a matter on which the Constitutional Commission had made an explicit recommendation. This matter, however, was discussed by the Alliance Ad Hoc Political Committee in May 1957, where Dr Ismail, then Minister of Internal Affairs, had given the assurance that the current practice of allocating unfilled quotas for posts and scholarships to non-Malays would be continued.⁶¹

The Commission's crucial recommendation that the entire matter of the special position of the Malays be reviewed after fifteen years was not accepted. The Malay fear was that, if, as recommended by the Commission, the matter was left in the hands of the Parliament to decide at the end of fifteen years there was no guarantee that the Parliament at the time, which as non-Malays were to have equal voting rights might have a majority of non-Malays members, would not decide to revoke the special position of the Malays without the consent of the Malays. The issue had created considerable controversy in the country. The non-Malay view was that fifteen years was a reasonable time limit. It was in these circumstances that a compromise solution was found by the Alliance. It was presented to a meeting of the Central Working Committee of the Malayan Chinese Association on 4 May 1957:

That the White Paper which the Government proposes to issue will include a note that it will be in the interests of all concerned that the Yang di-Pertuan Agong should review the provisions of this article (relating to the Special Position of the Malays, Article 157 in Draft Constitution

⁶⁰ "Constitution of the Federation of Malaya," *Malayan Constitutional Documents*, Vol. 1, 1962, Article 153 (2).

⁶¹ *Minutes of Central Working Committee meeting of the Malayan Chinese Association*, 4 May 1957.

recommended by the Constitutional Commission) from time to time.⁶²

It was widely maintained in Malaysia that when the MCA and the MIC insisted on a fifteen year limit on Malay special position, they were told by UMNO leaders (Tun Abdul Razak's name is especially mentioned)⁶³ that a fifteen year limit was not necessary, because for all they knew the Malays might be able to catch up with the non-Malays within the next few years and these provisions then would become unnecessary. And, therefore, the best course was to leave it to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong who would review the situation from time to time and determine if they were still necessary. It is important to note that it is on this basis alone that the provisions relating to the special position of the Malays were accepted by the MCA and the MIC.

It is significant that Tunku Abdul Rahman, then Prime Minister and the foremost leader of the Malays, in his speech introducing the draft constitution in the Federal Legislative Council in July 1957 did not even once refer to the Malays as the *bumiputra*, the sons of the soil, and as such entitled to a special position.⁶⁴ He had asserted:

When discussing the special position of the Malays and the legitimate interests of other communities, we must never forget that our main object is to unite our people. We should do all we can to remove communal barriers and help build a united and patriotic Malayan people.⁶⁵

Later, in replying to the debate, the Tunku had said:

He [referring to Tan Siew Sin son of Tan Cheng Lock and a key leader of the MCA] pointed out that as a race the Malays

⁶² *Minutes of Central Working Committee Meeting of the Malayan Chinese Association*, 4 May 1957. The White Paper issued by the Government, *Constitutional Proposals for the Federation of Malaya*, Cmnd. 210 did not include the commitment. See p. 19.

⁶³ Tun Abdul Razak at the time was the Chairman of the Alliance Political Ad Hoc Committee which was mainly responsible for finalizing the Constitution.

⁶⁴ *Federation of Malaya, Legislative Council Debates*, 10 July 1957.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

are well behind the others, and the object underlying the provisions is to ensure that they don't lose the little they have. This is a correct statement. He further stated that an economically depressed Malay community in a prosperous Malaya would not mean a peaceful Malaya—this is very correct too.⁶⁶

S. Chelvasingham-MacIntyre, an associate member of UMNO who had defeated Dato Onn bin Jaafar in the Batu Pahat constituency in the 1955 Federal Legislative Council elections, clearly indicated what was in the minds of the leaders of the various communities in the Alliance with regard to the question of the special position of the Malays:

The special rights accorded the Malays in the draft constitution is [*sic*] calculated to remove this inequality of opportunity. It is, therefore, manifestly clear that in the long run these provisions would operate not to separate the people into classes but to hasten the process of national unity. *Once national unity is achieved, the special rights will die a natural death.*⁶⁷

It is obvious that the basis on which the Malays were given a special position was that they had lagged behind the other communities in the past and unless this was rectified it would be difficult to set up a united new nation on a firm foundation. This disability had to be removed to allow the Malays a fuller participation in the social, economic and political life of the country. Thus the special position in its very nature was only a transitional arrangement and it was for this reason alone that it was decided that "the Yang di-Pertuan Agong should review the provisions of this article from time to time."

The Spirit of the Constitution and its Working

In all, the Constitution of independent Malaya, as conceived by its framers, the Constitutional Commission and the Alliance leadership, was geared to the creation of a united new nation

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11 July 1957.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

in Malaya. It accorded an equal political status to all the people of the country, irrespective of their racial origin; it entrenched the principle of one man one vote.⁶⁸ The special position of the Malays was incorporated only as an interim arrangement; Article 153 providing for the special position of the Malays was included in Part XII, "General and Miscellaneous," of the Constitution. It is significant that the Proclamation of Independence made on 31 August 1957⁶⁹ made no reference to the special position of the Malays when it made a specific mention of the rights and prerogatives of Their Highnesses the Rulers. The Proclamation, reflecting the very essence of the constitution, said

In the name of GOD, the Compassionate, the merciful. Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe and may the blessings and peace of God be upon his messengers.

And whereas the time has now arrived when the people of the Persekutuan Tanah Melayu will assume the status of a free independent and sovereign nation among the nations of the world . . . ;

And whereas a constitution for the Government of Persekutuan Tanah Melayu has been established as the supreme law thereof;

⁶⁸ It would be useful here to look at the position in Fiji where the situation was very similar to the one in Malaya at the time of constitution-making. In Fiji, the constitution does not provide for equal political status for the various communities; it has entrenched the political paramountcy of the Fijians, the indigenous people. In the House of Representatives, the lower house of the Parliament, the Constitution has reserved seats for the different communities in the following manner: Fijians (42.4 per cent of population) 22, Indians (50.6 per cent) 22, and General (including in the main Europeans and part-Europeans closely allied with the Fijians) 8. The upper house, the Senate, consists of the following nominees: 8 of the Great Council of (Fijian) Chiefs; 7 of the Prime Minister; 6 of the Leader of the Opposition; and 1 of the Council of Rotuma. For details see my "Communalism and Constitution-Making in Fiji," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 45, No. 1, Spring 1972, pp. 26-29.

⁶⁹ This proclamation was read by Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister, at the Merdeka celebrations on 31 August 1957, at which constitutional documents signifying the independence of Malaya were formally handed over.

- (iv) a common nationality for the whole of the Federation;
- (v) the safeguarding of the special position of the Malays and the legitimate interests of other communities.³⁷

Thus, significantly, the only directives that the Constitutional Commission was given with regard to the constitution of independent Malaya were that it must establish a strong central government, safeguard the position and prestige of Their Highnesses, provide for a constitutional head of state chosen from among Their Highnesses the Rulers, a common nationality, and safeguard the special position of the Malays and the legitimate interests of the other communities.

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³⁷ *Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission, 1957*, p. 2.

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Citizenship

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support from the race which it represents, and we are further satisfied that this agreement is a better way of doing justice between the races than any other that has been suggested or has occurred to us.”³⁸

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- (iii) those born in the Federation before *Merdeka* Day and resident there on *Merdeka* Day;
- (iv) those resident in the Federation on *Merdeka* Day but not born there.³⁹

There was no problem with regard to the first category. The Commission recommended that those who possessed rights of citizenship before *Merdeka* Day should continue to have them and those who were already entitled to citizenship by registration under the Federation of Malaya Agreement should retain the entitlement. With regard to the second category the Commission recommended the acceptance of the principle of *jus soli*, i.e. citizenship should be obtainable by the operation of law to all those born in the Federation on or after *Merdeka* Day. The Commission, however, was unwilling to recommend the principle of *jus soli* with retrospective effect as demanded by certain sections of the non-Malay communities. It said:

We are not satisfied that it is entirely possible or desirable to provide that all those who were born in Malaya, whatever be the date of their birth, wherever they may be now, and whatever be their present nationality, should be retrospectively made citizens of the Federation by operation of law.⁴⁰

With regard to such among them who were now resident in the Federation, i.e., the third category of persons, the Commission recommended that citizenship should be obtainable to them “without undue difficulty” provided they intended to reside in the Federation permanently and were prepared to take

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

an oath of allegiance and declared that they would not exercise any right or privilege which they might possess under the nationality laws of any foreign country. The only other conditions that such persons must fulfill were that they be over 18 years of age and of good character, that they should have resided in the Federation for five out of the preceding seven years, and that they should have an elementary knowledge of the Malay language.⁴¹ With regard to the controversial last category relating to those resident in the Federation on *Merdeka* Day but not born there the Commission recommended that

*citizenship should be open as of right but on somewhat different terms . . . Those to whom this recommendation applies are very numerous, and, in order that a sense of common nationality should develop, we think that it is important that those who have shown their loyalty to the Federation and have made it their permanent home, should participate in the rights and duties of citizenship.*⁴²

It further asserted that the only differences between conditions applicable to them and those applicable to the third category should be:

- (i) the applicant must have resided in the Federation for eight out of the preceding twelve years, and
- (ii) that the language test should be waived only if the applicant was over 45 years of age.

According to the recommendations of the Commission persons could further obtain citizenship by naturalization. For this they had to comply with the following conditions: that the

⁴¹ With regard to residence the Commission recommended that an unduly narrow interpretation should not be put to the term and that periods of temporary absence from the Federation should be included in the applicant's period of residence. In order to avoid delay it suggested that an applicant should be deemed to be of good character if he had not within the previous three years been in prison serving a sentence of imprisonment of more than one year. It further recommended that the language test should be waived in favour of all those who made their application within one year of *Merdeka* Day. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 15. Emphasis added.

person had attained the age of 21; that he was of good character; that he had resided in the Federation for ten out of the preceding twelve years; that he intended to reside there permanently; that he had "an adequate knowledge" of the Malay language; and that he was willing to take an oath of allegiance and declare that he would not exercise any right or privilege that he might possess under the nationality laws of any foreign country.

Despite substantial opposition to them amongst Malays not associated with the United Malays National Organization, all these recommendations of the Constitutional Commission were left unchanged by the Working Party and were incorporated into the final constitution adopted at the London talks in May 1957. Dato Onn bin Jaafar, the President of *Parti Negara*, alleged that the Commission's proposals had favored the non-Malays and if the Malays were to avoid being swamped in the future these had to be changed. He suggested three categories of non-Malays who could obtain citizenship: persons who already were subjects of any Malay Ruler; persons who already had become citizens of the Federation of Malaya; and those who were born in the Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca, provided they were willing to relinquish entirely all allegiance to the Queen. With regard to others he said: it "should be left for us [the Malays] to decide whether they can become Malayan citizens or not." And he added: "It should not be their right to be citizens." This, he believed, was necessary to maintain the Malay character of the country.⁴³

The crucial point to note here is that the provisions with regard to citizenship recommended by the Constitutional Commission and accepted both by the Working Party and the Malayan delegation to London talks of May 1957 were not based on the notion that Malaya was a Malay country and that it belonged only to the Malays. They were clearly geared to the aim of creating a multi-racial nation in Malaya and were a continuation or logical extension of the process inaugurated in 1948 that was based on the policy stated in the

⁴³ Federation of Malaya, Department of Information, *Daily Press Summary of Vernacular Papers*, 4 April 1957. Quoted in K.J. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

preamble to the Federation Agreement of 1948 "that there should be a common form of citizenship in the said Federation to be extended to all those who regard the said Federation or any part of it as their real home and the object of their loyalty."⁴⁴ The idea behind the citizenship provisions was certainly not what it was later to be alleged to be by Dr. Ismail, Dr Mahathir and other Malay leaders after the 1969 communal riots.

Language

The commission expressed its view clearly with regard to the question of the language of the new nation when it said that "we think that it is right that for all ordinary purposes Malay should in due course become the sole *official* language. Our recommendations are not intended to put obstacles in the way of that transition, but rather to regulate the transition so that it may take place in a manner fair to all communities."⁴⁵ It recognized the special claim of the Malay language and recommended that it should be the official language. But at the same time it suggested that for a period of at least ten years English should continue to be used as an official language. The Commission maintained that there were many citizens of the Federation who had no opportunity in the past to learn to speak Malay fluently and it would not be fair to them to make Malay the sole official language of the Federation "in the immediate future." It added: "After ten years it should be left to Parliament to decide when a change should be made and we have framed our recommendations so as to enable Parliament to proceed by stages if it thinks fit to do so. It may be found desirable first to discontinue the use of English for some purposes and then to discontinue its use for other purposes at some later date."⁴⁶ Concerning the languages of the non-Malay communities, the Commission recommended that none of them should be accorded the status of official language as this had not been found necessary in the past and that it would not lead to any great inconvenience. However,

⁴⁴ *The Federation of Malaya Agreement, 1948*, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission, 1957*, p. 74. Emphasis added.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

it was desirable that, as in the past, notices, announcements and other official documents should be published in Chinese and Tamil and that this practice should continue for "some considerable time."

With regard to the sensitive issue of multi-lingualism in the legislatures the Commission asserted that they had been impressed by the representations made to them that the existing law might be an obstacle in the way of election to the legislatures of persons whom the voters might want to elect. Consequently, it made recommendations for two changes:

- (i) that there should be no language qualification for candidates wishing to contest elections (".....we have drafted Article 41 in such a way as to abolish this qualification and prevent its reimposition."); and
- (ii) that for ten years there should be a limited right to speak in a legislature in a Chinese or Indian language.

The latter, however, was restricted to such persons who could not speak fluently in either Malay or English.

The final Constitution, by and large, followed the recommendations of the Constitutional Commission with regard to the designation of Malay as the official language and the continued use of English as an official language for a period of ten years after *Merdeka* Day and thereafter until the Parliament provided otherwise.⁴⁷ In fact, here the Constitution went beyond the recommendations of the Commission and gave a specific guarantee:

- (i) that no person should be prohibited or prevented from using (other than official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other language.
- (ii) that the establishment of Malay as the national language should not prejudice the right of the Federal Government or of any State Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community.⁴⁸

Further, the Constitution accepted the recommendation of the Constitutional Commission and did not prescribe any language

⁴⁷ Federation of Malaya, *Malayan Constitutional Documents*, Vol. 1, 1962, Article 152.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Article 152 (1).

qualifications for candidates wishing to contest elections. However, the Working Party was unwilling to provide for multi-lingualism and rejected the recommendation of the Constitutional Commission providing for limited right to speak in a legislature in a Chinese or Indian language for a period of ten years from *Merdeka* Day.

Religion

The Constitutional Commission, as a majority view, recommended that Islam should not be designated as the official religion of the Federation. Its argument was that there was universal agreement, including among those who sought to make Islam as the official religion, that if such a provision was made in the Constitution it must be made clear that it would not in any way affect the civil rights of non-Muslims. The Alliance, which had come to an agreement with regard to the issue, had stated in its memorandum to the Commission: "... the religion of Malaysia shall be Islam. The observance of this principle shall not impose any disability on non-Muslim nationals professing and practicing their religions and *shall not imply that the state is not a secular State.*"⁴⁹ The Commission, further, underlined the fact that the Counsel for the Rulers had stated to them: "It is Their Highnesses' considered view that it would not be desirable to insert some declaration such as has been suggested that the Muslim Faith or Islamic Faith be the established religion of the Federation."⁵⁰

However, this recommendation of the Constitutional Commission was rejected and, following the Alliance Memorandum to the Commission, Islam was designated as the official religion of the Federation. But at the same time the Constitution said that "other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation."⁵¹ Further,

⁴⁹ Quoted in *Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission, 1957*, p. 73. Emphasis added.

⁵⁰ The Rulers opposed this for the reason that it would have constituted an encroachment on the right of the States to have complete authority over matters affecting the Muslim religion.

⁵¹ Federation of Malaya, *Malayan Constitutional Documents*, Vol. 1, 1962, Article 3.

with a view to reassure non-Muslims, a whole article, under the title Freedom of Religion, was included in Part II of the Constitution relating to Fundamental Liberties. Here it was stated that no person should be compelled to pay any tax the proceeds of which were specifically allocated in whole or in part for the purposes of a religion other than his own.⁵² It also gave every religious group the right to manage its own religious affairs, to establish and maintain religious or charitable institutions, and to acquire and own property.⁵³ With regard to Muslims the Constitution prescribed that State law would be within its rights if it sought to control or restrict the propagation of any other religious doctrine or belief among them.⁵⁴

Special Position of the Malays

With regard to the special position of the Malays the Constitutional Commission found itself in an awkward position. On the one side, it had been asked in its terms of reference that it must safeguard the special position of the Malays and the legitimate interests of the other communities, on the other it was required to provide for a common nationality for the whole of the Federation and a constitution that guaranteed a democratic form of government. In the circumstances, the basis on which it made up its mind was well expressed in its report:

In considering these requirements it seemed to us that a common nationality was the basis upon which a unified Malayan nation was to be created and that under a democratic form of Government it was inherent that all the citizens of Malaya, irrespective of race, creed or culture, should enjoy certain fundamental rights including equality before the law. We found it difficult, therefore, to reconcile the terms of reference if the protection of the special position of the Malays signified the granting of special privileges, permanently, to

⁵² *Ibid.*, Article 11 (2).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Article 11 (3).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 11 (4).

one community only and not to the others. The difficulty of giving one community a permanent advantage over the others was realized by the Alliance Party, representatives of which, led by the Chief Minister, submitted that "*in an independent Malaya all nationals should be accorded equal rights, privileges and opportunities and there must not be discrimination on grounds of race and creed*" The same view was expressed by their Highnesses in their memorandum, in which they said that they "look forward to a time not too remote when it will become possible to eliminate communalism as a force in the political and economic life of the country."⁵⁵

The Commission listed the four areas with regard to which the Malays had enjoyed a special position in the past, based on the original treaties between their Rulers and the British and reaffirmed from time to time. These were:

1. Reservations of land and the system of reserving land for the Malays in the States.
2. Quotas for admission to the public services.
3. Quotas in respect of the issuing of permits or licenses for the operation of certain businesses,
4. Preferential treatment in the grant of certain classes of scholarships, bursaries and other forms of aid for educational purposes.

The Commission emphasized that they had found little opposition to the continuation of the arrangement, but there was strong hostility among certain people to any increase in the existing preferences and to their being continued for "any prolonged period." The Commission asserted:

We are of the opinion that in present circumstances it is necessary to continue these preferences. *The Malays would be at a serious and unfair disadvantage compared with other communities if they were suddenly withdrawn.* But, with the integration of the various communities into a common nationality which we trust will gradually come about, the need for

⁵⁵ *Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission 1957*, p. 71. Emphasis added. It should be noted that the present Malay leadership has completely rejected that fundamental principle.

these preferences will gradually disappear. Our recommendations are made on the footing that *Malays should be assured that the present position will continue for a substantial period, but that in due course the present preferences should be reduced and should ultimately cease so that there should then be no discrimination between races or communities.*⁵⁶

With regard to land it recommended that, subject to two qualifications, no more land should be designated Malay reservations and that the States should reduce Malay reservations but at a time considered appropriate by them. The two qualifications were: first, that if any land reserved for the Malays ceased to be reserved, an equivalent area could be reserved provided that it was not already occupied by a non-Malay; and second, that if any undeveloped land was opened up, part of it could be reserved for Malays provided an equivalent area was made available to non-Malays.

As for the other aspects of the special position, the Commission recommended that no new quotas or other preferences should be created. With regard to the existing ones it asserted that the Malays "ought to have a substantial period during which the continuance of the existing quotas is made obligatory."⁵⁷ It further suggested that if in any year there were not enough Malay applicants with the necessary qualifications to fill vacancies, the number of appointments should not be reduced and other qualified applicants should be appointed to fill the their quota of vacancies. It also recommended that after fifteen years there should be a review of the whole question. The procedure it suggested for the review was that the Government of the time should prepare and present a report to the Parliament which in turn would decide either to retain or to reduce any quotas or preferences or to discontinue them entirely.

Further, the Commission concurred with the view of the Alliance given in its memorandum: "The Constitution should . . . provide that the Yang di-Pertuan Besar should have the special responsibility of safeguarding the special position of the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72. Emphasis added.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Malays.”⁵⁸ But it added significantly that a majority in the Commission took the view that the Alliance intended that the Yang di-Pertuan Besar should act in this matter as in others as a constitutional head and should accept the advice of his Cabinet.⁵⁹ The Commission emphasized that in their view the intent of the Alliance was that the whole matter should be dealt with by the Government of the day, that is by the representatives of the people in Parliament.

It is important to note here that the sole basis on which the Constitutional Commission had accorded the Malays a special position was the fact that they had lagged behind the non-Malays in certain spheres and it was necessary to enable them to catch up. The Commission made no suggestion anywhere, implied or explicit, that the special position of the Malays was due to them as the *bumiputra*, the sons of the soil. The obvious intent was that it was only to be a transitional arrangement.

This was, however, one aspect of the draft constitution recommended by the Constitutional Commission where drastic changes were made by the Working Party. With regard to the reservation of quotas for admission to the public services, issuing of permits or licenses to operate certain businesses, and the grant of scholarships, bursaries and other forms of aid for educational purposes, the recommendation of the Constitutional Commission that the matter be left in the hands of the government of the day was rejected. The final Constitution reflected the minority view of Justice Abdul Hamid of Pakistan. It said:

. . . the Yang di-Pertuan Agong [Head of State] shall exercise his functions under this Constitution and federal law in such manner as may be necessary to safeguard the special position of the Malays and to ensure the reservation for Malays of such proportion as he may deem reasonable of positions in the public service (other than the public service of a State) and of scholarships, exhibitions and other similar educational

⁵⁸ Quoted in *Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission, 1957*, p. 73

⁵⁹ Justice Abdul Hamid of Pakistan dissented with the majority view and maintained that the words “special responsibility” in the Alliance memorandum implied that in this matter the Yang di-Pertuan Besar should act at his discretion and not on advice of his cabinet.

or training privileges or special facilities given or accorded by the Federal Government and, when any permit or license for the operation of any trade or business is required by federal law, then, subject to the provisions of that law and this Article, of such permits and licenses.⁶⁰

Further, the Constitution said nothing with regard to the question of unfilled quotas, a matter on which the Constitutional Commission had made an explicit recommendation. This matter, however, was discussed by the Alliance Ad Hoc Political Committee in May 1957, where Dr Ismail, then Minister of Internal Affairs, had given the assurance that the current practice of allocating unfilled quotas for posts and scholarships to non-Malays would be continued.⁶¹

The Commission's crucial recommendation that the entire matter of the special position of the Malays be reviewed after fifteen years was not accepted. The Malay fear was that, if, as recommended by the Commission, the matter was left in the hands of the Parliament to decide at the end of fifteen years there was no guarantee that the Parliament at the time, which as non-Malays were to have equal voting rights might have a majority of non-Malays members, would not decide to revoke the special position of the Malays without the consent of the Malays. The issue had created considerable controversy in the country. The non-Malay view was that fifteen years was a reasonable time limit. It was in these circumstances that a compromise solution was found by the Alliance. It was presented to a meeting of the Central Working Committee of the Malayan Chinese Association on 4 May 1957:

That the White Paper which the Government proposes to issue will include a note that it will be in the interests of all concerned that the Yang di-Pertuan Agong should review the provisions of this article (relating to the Special Position of the Malays, Article 157 in Draft Constitution

⁶⁰ "Constitution of the Federation of Malaya," *Malayan Constitutional Documents*, Vol. 1, 1962, Article 153 (2).

⁶¹ *Minutes of Central Working Committee meeting of the Malayan Chinese Association*, 4 May 1957.

recommended by the Constitutional Commission) from time to time.⁶²

It was widely maintained in Malaysia that when the MCA and the MIC insisted on a fifteen year limit on Malay special position, they were told by UMNO leaders (Tun Abdul Razak's name is especially mentioned)⁶³ that a fifteen year limit was not necessary, because for all they knew the Malays might be able to catch up with the non-Malays within the next few years and these provisions then would become unnecessary. And, therefore, the best course was to leave it to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong who would review the situation from time to time and determine if they were still necessary. It is important to note that it is on this basis alone that the provisions relating to the special position of the Malays were accepted by the MCA and the MIC.

It is significant that Tunku Abdul Rahman, then Prime Minister and the foremost leader of the Malays, in his speech introducing the draft constitution in the Federal Legislative Council in July 1957 did not even once refer to the Malays as the *bumiputra*, the sons of the soil, and as such entitled to a special position.⁶⁴ He had asserted:

When discussing the special position of the Malays and the legitimate interests of other communities, we must never forget that our main object is to unite our people. We should do all we can to remove communal barriers and help build a united and patriotic Malayan people.⁶⁵

Later, in replying to the debate, the Tunku had said:

He [referring to Tan Siew Sin son of Tan Cheng Lock and a key leader of the MCA] pointed out that as a race the Malays

⁶² *Minutes of Central Working Committee Meeting of the Malayan Chinese Association*, 4 May 1957. The White Paper issued by the Government, *Constitutional Proposals for the Federation of Malaya*, Cmnd. 210 did not include the commitment. See p. 19.

⁶³ Tun Abdul Razak at the time was the Chairman of the Alliance Political Ad Hoc Committee which was mainly responsible for finalizing the Constitution.

⁶⁴ *Federation of Malaya, Legislative Council Debates*, 10 July 1957.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

are well behind the others, and the object underlying the provisions is to ensure that they don't lose the little they have. This is a correct statement. He further stated that an economically depressed Malay community in a prosperous Malaya would not mean a peaceful Malaya—this is very correct too.⁶⁶

S. Chelvasingham-MacIntyre, an associate member of UMNO who had defeated Dato Onn bin Jaafar in the Batu Pahat constituency in the 1955 Federal Legislative Council elections, clearly indicated what was in the minds of the leaders of the various communities in the Alliance with regard to the question of the special position of the Malays:

The special rights accorded the Malays in the draft constitution is [*sic*] calculated to remove this inequality of opportunity. It is, therefore, manifestly clear that in the long run these provisions would operate not to separate the people into classes but to hasten the process of national unity. *Once national unity is achieved, the special rights will die a natural death.*⁶⁷

It is obvious that the basis on which the Malays were given a special position was that they had lagged behind the other communities in the past and unless this was rectified it would be difficult to set up a united new nation on a firm foundation. This disability had to be removed to allow the Malays a fuller participation in the social, economic and political life of the country. Thus the special position in its very nature was only a transitional arrangement and it was for this reason alone that it was decided that "the Yang di-Pertuan Agong should review the provisions of this article from time to time."

The Spirit of the Constitution and its Working

In all, the Constitution of independent Malaya, as conceived by its framers, the Constitutional Commission and the Alliance leadership, was geared to the creation of a united new nation

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11 July 1957.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

in Malaya. It accorded an equal political status to all the people of the country, irrespective of their racial origin; it entrenched the principle of one man one vote.⁶⁸ The special position of the Malays was incorporated only as an interim arrangement; Article 153 providing for the special position of the Malays was included in Part XII, "General and Miscellaneous," of the Constitution. It is significant that the Proclamation of Independence made on 31 August 1957⁶⁹ made no reference to the special position of the Malays when it made a specific mention of the rights and prerogatives of Their Highnesses the Rulers. The Proclamation, reflecting the very essence of the constitution, said

In the name of GOD, the Compassionate, the merciful. Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe and may the blessings and peace of God be upon his messengers.

And whereas the time has now arrived when the people of the Persekutuan Tanah Melayu will assume the status of a free independent and sovereign nation among the nations of the world . . . ;

And whereas a constitution for the Government of Persekutuan Tanah Melayu has been established as the supreme law thereof;

⁶⁸ It would be useful here to look at the position in Fiji where the situation was very similar to the one in Malaya at the time of constitution-making. In Fiji, the constitution does not provide for equal political status for the various communities; it has entrenched the political paramountcy of the Fijians, the indigenous people. In the House of Representatives, the lower house of the Parliament, the Constitution has reserved seats for the different communities in the following manner: Fijians (42.4 per cent of population) 22, Indians (50.6 per cent) 22, and General (including in the main Europeans and part-Europeans closely allied with the Fijians) 8. The upper house, the Senate, consists of the following nominees: 8 of the Great Council of (Fijian) Chiefs; 7 of the Prime Minister; 6 of the Leader of the Opposition; and 1 of the Council of Rotuma. For details see my "Communalism and Constitution-Making in Fiji," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 45, No. 1, Spring 1972, pp. 26-29.

⁶⁹ This proclamation was read by Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister, at the Merdeka celebrations on 31 August 1957, at which constitutional documents signifying the independence of Malaya were formally handed over.

in organizing itself to oppose the Malayan Union plan; it set up two departments—Malayan Union Opposition Department and Propaganda Department. In place of the Malayan Union it proposed the formation of a federation of the nine Malay States with provision for the inclusion of the two Settlements of Penang and Malacca on condition that their entry did not effect the rights and identity of the Malays and their States.¹¹

Confronted with the unprecedented united opposition of the Malay community to the Malayan Union, the British Government did not take long to decide to revoke the Union Plan in favour of a federation. The Federation of Malaya was inaugurated on 1 February 1948 and with this the UMNO had achieved the main objective for which it had been founded. And there followed a period of lack of activity in the UMNO; a clear idea of the direction in which the activities of the organization were to be directed was yet to crystallize. The UMNO was at the crossroads.

Although there is no mention of it on the agenda of the Congress (to be held at Johore Bahru soon), they will, explicitly or by implication, decide whether UMNO is to emerge as a real political force or whether it has lost its power and coherence and it is to fall into virtual eclipse.

Having substantially achieved the purpose for which it was originally formed—rejection of the Malayan Union Plan and establishment of a Constitution in accord with the Malay conception of their basic rights and aspirations—UMNO must now seek a new impetus, direct its energies into new channels and produce a political programme which allies Malay progress to that of the whole country.¹²

Fully conscious of this Dato Onn himself suggested at a meeting of the UMNO General Assembly:

Though the task of fighting the Malayan Union is nearly complete the Malays must be aware of the fact that it is only

¹¹ Ishak bin Tadin, "Dato Onn, 1946-1951", *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹² *The Straits Times*, 2 September 1947. Article by a Special Correspondent.

the beginning of our struggle. There are many other things that the Malays must do. . . The UMNO has been formed not only for the purpose of opposing the Malayan Union, but also to fight against the Malays themselves. We have to find ways and means of how we shall change the habits and way of life of the Malays in order to enable them to realize their duties and responsibilities.¹³

At this time UMNO was only a central organization with a variety of Malay associations as its affiliates. UMNO Charter gave little power to the central organization to assert control over the affiliates and, therefore, these tended to operate independently. Dato Onn believed that only a threat to all the member associations and as dangerous to the Malays as the Malayan Union proposals had been could hold them all together within the UMNO.¹⁴ He, therefore, proposed a drastic reorganization of UMNO; he suggested that the organization should introduce direct individual membership so as to enable the largest number of Malays to join it. There was substantial opposition within the organization to this proposal but Dato Onn was able to push it through because of the special position that he enjoyed within the UMNO and the Malay community in general.

This, however, was only the starting point of Dato Onn's reorganization program. Soon he was to embark upon a course attempting to alter the very character and aims of the UMNO. In June 1948, the communist "Emergency" began which intensified the racial contradictions in the country. A vast majority of the communists and their supporters were Chinese. The Malays, as a result, saw the movement as a Chinese attempt to take over their country and under the leadership of the UMNO they chose to rally round the Government. Under the circumstances, a further drifting apart of the two main communities in the country, the Malays and the Chinese, was inevitable and the possibility of serious racial friction and strife increased. This

¹³ *Minutes of the General Assembly of UMNO*, 2 September 1947, quoted in Ishak bin Tadin, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

¹⁴ Ishak bin Tadin, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

had its impact on Dato Onn's thinking who, during the inter-regnum between the Japanese surrender and the coming of the British Military Administration, had seen some of the worst communal trouble in the country in Batu Pahat, Johore, where he was then the District Officer. He could clearly see the dangerous potential of the situation and felt impelled to make efforts to bring the various communities in the country together.

Conscious of the feelings and fears of the rank and file of the UMNO, Dato Onn initiated his effort to bring together the various communities first outside the framework of UMNO. On 31 December 1948, Dato Onn invited twenty-one leaders of various communities to his home in Johore Bahru for informal talks. At this meeting it was decided to set up a Communities Liaison Committee "to maintain a happy understanding between the communities and to suggest ways and means of strengthening it through the testing days of the present and the future".¹⁵ The Committee was formed on 10 January 1949 and had among its members Dato Onn, Dato Panglima Bukit Gantang (Member, Central Executive Committee of UMNO and *Mentri Besar* of Perak), Dato Zainal Abidin bin Abas (Secretary-General of UMNO) and Tan Cheng Lock (President of Malayan Chinese Association). The Malay press was generally suspicious of Dato Onn's efforts.¹⁶ Reflecting the Malay view, it questioned the usefulness of the talks and expressed the fear that Dato Onn might surrender some of the rights and privileges that the Malay community had recently secured through its fight against the Malayan Union plan. Even some leaders of the UMNO, those who were not on the Central Executive Committee, had serious misgivings.

Soon, the Chinese established a united organization of their own community; on 27 February 1949, the Malayan Chinese Association was inaugurated in Kuala Lumpur. This further disturbed Dato Onn who believed that the new party would serve the interests of the Chinese and create rivalry with the Malays.¹⁷ Dato Onn was seriously concerned that the growth

¹⁵ Press Statement by the Communities Liaison Committee, March 1949.

¹⁶ Ishak bin Tadin, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹⁷ *The Straits Times*, 24 February 1950.

of such communal organizations would keep the various communities apart and stand in the way of their integration into one nation.

It was in the context of these developments that Dato Onn began to view himself more and more as a national leader given the task of creating a new multi-racial nation rather than the leader of the Malays alone. In line with his new thinking he attempted to move the UMNO into a non-communal direction and convert it into a national organization representing all communities in the country. His first aim was to associate non-Malays with the UMNO. At the 11th General Assembly of UMNO, held on 28 May 1949 at Arau (Perlis), Dato Onn pleaded:

It is absolutely important for Malays to obtain closer relations with other people in this country. It is time for us to take the view wider than the *Kampong* view. Let it not be said that Malays are narrowminded and suspicious.¹⁸

After a very heated debate the Assembly approved by a majority of 14 to 8 a new constitution to make the organization more political and to allow non-Malays to join it as associate members.¹⁹

This was only the beginning. In three months, Dato Onn was seeking far more drastic changes. In a Presidential speech at the 12th General Assembly of UMNO at Butterworth (Penang) on 27 August 1949, he suggested that the Malays must accept as nationals all non-Malays who were prepared to give their all to Malaya. He asserted that a single nationality was essential if "we are to achieve self-government and independence in Malaya." He even went to the extent of attacking the feudal system and the Sultans that were seen by the Malays as the mainstay of their separate identity and special status. He declared: "We must find ways and means to end feudal rule and replace it with a constitutional form of government."²⁰ It was of the greatest significance. *The Straits Times* asserted in an editorial:

¹⁸ *The Malay Mail*, 30 May 1949.

¹⁹ *The Straits Times*, 30 May 1949.

²⁰ *The Malay Mail*, 28 August 1949.

Malaya crossed a watershed of its social and political history in the little town of Butterworth . . . when Dato Onn made his speech to the General Assembly of the UMNO calling for a Malayan nationality instead of federal citizenship, acceptance by the Malay race of Malayan nationals of other races. . . Only three years ago Dato Onn headed the UMNO delegation in the Anglo-Malay Committee which drafted the Constitution of the Federation. At that time the idea of a Malayan nationality had not even entered the heads of the UMNO delegates. They were extremely reluctant to accept even the proposal for a new Federal Citizenship open to non-Malays, hedged about though it was with all kinds of restrictions.²¹

Soon, Dato Onn attempted to force the controversial citizenship recommendations of the Communities Liaison Committee upon the UMNO. There was very widespread and strong opposition to the proposals among the Malays who considered it as an "attempt to obtain loyalty by granting citizenship, whereas citizenship should be granted only in return for loyalty."²² However, Dato Onn had made up his mind. Under pressure from him, on 9 May 1950, the Executive Committee of the UMNO, after a long and heated debate, agreed to accept the proposals in principle.²³

When these proposals came before an emergency meeting of the General Assembly of the UMNO held at Kuala Lumpur in June 1950, there was open hostility to them and some members of the Assembly even went to the extent of branding Dato Onn a "traitor to the Malays and the country."²⁴ The opposition was led by Sardon bin Haji Jubir, President of the Singapore Malay Union (and since 1957 a member of the Malaysian Cabinet), who had the support of the Kelantan, Perlis, Selangor and Negri Sembilan Divisions of the UMNO. Sardon bin Jubir, in condemning the proposals, said: "If they are adopted, the Malay race will fade into obscurity as it has done in Singapore."²⁵ Undaunted by the vehement hostility to the proposals,

²¹ *The Straits Times*, 30 August 1940.

²² *The Straits Times*, 17 May 1950.

²³ *The Straits Times*, 10 May 1950.

²⁴ *The Straits Times*, 11 and 12 June 1950.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Dato Onn, in an attempt to force the issue, resigned as President of UMNO and at the same time announced the resignation of the entire executive committee. The UMNO General Assembly was not prepared for this; Dato Onn was still too powerful and there was no other leader within the UMNO with his widespread appeal and support who could replace him. The opposition immediately reversed its position. Kedah branch flew the UMNO flag at half mast expressing "the sense of loss." On 27 July, 4,000 Malays, men, women and children, from all parts of the country, went in a mile-long procession to Dato Onn's residence in Johore Bahru in a bid to persuade Dato Onn to return to the UMNO. The General Assembly of the UMNO at its annual meeting at Kuala Kangsar re-elected Dato Onn as President by 66 votes to 3 and at the same time it accepted the controversial citizenship proposals.²⁶

Towards the end of 1950, Dato Onn took the final plunge. On 20 November 1950, he told a correspondent of *The Straits Times* that he believed that the UMNO had progressed sufficiently to reach the stage where it had to open its doors to non-Malays and allow them full membership. UMNO had to be turned into a national political organization. "Merely opening the door to associate members is not enough. This must be a national body and non-Malay members should be offered all the rights and privileges of the organization."²⁷ To reflect the changed character of the UMNO he suggested that it be renamed the United *Malayan* National Organization. At the same time he mentioned that he had prepared a detailed programme for a new political party, the Independence of Malaya Party, and added that if the UMNO accepted his proposals he would remain with it and implement his program for the new party through it.

On 5 June 1951, Dato Onn announced that Malaya could attain independence in seven years with the establishment of Independence of Malaya Party.²⁸ Further, he warned that he would leave the UMNO and form the IMP if UMNO at its General Assembly meeting rejected his suggestion to convert itself into United Malayan National Organization. Outlining

²⁶ *The Straits Times*, 28 August 1950.

²⁷ *The Straits Times*, 21 November 1950.

²⁸ *The Straits Times*, 6 June 1951.

some of the principles for which the new party would work, he said that it would attempt to secure the merger of Singapore into the Federation. More, the party would stand for the elimination of the nine States and Settlements. "We should not even use the term 'State' to denote Johore, or Selangor, or Perak. The word should be 'territory'." These were extremely undesirable and dangerous propositions to most Malays. Within days there was a spate of letters in *The Straits Times*, all by Malays, who gave vent to their disappointment and anger with Dato Onn. Ahmad bin Haji A. Rahim, President of the Johore Peninsular Malay Union, warned:

. . . to force the Malays to share equal rights with foreigners by giving further concessions to them in this country will lead to incidents similar to those in Palestine or India, which neither Malays nor foreigners desire.²⁹

A "Malay" wrote:

Now it seems the Dato [Onn] is losing his head. He is becoming over-zealous. He is beginning to forget the people who supported him and placed him where he is now. . .

The Malays like the civilized peoples do want independence, at least self-government within the British Commonwealth of Nations, but it is feared that seven years as the target date to achieve that goal is too ambitious. Dato Onn is trying to ask the Malays to run before they can walk.³⁰

A "Malay Realist" wrote from Penang:

In comparison with the Chinese and Indians the Malays are merely babies just beginning to crawl. Prizes of sweets would still be sufficient to make them believe that Destruction was Protection. . .

I wish the Dato would stay his hand for another decade and steer the Malays towards economic progress—knowing well that the drive to live, if it is steered by non-Malays, will drive

²⁹ *The Straits Times*, 19 June 1951.

³⁰ *The Straits Times*, 23 June 1951

the Malays themselves to only one course, poverty. Is the IMP the banding together of lambs, lions and tigers to drive out the caretakers? Who then shall replace these powerful caretakers?³¹

“Kampong Malay” wrote from Kedah:

Dato Onn has evidently embarked upon a certain folly to throw the Malays into confusion and utter helplessness in the face of fierce competition for power. . . . They will be reduced to the status of Red Indians striving to live in the wastelands of America.³²

The common fear of the Malays was that Dato Onn by speeding up the independence of the country was exposing the Malays to the enterprise and economic power of the Chinese and Indians, when they were unprepared for it. To them the inevitable result would be a non-Malay take over of their country.³³

Within the UMNO too there was a widespread feeling of disenchantment with the party's founder, Dato Onn. He had gone too far and was threatening the very status and identity of the Malays the protection of which had been the main objective for which UMNO had been founded. In the earlier days whenever Dato Onn threatened to leave the UMNO there was a clamour within the organization to give in to his demands so as to maintain his leadership. But this was not to be so now; he had gone too far. A majority of the leadership of the organization and most of the rank and file showed little interest in Dato Onn's grand design.

However, Dato Onn's plan to form a new multi-racial political organization given to secure independence for Malaya and bring together the various communal groups was widely welcomed by the leadership of the Chinese and Indian communities and the trade unions. Encouraged by the response of

³¹ *The Straits Times*, 30 June 1951.

³² *The Straits Times*, 7 July 1951.

³³ Interviews with Hussein Onn (son of Dato Onn) and Dato Zainal Abidin bin Abas (first Secretary-General of UMNO), Kuala Lumpur, August-September 1963.

the non-Malays Dato Onn took the plunge and on 26 August 1951 decided to present his resignation even before the UMNO General Assembly had discussed his proposals. This time the organization did not request him to continue to lead it; it promptly elected Tunku Abdul Rahman, a little-known deputy Public Prosecutor in Kuala Lumpur, as its new President by 57 votes to 11.³⁴

On 16 September 1951, the Independence of Malaya Party was inaugurated in Kuala Lumpur.³⁵ It seems that at the time of leaving the UMNO Dato Onn had not thought that he was severing all relations with the organization that he had founded; he had emotional ties with the organization.³⁶ What he had in mind was that the UMNO was not yet ready to accept his ideas and therefore he had to leave it and establish the new party based on his ideas with the help of non-communal-minded Chinese, Indians and others and the non-communal elements within the UMNO. The rest in the UMNO, as he saw it, would be left under a moderate and responsible leader who would prepare them for eventual non-communal politics and co-operation with the IMP.

However, the new President of the UMNO, Tunku Abdul Rahman, had different ideas and would have nothing of it. On 17 September 1951, a day after the formation of the IMP, he declared that any member of the UMNO who joined the IMP, would be expelled from the UMNO.³⁷ "We cannot tolerate this ridiculous situation We cannot afford to have a split in our ranks. The policies of the IMP and UMNO are opposed." He further asserted: "It is the policy of the IMP to open membership to all persons who are resident in this country. There was no qualification as to their allegiance, loyalty or birthright. Can you form a nation with such flimsy materials?" He said that the UMNO, on the other hand, would want a proper choice of materials. "It is not fair for the Malays to throw in their lot with others when others refused to be naturalized,

³⁴ *The Straits Times*, 27 August 1951.

³⁵ For a full survey of the Independence of Malaya Party, see my *Politics in a Plural Society*, Oxford University Press, 1971, Chapter II.

³⁶ Interview with Hussein Onn, son of Dato Onn, who at this time was the Secretary-General of the UMNO, Kuala Lumpur, July 1963.

³⁷ *The Straits Times*, 18 September 1951.

refused to study the language, and refused to adopt the customs of the country.”

The UMNO had come a full circle. It had been established in 1946 with the objective to secure the revocation of the Malayan Union which was seen as a grave threat to the position and interests of the Malays. It had come into being and had developed for some time as an exclusively communal organization of the Malays. Moreover, this is how it was viewed by the rank and file of the Malay community and the leaders who had founded it. Most in the Malay community had remained committed to this view of the UMNO throughout unchanged. It was only Dato Onn bin Jaafar and some of his friends who had attempted to move the UMNO into a non-communal direction and then eventually to convert it into a national organization of all the people of Malaya. The rank and file of the organization and most of its leaders at the middle and lower levels had never subscribed to this view but were willing to go along with the activities of Dato Onn so long as they did not constitute a threat to the very fundamental aims of the UMNO. But Dato Onn's suggested conversion of the UMNO into a non-communal national organization was completely unacceptable to them. They allowed Dato Onn to withdraw himself from the UMNO and form the Independence of Malaya Party without any great show of sentiment and promptly elected new leaders who were firmly committed to the idea that the UMNO was a communal organization of the Malays committed exclusively to protect and promote their interests. *The Straits Times* wrote in an editorial:

It is the turning back of UMNO... that is tragic. The unhappy conclusion is that UMNO will return to the purely communal role which, up to a few months ago, it had seemed preferred to abandon.³⁸

Tunku Abdul Rahman, the new President, was to declare a few months later on 30 June 1952 even after the UMNO and the MCA together had successfully contested the Kuala Lumpur Municipal Elections which had laid the foundation of the Alliance: “Malaya is for Malays and it should not be governed

³⁸ *The Straits Times*, 28 August 1951.

by a mixture of races.”³⁹ The Malays must safeguard their rights over this land “which is ours for the benefit of our future generations.” Leaders, such as Dr. Ismail bin Dato Haji Abdul Rahman, Tuan Syed Nasir bin Ismail, and Sardon bin Jubir, who had in the past vehemently opposed Dato Onn’s moves were elected members of the Central Executive Committee of the UMNO. On the very day that Dato Onn took leave of the UMNO, its General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution asserting that the organization should remain essentially a Malay political body, looking after the interests and privileges of the Malays.⁴⁰ The organization continued to accept independence as a goal but its concept of independence differed radically from that of Dato Onn. Its view was that “when independence comes, power should be handed over to the Malays, since it was from the Malays that the British took over the country.”⁴¹

THE MALAYAN CHINESE ASSOCIATION

The salient features about the Chinese in Malaya before the Second World War were the significant divisions among them and their apathy with regard to Malayan politics. Writing a few years before the outbreak of the Second World War, Rupert Emerson had said:

The Chinese form no single community which can be viewed as a social or political entity for other than statistical purposes. Even leaving aside the vital distinction which must

³⁹ *The Straits Times*, 1 July 1952. In fact, Tunku Abdul Rahman had started making these extreme statements immediately after assuming the Presidency of the UMNO in late 1951. The Tunku had gone to such an extreme that Raja Ayoub bin Raja Haji Bok, Chairman of the Kuala Lumpur branch of the UMNO, was forced to warn publicly on 13 September 1951 that the Tunku would be blocking all chances of UMNO’s success in the municipal elections in the city, where a large part of the electorate was non-Malay, if he went on making “Malaya for the Malays” statements. *The Straits Times*, 14 September 1951. The former UMNO Youth leader, Mohammad Soviee, branded the Tunku’s speeches as “narrow racialism” and “explosive”.

⁴⁰ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the UMNO*, 27 August 1951 referred to in Ishak bin Tadin, ‘Dato Onn, 1946-1952,’.

⁴¹ Ishak bin Tadin, *ibid.*, p. 85.

be drawn on economic lines between rich and poor . . . there still remain two other cross classifications of basic importance: the local born as against the immigrant Chinese, and the various stocks of Chinese as against each other. . . . When these facts are taken into account it is obviously impossible to expect that the Chinese community will present a united front in any demand for political advance toward self-government.⁴²

They had all come to Malaya in search of livelihood and this is what preoccupied them primarily. Beyond this their interest was restricted to matters sectional and non political. They showed little interest in Malayan politics. Only the prosperous Chinese businessmen took some interest in the political developments in Malaya, but largely at the instance of the British administration. Primarily interested in making more money they were in no position to take political action which would alienate the British. As for the rank and file of the Chinese they were still strongly tied to China and it was the politics back home that consumed their interest. Thus their political involvement was restricted to Kuomintang and communism in China.

Even the significant constitutional changes initiated by the British after the Second World War which were of great significance for the Chinese failed to stir them. The Malays formed the UMNO in 1946 with the objective of securing the revocation of the Malayan Union plan but the Chinese remained unmoved. Although the Malayan Union was to their great advantage they, by and large, remained passive and did not press for its retention against vehement Malay opposition. Later, when the Federation of Malaya was introduced in place of the Malayan Union, even though they were dissatisfied with it, they did not present their viewpoint strongly enough to achieve much.

However, with the outbreak of communist guerilla warfare and the declaration of Emergency in 1948, the situation changed. Generally the Chinese viewed the outbreak of ter-

⁴² Rupert Emerson, *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule*, University of Malaya Press, 1964 (first published in 1937), pp. 282-83.

rorism as a matter between the British and the communist guerillas. But the Government, by and large, chose to regard the attempt by the communists as an exclusively Chinese affair, supported by all the Chinese in the country.⁴³ This forced the Chinese involvement in Malayan politics whether they liked it or not. The British saw the urgent need to woo the Chinese away from the communists through a new political organization. The founding of the Malayan Chinese Association "gave the British a better chance of obtaining cooperation from the Chinese community with a view to ending the Emergency."⁴⁴ Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner in Malaya at this time, was to state later that he wanted the MCA "to be stronger than the MCP [Malayan Communist Party]" and to provide the Chinese with an "alternative standard to communism."⁴⁵

For many years, Tan Cheng Lock, one of the most prosperous and well known among the Chinese in Malaya, had been contemplating the idea of a united organization for the Chinese.⁴⁶ The need for such an organization became imperative after the War when significant constitutional changes were initiated by the British. Many leaders of the community had begun to feel that a common organization was essential to protect and promote its interests. The initiative was taken by the sixteen Chinese members of the Federal Legislative and Executive Councils and the Malayan Chinese Association was launched on 27 February 1949 at Kuala Lumpur with Tan Cheng Lock as its President.

An interesting feature of the MCA was that in its early career it was closely connected with the Federal Government. This close connection was due to the fact that its

⁴³ In his speech at the inauguration of the MCA on 27 February 1949 Tan Cheng Lock had said: ". . .there is an inclination to blame the Chinese as a whole for the existence or continuation of terrorism in Malaya. . . ."

⁴⁴ K. J. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya*, University of Malaya Press, 1965, p. 152.

⁴⁵ *Malayan Mirror*, 14 June 1953, quoted in Ratnam, *ibid.*, p. 153.

⁴⁶ For details see Soh Eng Lim, "Tan Cheng Lock", *Journal of South East Asian History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1960, pp. 29-45.

formation and early development was largely the work of men either closely associated with the Government or Government officials themselves. The idea of the MCA. . . was first mooted by the Chinese members of the Federal Legislative and Executive Councils. The fact that these members owed their position on the Councils through nomination rather than election was a guarantee that anything they did or attempted would not be radically opposed to the Government's wishes. This guarantee of the close identification of the MCA's policies and activities with the wishes of the Government was maintained by the fact that one of the clauses in the Association's Constitution stipulated that "the Chinese members of the Legislative and Executive Councils would automatically become officers of the Association." In view of this guarantee and of the fact that one of the declared objects of the Association was to cooperate with the Government and to devote itself to social work in connection with the Emergency, it was hardly surprising that the Government not only approved but also encouraged its formation and early development.⁴⁷

Since the desire to form the MCA had come from a group of prosperous businessmen within the Chinese community it was naturally they who provided the leadership of the organization. Such leaders as had emerged from the rank and file of the Chinese community were mainly to be found in the ranks of the Malayan Communist Party or in the trade union organizations closely linked with the communists. The leadership of the MCA was not at all broadbased. Tan Cheng Lock, Leong Yew Koh, Yong Shook Lin, H. S. Lee, Khoo Teik Ei, and others were all prosperous businessmen or men from the professions with big business links. Most of them were English-educated and did not have any significant contacts with the Chinese community at the grass-roots level. One important point about them all was that they had close links with the British administration.

It is important to note here that the MCA, unlike the UMNO, was not founded exclusively to protect and promote

⁴⁷ Soh Eng Lim, "Tan Cheng Lock", *ibid.*, p. 46.

the interests of the Chinese community; this was only one of its several important objectives. It was expected, especially by the British, that it would emerge as a powerful counter to the predominantly Chinese Malayan Communist Party and help wean the Chinese away from communism. Several leaders of the MCA had close links with the Kuomintang and it is not unlikely that the success of the Communists in China in 1949 forced them to look for an organization to protect their own privileged and affluent position in Malaya. Being a representative body of an immigrant community the MCA included in its aims the attainment of inter-racial harmony and understanding. Tan Cheng Lock in his inaugural address on 27 February 1949 had said that the MCA had been launched

with the twin fundamental objectives of bringing about cohesion and unity among the Malayan Chinese of all classes and promoting inter-racial goodwill, harmony and cooperation it is a matter of supreme significance and an indispensable necessity that a basic purpose of this organization must be the attainment of inter-communal understanding and friendship, particularly between the Malays and the Chinese. . . .⁴⁸

The Constitution of the MCA adopted at the General Committee meeting held on 12 June 1949 laid down the following as the organization's objects:

- (a) To promote and maintain inter-racial goodwill and harmony in Malaya.
- (b) To foster and safeguard the social, political, cultural and economic welfare of the Malayan Chinese by legitimate and constitutional means.
- (c) To promote and assist in the maintenance of peace and good order for the attainment of peaceful and orderly progress in Malaya.
- (d) Generally to do all such acts and things as may be incidental to or connected with or conducive to the attainment of any of the above-mentioned objects.

⁴⁸ *The Straits Times*, 28 February 1949.

(It is not without significance that promotion of inter-racial goodwill and harmony was listed as first of the objects.) The very significant point that needs to be underlined is that the MCA was not committed exclusively to the interests of the Chinese community. Its founders and leaders did not view the organization in as strong and exclusively communal terms as those of the UMNO.

The response of the Chinese community was heartening to the founders of the MCA. But Chinese in large numbers began to join the organization only after October 1949 when the Federal government allowed it to sponsor its own multi-million dollar lotteries. In 1949, the government had introduced a plan to resettle Chinese squatters, who had formed the main source of food supplies for the communists, into "New Villages" which could be more easily defended against communist attack. The MCA closely cooperated with the government in this effort and was allowed to run a lottery to use its proceeds to provide financial assistance and social services for the Chinese being moved to the "New Villages". This "welfare patronage" helped the party in extending its membership.⁴⁹

Encouraged and aided by the British administration the MCA had little difficulty in establishing itself as the main spokesman of the Chinese community in Malaya. It was able to gain some significant achievements. Among the most important of these were the opening of the Malayan Civil Service to non-Malays,⁵⁰ and much liberalized citizenship requirements introduced in 1952 which enabled a significant number of Malayan Chinese to acquire citizenship. Despite these achievements and a large membership the MCA still had not emerged as a representative body of the Chinese to the same degree as the UMNO had established itself right from the time of its inception in 1946. The leaders of the organization at the national level were unsure of the potential of the organization and the extent of support enjoyed by them and the MCA

⁴⁹ Gordon P. Means, *Malaysian Politics*, University of London Press, 1970, p. 121.

⁵⁰ Until 1952 positions in the Malayan Civil Service were open only to Malays and expatriate Europeans.

amongst the Chinese in the country. It is this which had led Tan Cheng Lock, Yong Shook Lin, Khoo Teik Ei and others to acclaim Dato Onn's efforts to form a non-communal national political organization and support it when formed in late 1951.

THE MALAYAN INDIAN CONGRESS

The Malayan Indian Congress was launched at the beginning of August 1946 at Kuala Lumpur with the objectives: (1) to protect and promote the varied interests of the Indian community, (2) to prevent inter-communal disharmony and misunderstanding during the period leading to independence. It was not able to establish itself as the spokesman of the Indian community as it had to compete with at least two other organizations, the Malayan Indian Association and the Federation of Indian organizations, for the loyalty of Indians. Moreover, since the Emergency in 1948, Indians had come to play a dominant role in the trade union movement of the country. The leadership of most of the large trade union organizations, such as the Malayan Trade Union Council, National Union of Plantation Workers, the National Union of Teachers, Malayan Federation of Clerical and Administrative Staff Unions, was provided by Indians. In 1948, when the Government appointed five Indian representatives to the Legislative Council under the Federation of Malaya constitution, none was chosen from the Malayan Indian Congress. Three of them were trade union leaders, one a businessman, and one a prominent lawyer.

" Many Indians in Malaya have been conscious of the fact that they constitute less than ten per cent of the total population in the country and, therefore, in politics organized on strictly communal lines they would exert extremely limited influence. Many of them as a result have been attracted by non-communal political organizations where they have provided a significant part of the leadership and supporters."

THE INDEPENDENCE OF MALAYA PARTY AND THE FORMATION OF THE ALLIANCE

On 6 June 1951, a day after Dato Onn had formulated the principles of the new Independence of Malaya Party, it was disclosed that Dato Onn had received a questionnaire from Tan

Cheng Lock, the President of the MCA, on the possibility of forming a non-communal political organization. One of the questions asked by Tan Cheng Lock was :

Would it be possible to form a political party in the Federation with membership open to all without distinction of race, class, creed, color or nationality?⁵¹

Tan Cheng Lock was interested in a non-communal political party and therefore when Dato Onn announced his intention to launch such a political organization it was obvious that Tan Cheng Lock would fully cooperate with Dato Onn. A day after Dato Onn's announcement, *The Straits Times*, after interviewing a number of prominent leaders of the different communities, reported that a large number of them had declared their support for the new party.⁵² *The Straits Times* reported: "No recent political pronouncement has created so much interest in the Federation as Dato Onn bin Jaafar's proposals for the formation of an Independence of Malaya Party."⁵³

In spite of definite indications of Malay hostility to his plan, Dato Onn went ahead with the formation of the IMP as he was certain of widespread support from other communities. On 16 September 1951, the IMP was established at Kuala Lumpur amidst a fanfare of trumpets. It is important to note that the inaugural meeting was presided over by Tan Cheng Lock, the President of MCA. Yong Shook Lin, the Secretary-General of the MCA, and Khoo Teik Ei, the Treasurer, were both elected as members of the Central Organizing Committee of the new party. It was obvious that the national organization of the MCA was fully committed to the IMP. Tan Cheng Lock, in his speech at the inaugural meeting, had called upon the members of the MCA and other Chinese in the country to "give their full and active support to the IMP." However, as we shall see later this attitude was not to last for long.

The Malayan Indian Congress, by and large, fully supported the IMP. Unlike the MCA, it was to remain loyal to the IMP

⁵¹ *The Straits Times*, 7 June 1951.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *The Straits Times*, 8 June 1951.

throughout until its end. In fact, later when the MCA showed greater interest in UMNO-MCA cooperation than the IMP, the IMP was referred to by many as a predominantly Indian party.

Soon, the IMP decided to participate in an extremely unfavourable test of strength that proved almost fatal for it. Dato Onn and other leaders of the IMP believed that since what they were doing was right and good for the country it must work and would have the support of the people. They had a highly exaggerated view of the popular response to the party. Within days of its formation a party spokesman had jubilantly announced that pledges of support were "pouring into party's temporary headquarters" and that there was no time to count them.⁵⁴ So sure was the party leadership of popular support that it went headlong into the Kuala Lumpur municipal elections for 12 seats on the partly elected council scheduled for 16 February 1952 and ignored the crucial fact that the IMP had only just been started and organizationally was in no position to contest the elections. It had no ward branches in the city and hardly any leadership at the lower levels. Further, it refused to recognize the fact that communal feelings and loyalties were deeply entrenched among the people and that it would take a more substantial effort to move them away from those than good intentions and slogans of non-communalism.

The communal organizations, the UMNO, the MCA and the MIC, on the other hand, approached these first elections in the country with a great deal of caution. The UMNO at first showed little interest in contesting the municipal elections in Kuala Lumpur and George Town (Penang). Soon after the elections were announced in May 1951, UMNO made it known that it did not intend to contest the elections but would give support to members and non-members, Malays, and non-Malays, whom it considered suitable.⁵⁵ But within a month, the party announced its decision to contest the elections in both Kuala Lumpur and George Town (Penang). The MCA and the MIC were so unsure of themselves and considered the elections so insignificant that despite rumors that they would participate in the George

⁵⁴ *The Straits Times*, 18 September 1951.

⁵⁵ *The Straits Times*, 18 May 1951.

opposed to it" any member of the party "encouraging communal representation on the municipal council would be expelled from the party."⁵⁸ Further,

Regarding the position of organizations which had promised support for the ideals of IMP and were now contesting it, it was decided that the Chairman should attempt to see the leaders of such organizations and try to explain to them the dangers of communal representation in the hope of making them join forces with the IMP. It was agreed that the approach should be purely in a personal capacity.⁵⁹

The reference clearly was to the MCA. The MIC, the other communal organization, had decided not to put up any candidates. In fact, the President of the MIC, K. L. Devaser, was to successfully contest the Kuala Lumpur elections as an IMP candidate.

At the next meeting of the Kuala Lumpur Branch Committee held on 3 January 1951, the Chairman, Dato Onn, announced that "the MCA Selangor Branch was not prepared to come in with the IMP for the election."⁶⁰ At the same time the earlier decision of the Branch Committee to expel party members who were "encouraging communal representation on the municipal council" was not enforced. Therefore, despite the fact that the President, the Secretary General, and several other national officials of the MCA were fully committed to the IMP, the Selangor Branch of the MCA (this was the State branch that controlled the organization in Kuala Lumpur) went ahead with its decision to field candidates in Kuala Lumpur municipal elections. This meant fielding candidates against the IMP nominees. At this time the Chairman of the Selangor branch of the MCA was Sir Henry Lee, a prosperous tin miner and one of the most powerful leaders of the Chinese in the State of Selangor. He was powerful enough to commit the state organization of the

⁵⁸ Independence of Malaya Party, *Minutes of the Branch Committee Meeting*, 6 December 1951 (mimeographed).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 January 1952.

MCA on this course and ignore the commitment of the national leaders of the MCA to the IMP.

It was at this time, just after Dato Onn had announced at a Branch Committee meeting of the IMP that the Selangor branch of the MCA was not willing to work with the IMP in the Kuala Lumpur elections, that the foundation of the Alliance was laid in peculiar circumstances. Sir Henry Lee was the President of the Selangor State branch of the MCA at the time when the IMP was inaugurated. He was not invited to the inaugural meeting of the IMP in Kuala Lumpur on 16 September 1951. Sir Henry on his own did go to the inaugural meeting where he was ignored by the organizers and was not invited to sit on the platform where were seated the representatives of various organizations which had supported the formation of the IMP. He was much better known than many of them but he was not invited even to address the meeting. Sir Henry, at the time a power to reckon with in Kuala Lumpur, was visibly hurt by the treatment given to him by the organizers of the IMP. Also, Dato Onn bin Jaafar had not consulted him prior to the formation of the IMP when he had consulted almost every other important leader in the country. It seems that Sir Henry was so badly hurt that he took upon himself to destroy the IMP. And Sir Henry got his chance not long afterwards. The UMNO had already decided to contest the Kuala Lumpur municipal elections. Its Kuala Lumpur branch had set up an Election Sub-Committee under the chairmanship of Yahya bin Dato Abdul Rahman, who had minor tin mining interests in Selangor and who knew Sir Henry Lee. Right from the time of its formation the UMNO had operated with very inadequate finance, and, therefore, as Chairman of the Election Sub-Committee, the main task before Yahya bin Abdul Rahman was to raise enough funds for the elections. Collection of money was thus foremost in his mind when Yahya happened to meet Sir Henry Lee at the Miners' Club in Kuala Lumpur at the beginning of January. He began complaining about the difficulties in raising money for the elections. Sir Henry immediately saw his chance in this. He told Yahya that his party would be glad to provide funds to the UMNO for the elections on the condition that the two parties did not fight against each other and only fielded joint candidates. Yahya, without realizing the potential and

consequences of the arrangement suggested by Sir Henry, agreed on the spot. As the arrangement was to be effected only at the level of the Kuala Lumpur organization of his party and was of a temporary nature, Yahya did not consider it necessary to consult the Kuala Lumpur branch of the UMNO. When the arrangement was announced in the newspapers on the morning of 9 January 1952 in a joint statement by Sir Henry Lee and Dato Yahya bin Dato Abdul Rahman, it surprised Datin Puteh Maria, the Chairman of the Kuala Lumpur branch of the UMNO.⁶¹ The announcement created a stir. Datin Puteh Maria, wife of Dato Zainal Abidin bin Haji Abas (the first Secretary-General of the UMNO and one of the closest Malay lieutenants of Dato Onn), did not get very far in her attempt to undo the arrangement, and eventually, a few days before the Kuala Lumpur elections, resigned as Chairman of the Kuala Lumpur branch of UMNO.⁶² Dato Yahya bin Dato Abdul Rahman, the creator of the arrangement, was promptly elected as the new Chairman of the Kuala Lumpur branch.

Under the new arrangement, the UMNO and the MCA divided up the 12 seats on the council for which elections were to be held among themselves. The joint nominees were not fielded as Alliance candidates; they were designated as UMNO-MCA candidates. The term Alliance was not used. The joint effort proved tremendously successful; the UMNO and the MCA were able to win nine of the twelve seats (the MCA won six and the UMNO three seats). The IMP, their chief rival, was able to secure only two seats. Throughout the elections the IMP had emphasized its non-communal character; it put forward non-communalism as one of its main appeals. Its election posters said: *Vote for Non-Communalism and Progress: Support the Independence of Malaya Party*. The UMNO and the MCA, on the other hand, emphasized their respective communal appeals. They were also able to set up an organization far more effective than the IMP. The *Straits Times* wrote in an editorial after the elections:

There are several lessons to be learned from Kuala Lumpur's first elections, and the first of them is that organization is the

⁶¹ *The Straits Times*, 10 January 1952.

⁶² *The Straits Times*, 12 February 1952.

driving rod of political machinery. It was to efficient organization that the UMNO-MCA Alliance owed its spectacular victory. . .

The Alliance had at its disposal a large fleet of cars, many of which had come from outside Kuala Lumpur for the occasion, some of them as far afield as Ipoh. . .

. . .one of the more regrettable conclusions is that by and large it was, however, a communal vote.⁶³

Within the IMP the view of a group involved in the elections was:

We as a group which was closely involved throughout the campaign, refuse to believe that it was merely "blind voting" or superior organization and tactics on the day of the polling which led to our defeat. On the other hand, we are convinced that the Chinese voters did not vote for us because our party had nothing substantial to offer them, and in the absence of any such inducements, Chinese voters as a whole fell on their traditional loyalty to a Chinese organization, which has after all at least done something for them in the past.⁶⁴

The two seats that the IMP had won were both in the predominantly Indian Bungsar Ward. The party's candidates in the predominantly Chinese Petaling Ward secured the lowest vote among all its candidates. It had secured a substantial part of the Indian vote while a large part of the Malay and Chinese vote was attracted by the UMNO and MCA candidates.

The result of the election was of immense significance: first, it proved to be the beginning of the end of the IMP, and second, it facilitated the extension of UMNO-MCA cooperation to the national level. The crushing defeat of the IMP not only affected seriously the morale of its leaders and rank and file, but

⁶³ *The Straits Times*, 18 February 1952.

⁶⁴ Independence of Malaya Party, *Memorandum to the Kuala Lumpur Branch Committee from the Former Election Agent, Petaling Ward, Kuala Lumpur*, 10 March 1952.

	<i>Malay</i>		<i>Chinese</i>		<i>Indian</i>	
	<i>No. of candidates</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>	<i>No. of candidates</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>	<i>No. of candidates</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>
IMP	2	1,988	4	1,394	6	3,262
UMNO-	5	5,180	6	4,928	1	232
MCA						

more significant it led to rethinking among the leaders of the MCA. Before the Kuala Lumpur elections the leadership of the MCA was not very certain about the extent to which the Chinese community was behind it. There had been no opportunity in the past to test this, except the elections for the George Town (Penang) Municipal Council held in December 1951 in which the MCA had not participated.⁶⁵

A large part of the activities of the MCA since its formation in 1949 had been relating to the welfare of the Chinese community. During this period the party had functioned largely as a welfare organization. Many of its members had joined the association to avail themselves of the "welfare patronage" distributed by it and to enable themselves to participate in the extremely tempting lotteries conducted by it. The leadership of the MCA was fully conscious that the association, on its own, could not go very far in wielding political power and protecting the interests of the Chinese community. Therefore, when Dato Onn bin Jaafar, who had emerged as the most powerful leader in the country, sought their cooperation they had no hesitation in joining hands with him. They were certain that cooperation with this unchallenged leader of the Malays would not only ensure communal harmony in the country, but would be of benefit to the Chinese community. Moreover, what Dato Onn was offering at the time was extremely fair and attractive. As a result, the national leaders

⁶⁵ Penang was one of the two Straits Settlements in Malaya. It is a cosmopolitan and enlightened city. Also there were two non-communal political parties, the Radical Party of Penang and the Labour Party, which had participated in the elections. The MCA was extremely uncertain of its prospects there and even though the UMNO contested the elections the MCA chose to keep out of it.

of the MCA initially went wholeheartedly with the IMP and Dato Onn.

But the Kuala Lumpur elections changed the situation significantly. It gave the leadership confidence in their own organization and their ability to attract Chinese support. They began to see a new and more powerful potential of the MCA. The Chinese had supported it in large numbers and there was no reason why it could not establish itself as the spokesman of the Chinese community in the same way as the UMNO was of the Malays and wield political influence and power in its own right. Its six candidates in the predominantly Chinese areas in Kuala Lumpur had all won with very sizable majorities. UMNO-MCA cooperation in the elections had opened up altogether new possibilities. The leadership of the MCA felt that cooperation with the UMNO (especially without Dato Onn bin Jaafar as its leader) was a far more attractive proposition than working under the leadership of Dato Onn in his non-communal organization, the IMP. Dato Onn was well-known as a tough man and the MCA leaders were afraid of him. On the other hand, the new leader of the UMNO, Tunku Abdul Rahman, had the reputation of a happy-go-lucky playboy who was not known to assert himself. Moreover, they believed that by cooperating with the UMNO they would be able to keep their organization, the MCA, intact whereas working with the IMP would require its eventual disbandment. They knew that Dato Onn would not allow for long the existence of a communal organization closely linked with the IMP. This new thinking on the part of the MCA leaders meant the doom of the IMP; it was hardly possible for the IMP to survive without the support of Chinese as well as the Malays.

In the case of the UMNO, the success of the arrangement caused a weakening of the substantial opposition to the idea of cooperation with the MCA among those within it who were distrustful of the Chinese. Alliance thus had come to stay. The arrangement was tried in all the subsequent elections and it brought great electoral victories for the two parties. It was, however, a terrible irony that Malay-Chinese cooperation had been brought about by those leaders of the Malays who were committed to the idea that Malaya "should not be governed by

a mixture of races” rather than by Dato Onn bin Jaafar who had given up his position as the unchallenged leader of the UMNO, the organization he had himself founded, to establish a genuine non-communal multi-racial political organization.

The Alliance at this time was nothing more than a mutually beneficial election device. Instead of campaigning against each other, the member parties worked together. They divided the electoral constituencies among themselves, by and large, on the basis of the racial character of the constituency and during the election helped each other.

Within days of the Kuala Lumpur elections, Sir Henry Lee, the main architect of the Alliance and the President of the Selangor State branch of the MCA, sent a letter to Tan Cheng Lock, the national President, proposing that the Alliance idea be extended to the national level.⁶⁶ Tunku Abdul Rahman held meetings with MCA leaders in Selangor and stated that he hoped to meet Tan Cheng Lock soon to discuss the plan to extend the Alliance to the national level. A series of meetings were held between the leaders of the UMNO and the MCA and there was agreement to link the two organizations on the national level and on a more permanent basis. It was decided to set up liaison committees consisting of representatives of the two parties at the local levels thus providing an institutional link between the two parties throughout the Federation.

The success of the arrangement was soon to attract the Malayan Indian Congress, the communal organization of the third largest racial group, the Indians. On 17 October 1954, after the IMP had gone out of existence and the Alliance had established itself as the chief spokesman of the nation, the Executive committee of the MIC, after a heated debate, decided to join the UMNO-MCA Alliance.⁶⁷

This was the honeymoon period of the Alliance. Even though the formation of the Alliance based upon the idea of Malay-Chinese cooperation had not succeeded in dispelling the traditional Malay fear and suspicion of the Chinese, these feelings had not come out into the open and caused a serious strain on the working of the Alliance during this period. This

⁶⁶ *The Straits Times*, 23 February 1952.

⁶⁷ *The Straits Times*, 18 October 1954.

was chiefly because, first, the British (whom the Malays had always seen as their protectors) were still in the country, and second, organizations representing the non-Malays were yet to make any serious demands on fundamental issues.

The organization of the Alliance at this time was loose and the relationship of the three member parties had not been clearly defined. As was commented by *The Straits Time* in an editorial on 12 July 1956, the Alliance existed

by virtue of a gentleman's agreement between three political parties—the UMNO, the MCA, and the MIC. This political marriage has never been regularized to define the precise relationship between these partners. To press the analogy, the partners never became one.

Each retained its identity and freedom of action. The Alliance has been no more than a voluntary subordination of the identities of the individual parties for cooperative action in the common objective of winning independence and fighting the elections. . . .

It is important to note here that though not explicitly spelled out anywhere, in practice the MCA during this period was able to secure for itself a more or less equal position with the UMNO in the Alliance chiefly because of its superior organization and financial power. Also, as long as elections were held only at the municipal level, the MCA was able to sustain this position as large sections of the electorate in the cities and towns were Chinese. Even though many in the Chinese community were yet to acquire citizenship, it constituted a sizable part of the electorate (then based on a restricted franchise) in urban centers like Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Seremban, George Town and Malacca. But this was not to last for long.

MALAY POLITICAL PARAMOUNTCY

From about 1954, with the decline of Dato Onn bin Jaafar and his Independence of Malaya Party and the emergence of Alliance as the representative of Malayan national aspirations, a change began to take place in the relationship of the three member parties within the Alliance. Independence was in the air

and it was imperative to the Malays that they must look for an arrangement that would sustain and safeguard a special position for them and maintain the Malay-Muslim character of the country. The UMNO, reflecting this view, asserted itself as the senior and dominant partner and the MCA and the MIC, representing the immigrant non-Malay communities, accepted a secondary role as they realized that in any negotiations for independence with the British it was the Malays who had to play the leading role.

This was the turning point. The MCA got caught in a vicious circle: the more it lost its position of equality to the UMNO within the Alliance and gave in to the UMNO the more it lost its support within the Chinese community and the smaller its base among the Chinese the weaker became its bargaining power with the UMNO in the Alliance. After independence, whenever the MCA was to make demands on behalf of the Chinese community the usual UMNO response was: How can you make demands on behalf of the Chinese when you are not able to get their support? Deliver the Chinese vote first for the Alliance and then make demands on their behalf. The MIC, representing the Indians who formed only about 10 per cent of the population in the country, has never been in a position to bargain.

The beginnings of a change in this relationship were obvious at the time of the first elections for the Federal Legislative Council in 1955 for 52 elected seats. At this time even though non-Malays constituted about half the total population of the country, they accounted for only 15.8 per cent (Chinese 11.2 per cent and Indians and others 4.6 per cent) of the total number of voters. The Malays constituted as much as 84.2 per cent of the total electorate. Within the UMNO, the widely held view was that non-Malays constituted only about 10 per cent of the electorate and, therefore, no more than 10 per cent of the Alliance candidates for the Federal Legislative Council elections should be non-Malays; 90 per cent of the Alliance candidates should be Malays. Tunku Abdul Rahman, the President of the UMNO and of the Alliance, was opposed to this demand and called for a more reasonable distribution of seats among the three partners in the Alliance. The showdown took place at the half-yearly General Assembly of the UMNO

at Kuala Lumpur in early June 1955. Tunku, threatened to resign his position as President of the UMNO if its members adhered to their demand that 90 per cent of the Alliance candidates be Malays.⁶⁸ He succeeded in demanding and securing a vote of confidence in himself and the Alliance with the MCA.

At first, the Alliance National Council allotted 12 out of 52 seats to the MCA, and there were reports that no seats had been given to the MIC.⁶⁹ However, this was revised and the final distribution of the seats was as follows: UMNO 35, MCA 15, and MIC 2. This was accepted by the MCA and the MIC gratefully; the important point to note is that they were able to secure the increased number of seats not through their own efforts and influence but thanks largely to the goodwill of Tunku Abdul Rahman.

The Alliance manifesto for the Federal Legislative Council elections, *Menuju Kearah Kemerdekaan* (The Road to Independence), clearly reflected this changing relationship of the three partners in the Alliance. Even though there was considerable controversy with regard to issues such as citizenship and multi-lingualism and it was obvious that the non-Malays were concerned about the UMNO attitude towards these, the Alliance manifesto generally tended to reflect the UMNO view. Non-Malays believed that the right to citizenship based on birth in Malaya, *jus soli*, must be available to them. But the UMNO was opposed to this and at its behest the Alliance took the decision to avoid the contentious issue during the elections.⁷⁰ The Alliance manifesto stated that "the alien problem must . . . come under the scrutiny of the Special Independent Commission, for the appointment of which the Alliance has petitioned Their Highnesses, the Rulers".⁷¹ It asserted that the Commission's terms of reference must include this issue so that it could investigate the problem and recommend measures "whereby the position of alien population in the country can

⁶⁸ *The Straits Times*, 5 June 1955.

⁶⁹ Gordon P. Means, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁷⁰ *The Straits Times*, 30 April 1955.

⁷¹ Alliance National Council, *Menuju Kearah Kemerdekaan*, 1955, p. 37.

be satisfactorily resolved." However, on the question of multi-lingualism, the Alliance, under pressure from UMNO, came out into the open and rejected the demand.⁷² The Alliance was only willing to go to the extent of stating that it "wants statutory recognition to be given to other languages by prescribing that citizens of Malaya, whatever their race or creed, have a legitimate and fundamental right to preserve their own language, script and culture."⁷³ The manifesto maintained that a free country must have its own national language as it facilitated the working of democracy and fostered a more profound sense of common nationhood. It insisted that Malay alone should be adopted as the national language and that this should be written into the Constitution of independent Malaya.⁷⁴

It is important, however, to note that on the whole non-Malays, represented by their communal organizations, the MCA and the MIC, were able to secure a far more reasonable deal out of the UMNO at this time than ever during the entire post-independence period. This was only the beginning of the drift towards a secondary position of the MCA and the MIC within the Alliance and the UMNO had not assumed the position of ascendancy that it was to have in the post-independence years. Also, the position of the MCA as a representative organization of the Chinese community had yet to be effectively challenged and naturally this strong position of the MCA within the Chinese community was reflected in the way the organizations, and the demands that it made on behalf of the Chinese, were treated by the UMNO. With regard to the question of education which later was to cause a tremendous lot of trouble, the Alliance took a reasonable position and showed concern for the non-Malay viewpoint. It asserted that its policy will be, among others:

⁷² *The Straits Times*, 30 April 1955. Also, Gordon P. Means reports: "To prevent Malay mistrust of the Chinese in the MCA, Tan Cheng Lock, as its president, went to great pains to try to dissuade the Chinese Guilds from submitting a petition to the Queen for multi-lingualism." Gordon P. Means, *Malaysian Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁷³ *Menuju Keadah Kemerdekaan*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

*To allow the vernacular schools their normal expansion: To encourage rather than destroy the schools, language or culture of any race living in the country.*⁷⁵

With regard to national schools, it said:

The Alliance policy is to establish a type of national school *that will be acceptable to the people of Malaya* and will meet with their needs in promoting their cultural, economic, social and political development as a nation, so as to facilitate the fulfilment of the Alliance aim to adopt Malay as the National Language of the country.⁷⁶

This meant that schools teaching through the medium of Chinese or Tamil languages were not necessarily considered to be in conflict with a national system of education and that they had a place in that system.⁷⁷ It was for this reason that the manifesto asserted:

The Alliance considers that the standardization of textbooks is most important. Textbooks similar in substance with Malayan outlook should be produced in all the languages used in the country, i.e. English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil.⁷⁸

Significantly, the manifesto made hardly any mention of the special position of the Malays, even though it did deal in some detail with constitutional issues. For example, with regard to the position of the Malay Rulers it had no hesitation in stating:

As the Alliance has pledged that the special position of the Rulers as Constitutional Heads of their respective States

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 22. Emphasis added.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

⁷⁷ In the post-independence period, as we shall see later, the Alliance was to drastically revise its position and refuse to accept vernacular schools using Chinese and Tamil languages as medium of instruction as part of the national system of education under any conditions.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

should be recognized, it recommends to the Special Independent Commission that this position should be upheld and should not be in any way impaired.⁷⁹

Recognizing the inferior economic position of the Malays, the manifesto said that the Alliance will take the following measures:

- (a) To convince the Malays that they have the aptitude and capability to become big and successful businessmen;
- (b) To encourage Malays to start businesses;
- (c) To give suitable Malays every opportunity, by scholarships and by arrangements with merchants and industrialists, to receive training and acquire technical skill wherever possible from existing businesses, including banks;
- (d) To help Malays already in business to expand with finance from the proposed Land Banks;
- (e) To start joint pilot Sino-Malay businesses, and to encourage similar undertakings by Malays and other domiciled races.⁸⁰

The entire tone and content of the manifesto gave impression of reasonableness on both sides, a reasonable give-and-take and a definite understanding and appreciation of the feelings and sensitivities on both sides. Undoubtedly, the Alliance by this time had emerged as the main spokesman of the Malayan nation, but its position of pre-eminence was in no way unchallenged. Dato Onn bin Jaafar, the acknowledged father of Malay nationalism had certainly not given up his fight against the Alliance though his Party Negara now largely consisted of Malays and sought to represent their interests. Dato Onn bin Jaafar was the first Malay to emerge as a national leader and at one time had enjoyed such great charismatic influence over the Malays that the issue between him and the Alliance could in no way be considered settled. Moreover, Onn bin Jaafar, after his disillusionment with the Chinese and the

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

collapse of the IMP, had assumed a strongly pro-Malay posture. There was also the Pan Malayan Islamic Party vying with the UMNO and the Party Negara for the Malay vote. In the circumstances, the UMNO was keen not to alienate the non-Malay support, coming through the MCA and the MIC, and maintain its advantage over the Party Negara and the Pan Malayan Islamic Party.

But unfortunately, in the post-independence period as the UMNO became completely dominant in the Alliance, these were not to be the features of Alliance manifestoes, nor of its approach to the fundamental problems facing the country.

As independence drew near, the UMNO, representing the *bumiputra*, began to assume increasingly dominant influence and power within the Alliance. The imminent departure of the British, whom the Malays had seen as their protectors against the non-Malays, brought to the front and intensified the Malay fears of the non-Malays. In this situation it was imperative that the UMNO should establish itself as the dominant partner in the Alliance if it was to protect and promote Malay interests and in so doing maintain itself as the representative organization of the Malay community.

The Malays have a deep-rooted feeling that they alone are the *bumiputra*, and as such, have a special right over the country. On 30 June 1952, a few months after the UMNO and the MCA had successfully contested the municipal elections in Kuala Lumpur, which had laid the foundation of the Alliance, Tunku Abdul Rahman, then President of the UMNO, had asserted: "Malaya is for the Malays and it should not be governed by a mixture of races."⁸¹ The Malays must safeguard their rights over this land "which is ours for the benefit of our future generations." More recently, in an interview with *The Asia Magazine*, he said:

It is understood by all that this country by its very name, its traditions and character is Malay. The indigenous people are Malays and while they on the whole have been left behind in the economic and professional fields, others have been helped along by the understanding and tolerance of the Malays

⁸¹ *The Straits Times*, 1 July 1952.

to be successes in whatever fields they are in. In any other country where aliens try to dominate economic and other fields, eventually there is bitter opposition from the indigenous people. But not with the Malays. Therefore, in return, they must appreciate the position of the Malays who have been given land in Malay reservations and jobs in the Government.

Without those where would they go? They can't go into business which is in the hands of the non-Malays. And anyhow these businessmen quite naturally employ their own people. Therefore, if Malays are driven out of everything, however tolerant they may be, there is a limit. Resentment would build up and there would be trouble, and those who had found prosperity would also suffer.⁸²

Understandably, the Malays have a mortal fear of being "reduced to the status of Red Indians striving to live in the wastelands of America." Recently, the Malay view has been presented in an extremely frank and forthright manner by an UMNO leader, Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, in his book, *The Malay Dilemma*.⁸³ He asserts that "the Malays are truly the definitive people of the Malay Peninsula, the real and original rulers and owners of Malaya. No other race has any grounds to dispute this."⁸⁴ And when citizenship was conferred on

⁸² *The Asia Magazine*, 30 August 1964. It is not without reason that the Government is designated as *Pemerintahan Tanah Melayu* (Government of the Land of the Malays) and facilities such as railways are known as *Kareta Api Tanah Melayu* (Railways of the Land of the Malays). In the national language, Malay, Malaysia is mostly referred to as *Tanah Melayu* (Land of the Malays).

⁸³ Asia Pacific Press, Singapore, 1970. At present, Dr. Mahathir is Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia.

⁸⁴ Countering the argument that aborigines, who lived in Malaya prior to the coming of the Malays, should alone be considered as the *bumiputra*, Dr. Mahathir asserts: "... the presence of aborigines prior to settlement by other races does not mean that the country is internationally recognized as belonging to the aborigines. Aborigines are found in Australia, Taiwan and Japan, to name a few, but nowhere are they regarded as the definitive people of the country concerned. The definitive people are those who set up the first governments and those governments were the ones with which other countries did official business and had diplomatic relations. . . . In

people of other races, "it is because the Malays consent to this". And what is more important, "that consent is conditional". All that this means is that non-Malays were conferred citizenship on the condition that they were willing to conform to the characteristics of the "definitive" race, the Malays. Their own rights concerning control and perpetuation of their own distinctive characteristics were to be limited. For example, with regard to the language issue Dr. Mahathir asserts:

In this matter of national language the rights of new citizens are limited. They may not seek to replace it with other languages, even though technically and legally this can be done. The national language of Malaya is clearly stated in the Constitution. As the Constitution may be changed on the agreement of two-thirds of the Members of Parliament, it would seem that a change in the national language could possibly be moved by new citizens. *Any such move however would be against the spirit with which citizenship was offered by the Malays, and accepted by non-Malays.*⁸⁵

The Malays are inclined to extend this argument to the field of national culture as well. Mahathir himself asserts that in other countries of Southeast Asia (and in Australia, the United States, and Brazil) the process of extending citizenship to immigrant peoples was gradual and controlled and, therefore, as small numbers of immigrants acquired citizenship, they adopted the characteristics and the language and culture of the "definitive" race of the country.⁸⁶ What is more, they not only forget their own ancestry but they insist on all others who follow them to abide by this crucial condition of citizenship. Mahathir maintains that but for the British colonial interlude

Malaya the Malays without doubt formed the first effective governments. The Malay States have been internationally recognized since the beginning of Malayan history The *Orang Melayu* or Malays have always been the definitive people of the Malay Peninsula. The aborigines were never accorded any such recognition nor did they claim such recognition. There was no known aborigine government or aborigine state." Mahathir bin Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-27.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 137. Emphasis added.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-34.

this would have occurred in Malaya. He cites the example of Chinese and Indians in Malacca who, according to him, lost the use of their own languages and gave "some evidence of undergoing a typical process of assimilation." Representing the view of most Malays, Mahathir would like to see that happen in Malaysia as well. At the 17th General Assembly meeting of UMNO held in Kuala Lumpur in early September 1964, the National Executive had initiated certain changes in the organization's Constitution. One of these, relating to the objects of the organization, said:

To protect and promote all fundamental laws contained in the Constitutions of Malaysia and the States, especially those relating to the Official Religion (Islam), national language and culture, the status and sovereignty of the Malay Rulers, and the special rights of the Malays and the indigenous people.⁸⁷

There was a very angry and heated debate with regard to this. The general feeling was that the provision was vague and dozens of representatives from the floor suggested that the word *bahasa* (language) should be clearly specified as either *bahasa Melayu* or *bahasa (Melayu)* and the words *kebudayaan Kebangsaan* (national culture) be replaced by *kebudayaan Melayu* (Malay culture) or national culture based on Malay culture. To calm down the controversy several important leaders of the UMNO, including Tun Razak, Syed Jaafar Albar, Tuan Syed Nasir and Ali bin Ahmad spoke and called on the delegates not to press for the change. And interestingly, when the above-mentioned changes to the amendment were put to vote only a few of the delegates voted in favor of them and as a result the original wording of the National Executive amendment was accepted by an overwhelming vote. The same day when this writer asked Syed Jaafar Albar (then Secretary-General of the UMNO) and Ali bin Ahmad (Assistant Secretary-General) as to why they did not go along with the idea which apparently had the support of a large majority of the delegates and which they

⁸⁷ *Kertas Persidangan* (Meeting Papers), Bil: 2.17.64, 17th General Assembly Meeting UMNO, 5, 6 and 7 September 1964.

themselves had always subscribed to, their answer was that they did not want to say publicly that when they speak of national language and culture they mean Malay language and culture. They maintained that the position was clearly understood by the people concerned, referring to the leadership of the MCA and the MIC, and it was useful to avoid making it a contentious public issue.

In addition to Malay domination over politics and government in order to safeguard the Malayo-Muslim character of the country and protect the special position of the Malays, the unity of the Malays has always been considered as of great significance. It was felt that unless the Malays remained united they would be overwhelmed by the non-Malays and their country would be taken over. Malays who dared to leave the ranks of the Malay political organizations, the United Malays National Organization or the Pan Malayan Islamic Party, were called traitors to the Malay cause. The feelings against them have been so strong that they often have been treated as outcasts. There is the case of Dato Onn bin Jaafar, father of Malay nationalism and the founder of the UMNO. Soon after he left the UMNO, its new President Tunku Abdul Rahman, said that Dato Onn, by leaving the UMNO and forming the non-communal IMP, had sold away Malay rights and heritage to other races.⁸⁸ One could also cite the example of Dato Zainal Abidin bin Haji Abas. Dato Zainal, coming from Perak, had been a very prominent Malay for over two decades. He, along with his mentor, Dato Onn, was one of the founders of the UMNO in 1946 and was also its first General Secretary. Later, in 1951, he left the UMNO with Dato Onn and joined the IMP. Years later he was to accept the chairmanship of the non-communal United Democratic Party. This completely alienated him from the Malay community. In the 1964 general elections, he contested for Parliament from his home constituency, Parit in Perak, where he was not only defeated by a much younger UMNO nominee but suffered the humiliation of losing his deposit.

Until recently, when the UMNO and the Pan Malayan Islamic Party began to cooperate, the latter's existence as a

⁸⁸ *The Straits Times*, 1 July 1952.

separate communal organization was seen by many in the UMNO as nothing more than as a source of serious disunity among the Malays. They believed that there was little difference between the two organizations with regard to the fundamental aim—to establish Malaya as a Malayo-Muslim country; the difference lay mainly in style and tactics. While the PMIP believed in coming out into the open and telling the non-Malays clearly that Malaya was a Malay county where non-Malays were welcome to live and earn their livelihood so long as they did not demand a parity political status with the Malays, the UMNO hoped to achieve the same end without openly proclaiming it to be so.

With the ascendancy of the UMNO, the MCA and the MIC were increasingly relegated to a secondary position within the common organization, the Alliance. This was clearly reflected in the crucial negotiations with regard to the constitution of independent Malaya during 1956-57. As we noted in the previous Chapter, the MCA was forced to make substantial concessions to the UMNO on issues of vital interest to the Chinese community. The extreme pressure felt by the MCA was clearly expressed by Tan Siew Sin (the President of MCA since 1960), at a meeting of its Central Working Committee held on 7 April 1957 to discuss the changes in the recommendations of the Constitutional Commission demanded by the UMNO, when he said that while he appreciated "the force of the argument" of those who were opposed to these changes he felt that "if we insist. . . we may well have to part company from UMNO. This the MCA cannot afford to do."⁸⁹ Earlier, in 1956, at the time of the deliberations within the Alliance with regard to the Alliance Memorandum to the Constitutional Commission, when there was considerable concern about the Constitution of Malaya among leaders of the Chinese community, it was again Tan Siew Sin who was so concerned about the excessive demands of the Malays that he felt compelled to write the following in a personal letter to Dr. Lim Chong Eu (at the time a leader of the MCA, later to emerge as the president of the MCA) on 27 September 1956:

⁸⁹ Malayan Chinese Association, *Minutes of Central Working Committee Meeting* (mimeographed), 7 April 1957.

Briefly my views can be summarized thus: In the present stage of the country's development, we must face the fact that communalism exists in a big way. Even the Malays, with their overwhelming voting strength want their, "special rights" written into the Constitution. Some of them are not satisfied with their present plums, i.e., the majority of posts, and the best of them too, in the public service, [and] they want to extend this highly discriminatory form of legislation into industry and commerce. "Warta Negara" talks about the necessity for making the Malays the "master race" of Malaya. This presumably means that non-Malays are to be reduced to the status of hewers of wood and drawers of water. Shades of Hitler: Others want Malaya to join up with Indonesia. I myself have heard this from the lips of one or two UMNO officials. It is unnecessary for me to tell you what this idea, seriously pursued, will lead to. It is difficult to assess the strength of these various forms of racial fanaticism but, at the same time, one cannot blame the Chinese and other non-Malays for being slightly nervous, to say the least. The non-Malays, therefore, have to be communal merely to ensure their survival.

A Malayan nation does not exist at the moment and may never will (*sic*), the way things are going. Such being the case, to my mind, the MCA must uphold Chinese interests, first, last and all the time.⁹⁰

At the time of constitution-making during 1956-57, the MCA was subjected to heavy pressure from within the Chinese community. Lau Pak Khuan, a former President of the MCA in Perak and one of the most powerful men within the Chinese community, declared that if the MCA failed to include the following four points in its joint memorandum (with the UMNO) to the Constitutional Commission, the Perak Chinese would withdraw from the MCA and present their views directly to the Commission:

1. Equal citizenship rights for Indians and Chinese. They should be accorded the same rights as the Malays.

⁹⁰ A photo-copy of the original with this writer. *Warta Berita*, now defunct, was then a prominent Malay language newspaper.

2. Those born in Malaya, irrespective of race or parentage, and those who have lived in this country during the last five years and are loyal to this country should be given citizenship rights.
3. Responsibilities and privileges of the citizens of independent Malaya should be equal.
4. Multi-lingualism should be adopted, with the languages of the various races regarded as official.⁹¹

Even the MCA was forced to admit that its leadership of the Chinese community had been threatened by the controversy over the issue of right to citizenship based on birth.⁹² The chief Executive Secretary of the MCA, T. H. Tan, reporting on a meeting of the MCA leaders held in Malacca, wrote to the Alliance National Council that it had been decided that "the MCA, as the political representative of the Chinese, must support the principle of *jus soli*". Soon the Central Working Committee of the MCA "decided that the MCA members of the Alliance Ad Hoc Political Committee should demand unconditional *jus soli*".⁹³

However, the MCA was unsuccessful in getting these demands accepted by the UMNO. On several issues, as we noted in Chapter 2, it found it difficult not to give in to the UMNO. This caused very widespread dissatisfaction among large sections of the rank and file of the MCA and within the Chinese community in general. After the publication of the report of the Constitutional Commission in February 1957, a three-man delegation of the newly formed Federation of Chinese Guilds and Associations left for England in May 1957 to make representations to the British Government. Before leaving for England, a member of the delegation, Tan Kee Gak declared:

The 1,094 guilds and associations which represent over 2,000,000 Chinese in Malaya have given us a mandate. We are going to carry it out

⁹¹ *The Straits Times*, 29 March 1956.

⁹² *The Straits Times*, 17 April 1956.

⁹³ *Minutes of MCA Central Working Committee Meeting*, 7 July 1956.

*We do not expect the MCA to do anything for the Malayar Chinese.*⁹⁴

This was the beginning of the disillusionment with the MCA among large sections of the Chinese community. They had come to believe that the MCA, as a member of the Alliance, was not in a very strong position to protect and promote the interests of the Chinese community. Some Chinese were so disturbed that they went to the extent of leaving the MCA, thus contributing to its further weakening. At the same time, this ferment led to the emergence of a younger and more vigorous group within the MCA leadership. In early 1958, it was reported that this group was making a bid to depose Tan Cheng Lock, who had founded the MCA and had remained its President ever since, so as to be able to reorganize the MCA "to protect more strongly the interests of the Chinese".⁹⁵ To the new group the primary purpose of the MCA's existence was to protect and promote the interests of the Chinese community and they believed that the old guard of the MCA, in order to maintain the Alliance, had not fought strongly enough for the interests of the Chinese community. The difference in the outlook of two similar groups in the Malayan Indian Congress at this time was well-expressed by *The Straits Times* in an editorial on 19 February 1958.

A major cause of instability is that Congress has become the battleground for two schools of thought. The president regards the MIC as an Indian organization wedded to the national purposes of the Alliance Government. This implies the subordination of communal interests where they conflict with the Government's national purposes. It means more than not recognizing any Indian interest outside the national framework. It calls for active opposition to any Indian interest which is not in harmony. As long as the MIC is a component of the Alliance Government, loyalty to Government policies and priority for national interests in fact must remain the prime consideration.

⁹⁴ *The Straits Times*, 6 May 1957. Emphasis added.

⁹⁵ *The Straits Times*, 3 March 1958.

This is what the second faction has refused to see. This group treats the MIC as an organization independent of the Alliance and the Government. Many of the criticisms it has levelled imply that the MIC representative in the Government has behaved as an Alliance spokesman and has not imposed the MIC viewpoint on its partners. It may not have been stated as bluntly as this, but that unquestionably is the underlying assumption. This group has found the Alliance partnership a restraint rather than a source of strength.

(Here "the national purposes" of the Government and the Alliance should be viewed as those perceived by the UMNO, representing Malay political power and paramountcy.)

The key leaders of the new group were Dr. Lim Chong Eu and Too Joon Hing (then Secretary General of the MCA). The showdown between the two groups took place on 23 March 1958 at the annual meeting of the Central General Committee of the MCA when the new group put up its own candidates against the old guard nominees. Unexpectedly, Dr. Lim was elected President defeating Tan Cheng Lock, the founder of the MCA, by 89 votes to 67. Too Joon Hing defeated Ong Yoke Lin, the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare and a leading member of the old guard,⁹⁶ for the post of Secretary-General. At the same time, the new group captured all other important positions in the organization.

The new leadership, being fully confident that they represented the rank and file of the Chinese community, began to assert themselves right from the beginning. They made it quite clear that they would be unwilling to accept a secondary position for the MCA within the Alliance. On 11 May 1958, the Political, Organization, Election and Membership (POEM) Standing Sub-Committee of the MCA demanded that

...as a partner of the Alliance the MCA Headquarters should have complete authority in the selection of MCA candidates in all Federal, State, municipal and local council

⁹⁶ Ong Yoke Lin was the only non-Malay representative of the Alliance on the Working Party which had finalized the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya in 1957.

elections, though, again as a partner the MCA Headquarters would always try to get agreement from the other two partners in such selections.⁹⁷

A few months later, on 30 November 1958, Lim Chong Eu declared:

Firstly, we want equality in this country. Secondly, we are for an assurance of our way of life, our language, and our schools. Thirdly, we express the hope that we shall find economic advancement and economic equality.⁹⁸

Under the circumstances, a showdown with the UMNO was unavoidable for this assertion of equality was a clear challenge to the entire basis on which the Alliance had worked since 1956-57 and on which alone the Alliance concept was acceptable to the UMNO. More, the old guard⁹⁹ of the MCA had shown no disinclination to accept the UMNO as the senior partner within the Alliance. To complicate matters, the old guard, which had been displaced in the MCA but had retained their positions in the Government, was not sitting quietly. They were being encouraged and assisted by the UMNO to attempt to recapture power within the MCA. The occasion for the showdown was provided by the 1959 parliamentary elections. Earlier, in the State elections, the Malay extremist Pan Malayan Islamic Party had campaigned on the basis that after the parliamentary elections it would seek to amend the Constitution to make it more pro-Malay with the help of other Malay members of the Parliament (obviously meaning UMNO representatives). This had caused very serious concern among the MCA leaders and the President of the MCA, Lim Chong Eu, on 24 June, wrote to Tunku Abdul Rahman, the President of the UMNO and the Alliance:

The fear of Malaysians of other racial origins—Chinese,

⁹⁷ *Minutes of the Central Working Committee Meeting*, 6 July 1957.

⁹⁸ *The Straits Times*, 1 December 1958.

⁹⁹ These were widely referred to by the press at this time as the pro-Alliance faction of the MCA.

Indians, Eurasians—is simply one of fear of Malay communalism. A fear that this unbridled attitude can not only destroy the kind of progress as Malaysians, which the Alliance plans for, but further that it can also lead to constitutional oppression of the minorities.

It has, therefore, been the MCA policy ever since the constitutional talks began to support what we consider to be a fair and equitable constitution, which would ensure the equality of the fundamental rights of our citizens and further to uphold and maintain this constitution. . . .

Nevertheless, it is correct to say that the fear still remains and it is kept alive by the provision of the constitution which allows amendment to the constitution by a two-third majority.

For then in the parliamentary sense, the danger of communalism can only be the danger of Malay communalism, for only the Malays can obtain the two-thirds majority necessary in Parliament to effect any changes in the Constitution. We have ourselves watched with anxiety and care the swing in the Legislative Council towards a more pro-Malay attitude caused by the pressure of the backbenchers from the East Coast.

But after the Trengganu election results, I think, you will agree with me that it will be hazardous . . . for the Alliance to “swing” further in that direction and that the only safe way to ensure the destiny of our nation is to hold a firm course towards a Malayan nation.

Under the circumstances I feel that it is necessary for me to draw your attention to how very important it is for the Alliance Manifesto to clearly express the Alliance determination to uphold and sustain the Federal Constitution as it stands.¹⁰⁰

He further asserted that the MCA should be allocated about 40 seats out of a total of 104 in the parliamentary elections to ensure that the constitution of the country could not be amended without the support of some MCA members of the Parliament.

¹⁰⁰ *The Straits Times*, 10 July 1959.

Tunku Abdul Rahman did not reply to the letter and certain elements within the MCA in an attempt to force the issue released the confidential letter to the press on 8 July without the knowledge of the MCA President. A very serious crisis followed in the Alliance that was to settle once and for all the supremacy of the UMNO within the Alliance. On the night of 9 July 1959, Yong Pong How, the head of the publicity section of the MCA, announced:

The question of Malayan Chinese Association breaking with the United Malays National Organization and leaving the Alliance is a very, very grave one because of the national issues involved. It is clearly the last thing we want to do. But if the MCA is left in a position within the Alliance in which it can get little support of the people it claims to represent, then the situation is completely different.¹⁰¹

Tunku Abdul Rahman, as the leader of the Alliance, reacted violently and announced that the Alliance would contest all the 104 seats in the parliamentary elections but without the sections of the MCA led by its President, Lim Chong Eu.¹⁰² The Tunku called Lim's letter "a stab in the back" and demanded that the MCA should unconditionally withdraw the demands made therein. Later, in a press conference, he announced that he was taking over all functions of the Alliance National Council¹⁰³ and would personally determine the selection of candidates and the allocation of seats among the three partners in the Alliance.

On 12 July, Lim Chong Eu met the Tunku and he was told that the MCA would be allowed to remain in the Alliance only if it accepted his terms. The following is a report given by the MCA President to the Central General Committee:

With regard to the allocation of seats it is most likely

¹⁰¹ *The Malay Mail*, 10 July 1959.

¹⁰² *The Straits Times*, 11 July 1959.

¹⁰³ The National Council consisting of sixteen representatives each of UMNO and the MCA and six representatives of the MIC was the chief decision-making body in the Alliance.

that we shall be allocated 32 seats. With regard to the nomination of candidates [it] will be made by the Tunku alone, because of the shortness of time, but before finalizing the list I would be consulted and I presume after my consultation it would be presented to the Alliance National Council.¹⁰⁴

Lim Chong Eu further added, giving full expression to the sense of frustration and helplessness:

The question now is no longer a simple question of allocation of seats, of candidates or of conditions in the manifesto and so on. It is only a question of the reiteration of your faith in the Alliance and the leadership of the Alliance. What will happen with regard to the seating and allocation and manifesto and so on, I do not know. But I have every reason to believe that if confidence is restored in the Alliance then what we have gained so far in negotiations can be sustained. This is only my belief.

That, Gentlemen, is the position. I am very sorry that the Central Working Committee cannot give you any clear guidance in this matter.¹⁰⁵

Tunku's terms for the return of the MCA into the Alliance were put to vote in the Central General Committee and were approved by a margin of 89 votes to 60.

The final distribution of seats among the Alliance partners was announced on 12 July: UMNO was given 70 seats and the MCA and the MIC were allocated 31 and 3 seats respectively. In accordance with the agreement, it was Tunku Abdul Rahman who selected all the Alliance candidates including those from the MCA. However, contrary to the agreement, the President of the MCA was not only not consulted but was not shown the list of MCA candidates prior to their filing nominations.

The reason why Tunku Abdul Rahman insisted on selecting the MCA candidates for the parliamentary elections himself was to ensure the selection of MCA candidates acceptable to the UMNO (i. e., those belonging to the old guard) and leav-

¹⁰⁴ *Minutes of MCA Central Committee Meeting, 12 July 1959.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

ing out, as far as possible, those belonging to the new leadership or aligned with them. It was as a result of this that prominent leaders belonging to the old guard of the MCA, such as Tan Siew Sin and Ong Yoke Lin, were nominated for safe seats.¹⁰⁶ The UMNO feared that if the new leadership of the MCA which was insistent on equality, was allowed to select the party's candidates it would successfully use this power to stabilize and strengthen its position within the organization. And it would become very difficult for the old guard to re-establish their control over the MCA.¹⁰⁷

Many leaders of the MCA felt that the UMNO had taken a "dictatorial attitude" towards them and had treated the MCA as a "satellite" of the UMNO. Completely frustrated, many top-ranking leaders resigned from the party.¹⁰⁸ They chose this course rather than withdrawing the MCA from the Alliance primarily to avoid a serious communal confrontation between the Chinese and the Malays. Many members of the Central General Committee had frankly expressed fears of such a confrontation at the crucial meeting of the Committee on 12 July which had taken the decision to accept Tunku Abdul Rahman's terms. Tan Siew Sin, a key leader of the pro-Alliance faction, had warned:

... if government wanted to it could cause a lot of trouble without changing the Constitution. For instance, it could cut down drastically the allocation for education. Then some schools would close down, students would rebel and riot and

¹⁰⁶ Tan Siew Sin contested from the Malacca Tengah constituency where 67.8 per cent of the electorate was Malay and Ong Yoke Lin from the Ulu Selangor constituency where the Malays accounted for 32.9 per cent of the electorate and Indians and others 19.5 per cent.

¹⁰⁷ Members of the old guard such as Tan Siew Sin and Ong Yoke Lin had retained their position as Ministers in the Alliance Government after they had lost their position in the party in 1958. Tunku's fear was that in case the old guard leaders were not returned to the parliament he would be forced to select Chinese members in the Alliance government only from the ranks of the new leadership.

¹⁰⁸ Some of the important ones were: Too Joon Hing, Chin See Yin, Quok Kai Dong, Tan Suan Kok, Lawrence H. C. Huang, Yong Pong How, Ng Ek Tiong. Dr. Lim Chong Eu did not leave the party immediately after the crisis.

when that happened Government could suspend the Constitution and declare martial law under which it could do anything it liked. Therefore, if we were not in the ruling party in Government, 40 seats could not give us protection. Those who suffer would be mainly those who lived in small towns and kampongs and surrounded by thousands of Malays.

It was wonderful to feel a hero or a champion but he hoped he would never be a champion by shedding somebody else's blood.¹⁰⁹

Another member of the committee had said that

the recent trouble in Pangkor Island should serve as a warning that communal trouble would not only be confined to the East Coast. We should not make any more fiery speeches. We should give our mandate to the MCA members in the Alliance National Council to negotiate terms.¹¹⁰

Another had warned:

...it was a matter of life and death to reach a satisfactory solution to our problems. If the MCA broke from the Alliance our position would be dangerous. We must bear in mind the danger to the lives and safety of the Chinese people living in the *Kampongs*.¹¹¹

The whole episode, especially the way the MCA had been treated by the UMNO and the way it had given in, naturally, created a tremendous dissatisfaction and disenchantment with the MCA among large sections of the Chinese community. This was clearly reflected in the result of the 1959 parliamentary elections; the MCA, which had won all the 15 seats it had contested in the 1955 Federal Legislative Council elections, was able to secure only 19 of the 31 seats allotted to it in the 1959 parliamentary elections. What is more significant, the MCA candidates were returned only from those constituencies.

¹⁰⁹ *Minutes of MCA Central General Committee Meeting*, 12 July 1959.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

where the defection of large numbers of Chinese voters could be offset by the votes of the Malays, who were called upon by the UMNO to vote for the pro-Alliance MCA candidates. The situation should be quite clear from the following:

<i>Constituencies where MCA Candidates</i>	<i>Constituencies where Malays are 20 percent or above of electorate</i>	<i>Constituencies where Malays are below 20 percent of electorate</i>
<i>Won</i>	19	-
<i>Lost</i>	4 ^a	8

^a In two of these constituencies the large Malay vote was split by the candidates of the Pan Malayan Islamic Party

In all the 19 seats won by the MCA, Malays constituted over 20 per cent of the electorate. This position suited the UMNO very well as it made the MCA significantly dependent on the UMNO in winning elections. This inevitably further weakened the position of the MCA vis-a-vis the UMNO: leaders of the MCA owing their seats in the Parliament to the UMNO to a significant degree could hardly be expected to stand up to the UMNO. The UMNO was not at all perturbed by the losses suffered by the MCA. It was, in fact, not at all keen that the MCA should win a large number of seats as it was afraid that having won a large number of seats on the basis of a solid backing of the Chinese voters the MCA was bound to assert itself and make demands on their behalf. The only purposes for which the UMNO wanted the MCA to remain in the Alliance were:

- * 1. to maintain the inter-communal image and facade of the Alliance;
- 2. to provide enough support and seats to give the Alliance a two-thirds majority in the Parliament;
- 3. to provide a controlled channel for the expression of Chinese discontent and dissatisfaction.

And these were all that the MCA could use to secure any concessions from the UMNO.

It was not long before the old guard, the pro-Alliance group,

was restored to its position of leadership of the MCA. In 1961, Tan Siew Sin, the son of Tan Cheng Lock, from whom the presidency of the MCA had been taken away by Dr. Lim Chong Eu in 1958, was elected the president of the party. With him were restored all the other leaders of the pro-Alliance group. The circumstances under which they had come back to assume the leadership of the MCA was to make them completely subservient to the UMNO.

The issue of the relative position of the three partners in the Alliance was settled, more or less, once and for all. UMNO established itself as the senior partner in the Alliance. Even the Tunku's biographer commented:

... the Alliance is really made up of one principal party, the UMNO, with the MCA and the MIC as branches clothed with the intelligentsia and capitalist classes of each community.¹¹²

The new leaders of the MCA were all prosperous businessmen. Many of them were in politics not because of any deep political convictions or elevated aims but because they had found that political links were of immense benefit to their business interests. They had, therefore, no hesitation in making substantial concessions with regard to the vital interests of the Chinese. Their chief interest had been to maintain the MCA as a member of the Alliance, at least as long as it was the ruling party, even if it meant the status of a junior partner.

The *quid pro quo* arrangement which had begun taking shape at the time of independence between the UMNO leaders and the pro-Alliance MCA leaders was revived and, now with the weakened position of the MCA, was firmly established. Speaking before the Central General Committee of the MCA on 12 July 1959, at the time of the crisis in the Alliance, Tan Siew Sin had said: "Regarding Sino-Malay

¹¹² Harry Miller, *Prince and Premier: A Biography of Tunku Abdul Rahman Al-haj*, London, 1959, p. 216.

Tunku apparently fully approved of the book as he says in a foreword: "I believe this to be as complete an account of my life as it is possible for another man to write."

relationship there was a fear, that because of the economic power of the Chinese, the Malays would be completely swamped and to avoid this it was necessary for the Malays to retain their political power."¹¹³ Later, at the time of the 1964 general elections, he was to reiterate:

We have to accept that the Chinese are economically stronger than the Malays. The Malays, therefore, feel that in order to counter-balance their weak economic position they have got to have political power. They feel that with this political power or special position they could cope with the other races politically and economically.¹¹⁴

Not long afterwards, this writer was told by Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein, then Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia:

It is true at the moment that political power is in the hands of the Malaysians [the term used to refer to the Malays and other indigenous people in Sabah and Sarawak] and economic power is in the hands of the Chinese. That is why we must try and balance things out. That is why we are doing our best to try and give the Malays a little bit of a share in the economic life to enable them to feel safe in the country. After all they were original settlers.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ *Minutes of Central General Committee Meeting of MCA*, 12 July 1959, p. 13.

¹¹⁴ *The Straits Times*, 6 March 1964.

¹¹⁵ Interview for the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation, April 1967.

IV

POLITICAL PARTIES OF THE NON-MALAYS

MALAYSIA has seen a large number of political parties of the non-Malays. Most of them were formed during the early fifties, before independence, when elections were first introduced in Malaya. Here we are concerned only with those that survived through independence.

They have played only a limited role in politics, certainly until 1963 when the creation of Malaysia allowed the Singapore ruling party, the People's Action Party, to enter the Malaysian political arena. We will deal with the impact of the PAP and its successor in Malaysia, the Democratic Action Party, in the following chapter. In this chapter our main concern is to see why the parties of the non-Malays failed to make any impact on the political paramountcy of the Malays and influence the political process based on it.

The non-Malay parties have operated within the framework of two crucial circumstances which have determined their effectiveness. Firstly, the Malays, and their leaders, have always viewed them as nothing other than communal organizations of the non-Malay communities threatening the political paramountcy and special position of the Malays. The Malays have shown little inclination to join them and support them despite the fact that they were all founded as genuinely non-communal political organizations. This made it impossible for these parties to maintain their non-communal character and invariably over the years they were turned into non-Malay, essentially Chinese, communal organizations. And that made them even more unacceptable to the Malays. They have been allowed to exist only as *opposition* parties, a necessary window-dressing for parliamentary democracy and providing a legally-constituted and controlled channel for non-

Malay discontent and dissatisfaction; they would not be acceptable to the Malays as alternative governments.

Class contradictions have not seriously manifested themselves among the Malays. The community has retained its traditional character to a significant extent. In the main it consists of three classes:

1. The Sultans and the associated aristocracy;
2. A middle class consisting of government officials and a small number of professionals;
3. The *kampong* class, most of them farmers and fishermen.

A vast majority of the Malays belong to the *kampong* class and have remained loyal to the Sultans and the aristocracy. They look towards the first two classes for guidance and leadership and loyally follow them. Interests based on class distinctions have not manifested themselves strongly and without doubt community interest, as perceived by the upper class leadership, assumes preponderance over class interest. This has made it impossible for non-communal political parties to persuade Malays to think in terms of their class interest and work together with non-Malays on the basis of identity of class interest.

The community has been generally successful in maintaining a strong sense of unity and solidarity, especially in relation to the non-Malay communities. Their various political organizations, the UMNO, the Party Raayat, and the Parti Islam, all represent fundamentally a similar outlook and position on the crucial political and communal issues. All Malays speak the same language, practice the same religion, and share a common way of life. This homogeneity further contributes to the sense of unity. State particularism, based on loyalty to the Malay State and its Sultan and potentially a strong divisive force, has lost much of its intensity since the formation of UMNO in 1946 and the emergence of an all-Malaya Malay nationalism; since independence in 1957, the Malay sense of loyalty has been directed increasingly to the national Malay community. This has been largely in response to the presence of large numbers of non-Malays who are seen as a grave

threat to the existence, identity and well-being of the community as a whole. All this has made it extremely difficult for non-communal political parties to penetrate the Malays, maintain their own non-communal character and appeal, and play a full role in Malaysian politics.

The non-Malay communities in Malaysia are not united. They are divided, first, on the basis of community, the Chinese, the Indians, the Ceylonese, etc. In most of the non-Malay political parties there has always been a serious undercurrent of Chinese-Indian distrust and conflict. Second, and what is more important, the communities themselves are badly divided; dissimilar educational background, occupation, class interests, etc. have given them different outlooks towards the basic political and communal issues.

Indians in Malaysia are divided into three main groups:

1. Labour in rubber estates and plantations;
2. Urban working class and small businessmen;
3. Middle class professionals and civil servants.

The estate-dwelling Indians, most of whom are Tamil-speaking, have always formed a separate insular group. They have remained isolated physically not only from other communities but also from other Indians and have generally lived their own life. Economically depressed and not having had the benefit of adequate educational facilities they have tended to remain under the strong influence of estate owners and officials, trade union leaders, and sometimes leaders of the Malaysian Indian Congress. They are essentially apolitical, not concerned with either ideological or communal issues. By and large, they have constituted a loyal and dependable following of a political or a trade union leader.

The urban Indian, on the other hand, whether of the working class or from the professions, is politically mature and sophisticated. Many of them have been active participants in the trade union movement in the country; in fact, a large part of the leadership of the trade union movement, since about 1950, has been provided by them. They have generally tended to support non-communal political parties; Indians had consti-

tuted the largest single group in Dato Onn bin Jaafar's Independence of Malaya Party and had remained loyal to it until its end.¹ The conversion of the non-Malay parties into essentially Chinese parties has been a matter of disappointment to them and has caused them to withdraw their support and participation from them. Not many among them have worked for or supported the Malaysian Indian Congress in the post-independence period.

In all, Indians have played an insignificant role in Malaysian politics; they represent only about 10 per cent of the total population and there are not many electoral constituencies where they constitute a large enough voting bloc to have a decisive influence on the outcome of the election.

Amongst the non-Malays, it is only the Chinese who are numerous enough to play a significant role in politics. They can be divided into the following groups:

1. The *towkay* class.
2. The English-educated middle class.
3. The Chinese-educated middle and working class:
 - (i) the ideologically orientated;
 - (ii) those who are concerned primarily with the position of the Chinese, their language, education and culture.

The prosperous businessmen, the *towkay*, have traditionally supported and provided the leadership of the Malaysian Chinese Association. They have generally kept away from political parties in opposition as only links with the ruling party are of benefit to their business interests. The English-educated middle class in the urban centres has generally shunned politics; they are more attracted by the good life available in the country. For long it was only a small group among them which had shown a social conscience and had helped form and operate non-communal political organizations. However, in the more recent years, the seriously worsened communal situation in the country has created a greater interest in politics among the English-educated Chinese.

¹ See my *Politics in a Plural Society*, *op. cit.*, Chapter 2, "The Independence of Malaya Party and the Party Negara"

It is the Chinese-educated who have formed the largest and the most active and vocal group within the Chinese community. They have shown greater political awareness and have generally provided a large part of the following of the various political parties of the non-Malays. Among them there are those who are more concerned with ideological issues and have provided the rank and file and leadership of left wing parties and of some of the radical unions in the pre-independence period. A large part of the Chinese-educated are, however, primarily concerned with the position of their community and their language, education and culture. In the pre-independence period, and to a certain extent until 1959, they had provided the mass base of the Malaysian Chinese Association. Starting from the time of constitution-making and independence in 1956-57, their disillusionment with the MCA forced them to swell the ranks of other non-Malay political organizations, such as the Labour Party and the People's Progressive Party.

These differences have been significant enough to make it extremely difficult for the non-Malays to get together and present a united front against Malay political power. Political parties of the non-Malays too, reflecting these divisions, are badly divided and have found it hard to get together against the ruling Alliance. Before 1969, all attempts to bring them together were unsuccessful and as a result the non-Malay opposition was unable to seriously challenge Malay political paramountcy.

As we shall see below the parties themselves were seriously divided and this led to their weakening and fragmentation. The Labour Party, the oldest and the largest among them, found itself badly split soon after independence between the Chinese-educated Chinese and the English-educated. The People's Progressive Party found it difficult to cope with the suspicion and distrust between the non-Chinese leadership at the top and the Chinese rank and file and middle-level leadership. The United Democratic Party was able to keep together within its fold moderates and extremists Chinese only for less than a year.

THE LABOUR PARTY OF MALAYA²

It was the first non-communal political party to be established in Malaya. It was started as a group of regional labour parties; the first of them, the Labour Party of Penang, was formed on 15 May 1951, and within a few months, similar labour parties were established in the States of Perak, Malacca, Selangor and Negri Sembilan. These are all states with a large non-Malay population. On 26 June 1952, representatives of these state parties met in Kuala Lumpur and formed a loosely organized confederation, the Pan-Malayan Labour Party. For some time it remained "a sketchily organized political party, a party of personalities with a socialist label."³ Most of the leaders of the party were government servants associated with trade unions of government employees. The party had a strong pro-British orientation and was critical of communism and its role in Malaya. However, soon this orientation was changed when a small, new, English-educated group of professionals (not in the employ of the Government) entered the party and succeeded in moving it further in a socialist direction. It was at the instance of this group that in June 1954 the party was renamed the Labour Party of Malaya and its constitution was changed to provide for direct individual membership in place of the separate membership of the State labour parties affiliated to the Pan-Malayan Labour Party. Under the new leadership the party came to adopt a more progressive stand with regard to issues such as the Communist Emergency and independence. Primarily as a result of its changing orientation it attained some small successes in the municipal elections in cities like Kuala Lumpur and Penang. However, its influence at the time was restricted to the larger cities; it had little support in the rural areas, among the Chinese workers, the Malay peasantry and the Indian estate labour. This was reflected in the party's effort in the 1955 Federal Legislative Council elections when it fielded only four candidates for 52 seats, and all of them were soundly defeated.

² For a detailed study of the party see my *Politics in a Plural Society*, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-166.

³ *New Statesman and Nation* (London), 12 September 1953.

As a result of its inadequate performance, the leadership of the party decided not to contest any elections for one year and during the period to concentrate on creating a mass base. Also, in an attempt to attract larger support from the working class, it moved further to the left ideologically. It became more critical of British colonialism and adopted a less hostile attitude towards communism in Malaya. This had an immediate impact and the party began to attract some new members and supporters from about the end of 1955. These new entrants were mostly Chinese-educated Chinese workers. Some of them were possibly supporters of the banned Malayan Communist Party instructed to infiltrate civil politics after setbacks in the armed struggle to liberate Malaya.

It is important to note here that thus far the Labour Party had placed a great emphasis on its non-communal character. It had not attempted to subordinate its principles, programme and ideology to the compulsions of the plural society in Malaya. It had stuck to its principles and had avoided making any compromises with the aim to please one community or another. This approach of the party naturally was not to the liking of the Malays. They considered the party to be an organization of the non-Malays. It had only a handful of Malay members and supporters who had been attracted not by the party's policy and programme but by its small number of Malay leaders through their personal contacts and influence.

This emphasis on non-communalism and lack of any effort to take into account the sensitivities of the Malays continued through to the time of independence. In its memorandum to the Constitutional Commission, announced on 28 September 1956, the party rejected "the false premise that Malaya belongs to any one race and believes that if the proposed constitution is to be based upon this pernicious theory, all hopes of creating a Malayan nation will have to be abandoned."⁴ It further asserted:

All Malayan nationals shall enjoy equal rights and share equal responsibilities. The Labour Party does not regard the safe-

⁴ Labour Party of Malaya, *Memorandum to the Reid Constitutional Commission*, Penang, 25 September 1956.

guarding of the special position of the Malays as a provision which will benefit the Malays in the long run, inasmuch as any special treatment usually results in unfitting rather than fitting the recipient for any active and useful role in society.

On the sensitive issue of the position of the Malay Rulers in independent Malaya the memorandum recommended:

...the present leaders of the Alliance, mainly a Party of Privilege, have by subtle and skillful propaganda, led the Malay masses to believe that their interests are identical with those of the Malay Royalty and Ruling Classes. In deference therefore to present Malay feelings on this question, the Labour Party recommends that the present Rulers be made Constitutional Heads of their respective States with restricted powers and privileges to be strictly defined in the Constitution. The Labour Party recommends, however, one important proviso thereto, namely that when the question of a successor to any of the present Rulers comes up for consideration in due course, the entire voting population of the State concerned should be given opportunity, by means of a referendum, to express their feelings and views on the matter.

This was a bit too much for the Malays within the party to accept. The result was that the small number of Malays who had been associated with the party for some time now quit it.

Starting from mid-1957, the party underwent a marked change in its character. It began with the advent of independence and the formation of the Socialist Front comprising the Labour Party and the Party Raayat.⁵ In the negotiations for the formation of the Front, there was serious disagreement between the Labour Party and the Party Raayat on two important issues. The Party Raayat, largely dependent on Malay participation and support, demanded that the Labour Party must accept the position of the Malay Rulers and the special position of the Malays as provided in the Constitution of Malaya.⁶ The Labour

⁵ Party Raayat was a left wing party with a predominantly Malay membership.

⁶ *The Straits Times*, 25 June 1957.

Party, which had earlier rejected these, in its keenness to join hands with the Party Raayat modified its stand and accepted the position of the Malay Rulers and the special position of the Malays. The leaders of the Labour Party had come to the conclusion by this time that the party thus far had failed to establish any roots among the Malay masses and that it would be even more difficult to do so in the post-independence situation when Malay fears and suspicion of non-Malays had increased considerably. Therefore, it considered it advantageous to join hands with the largely Malay Party Raayat even though it meant making significant compromises in its policy position.

In the pre-independence period the lack of a significant base among the Malays did not unduly worry the leadership of the Labour Party. At that time it was the idea of democratic socialism which had brought together many Chinese and Indians into the Labour Party and in this ideological commitment support of the Malay community or lack of it was not of any great consequence. Moreover, during the period, at least until 1955, elections were restricted only to the town and municipal levels where a sizable proportion of the electorate was non-Malay. But independence changed this situation and the party began to think in terms of competing for political power. It now became obvious that without some support among the Malays, the largest racial group in the country, it could never hope to capture political power; thus the utility of an Alliance-like ideologically orientated Socialist Front.

This had a significant impact on the character of the Labour Party. Soon there emerged an understanding between the two member parties of the Front that Party Raayat would concentrate on enlarging the area of its support within the Malay community and the Labour Party would restrict its effort to gathering greater support among the non-Malays. The crucial consequence was that the Labour Party more or less completely gave up all ideas of attracting Malay support, essential to maintain and strengthen its non-communal character. Its policy, programme and activities, over the years, became more and more geared to building a mass base among the non-Malays, especially the Chinese. This shift was reinforced by another significant development.

Between 1956 and late 1959, as a consequence of the considerable disenchantment among the Chinese with their communal organization, the MCA, a large number of Chinese-educated Chinese young men and women of working class origin entered the Labour Party. These had been attracted by the party's non-Malay base and socialist and anti-colonial orientation. Among the Chinese disillusioned with the MCA, those who were primarily concerned with the position of the Chinese community and the issues of language and education and did not have any ideological orientation joined parties like the People's Progressive Party and the United Democratic Party. In 1958, there was an influx of another type of Chinese-educated Chinese into the Labour Party when the government declared the predominantly Chinese Factories and General Workers' Union an unlawful organization. Most of the full-time workers and a large number of the members of the union, all radical in their ideological orientation, joined the Labour Party. This gave the party a very sizable number of Chinese-educated Chinese members and supporters, in fact, larger than the rest of its members and supporters. Gradually, they were able to organize themselves within the party as a unified force. And it was not long before they were successful in taking over control of the Labour Party from its non-communal and ideologically moderate English-educated leadership.

It would be worthwhile here to identify the differences between the Chinese-educated Chinese and the English-educated moderates. The two groups emerged from very different backgrounds. Almost all of the Chinese-educated were of working-class origin from the little towns and New Villages. They were all educated in Chinese-medium schools, centres with a long tradition of Chinese nationalism. They had only a few years of schooling, perhaps up to the primary level. Most of them, except the small number of their ideologically articulate leaders, had a communal orientation. Ideological extremism was only incidental; their primary devotion was to the great fatherland China and its rich cultural heritage and language. They did not at all like the English-educated leaders of the party and considered them soft and *bourgeois*.

The English-educated, who were cosmopolitan in their outlook, on the other hand, were genuinely non-communal and

generally showed strong disinclination to exploit emotive communal issues for the purposes of gaining support for the party. They mostly adopted a moderate position on communal issues. However, the Chinese-educated invariably committed themselves to an extreme position on these issues, and it was only for tactical reasons that it was not expressed openly. Their leaders were fully conscious of the limitations and dangers of their extremist approach and for some time were able to moderate them, at least in their public presentation.

The increasing role of the Chinese-educated Chinese within the Labour Party brought it significant successes in the local council elections in the New Villages starting from 1959. The successes were especially significant in the States of Johore and Selangor, the two strongholds of the Chinese-educated within the Party. These successes and the intensified ideological polarization brought about in the country by the issue of Malaysia further strengthened the control of the Labour Party by the Chinese-educated Chinese. By the time of the 1964 general elections, the party was very largely controlled by them, and its membership consisted mostly of Chinese-educated Chinese.

The 1964 general elections were held in a highly charged atmosphere. Even though the new federation of Malaysia had come into being in September 1963 Indonesians had continued to pursue their policy of "confrontation" and "crush Malaysia" at the time of 1964 general elections. The ruling Alliance Party saw its opportunity in this and used Indonesian "confrontation" and the threat to the country's independence and territorial integrity to rally the masses of people behind it. It made this as the sole election issue. The Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, in an eve-of-the-election broadcast over the official Radio Malaysia, appealed:

I ask each and everyone of you to be loyal to this country and help fight the enemy from within and without. This, at least, is the duty you owe to the country of your birth or adoption, a country which has given you life and happiness.⁷

The Alliance branded the opposition parties that opposed Malaysia as anti-national and pro-Indonesian.

⁷ *The Straits Times*, 24 April 1964.

The Labour Party, too, under the influence of the Chinese-educated, made "Indonesian confrontation" and Malaysia as the sole election issue. It placed all emphasis on the Malaysia issue in its election campaign and its approach to the voters was: "If you want war, vote for the Alliance, and if you desire peace, vote for the Socialist Front." They maintained that "the Alliance is making all efforts to use the war scare that it has created to get back to power. If we do not counter it, they would utilize the situation by telling the people that the country's security and integrity is threatened and that all people must rally round Tunku and the Government."⁸ The Labour Party maintained that the Alliance Government, under the influence of the neo-colonialist powers, had pursued an aggressive policy which was entirely to be blamed for Indonesian "confrontation."

This approach of the party, under the influence of the Chinese-educated, led to its rout in the 1964 general elections.⁹ It was able to secure seven seats in the different State legislatures (two in Malacca, three in Selangor, and two in Penang) and only two seats in the Parliament. The English-educated leaders put the blame for the defeat of the party entirely on the role of the Chinese-educated and sought the return of the party to its previous non-communal and ideologically moderate stance. However, the Chinese-educated viewed it very differently and were not especially worried by the electoral reverses. The *Annual Report of Selangor Division of Labour Party for 1964* said:

In the recent State and General elections, we lost some seats. . . . This fact only further proved the democratic system praised by the Alliance was deceptive. Their intention was to conceal their reactionary nature. The election was full of deception, falsehood, oppression and corruption.

. . . although our party suffered some setbacks in the election, our party stand is still unchallenged. Our struggle is still anti-colonial and anti-Alliance. Our struggle is still

⁸ Interview with C.C. Yong, a Chinese-educated leader of the Party Raayat and Socialist Front, Johore Bahru, March 1964.

⁹ For a full account see my "The 1964 General Elections in Malaya," *International Studies*, Vol. VII, No. 1, July 1965, pp. 20-65.

against the British colonialist and United States Imperialists and their stooges—the Alliance clique. *As a socialist our main task is to educate the masses and organize the masses.*

Only when the masses have been organized and educated they will be able to replace the reactionary government once and for all, and to eradicate injustice and to build a new socialist society.

*There is one more point we must make clear and that is to distinguish a party from good or bad does not depend on election results but on whether it is for the people or on the side of the reactionaries.*¹⁰

To the Chinese-educated the most important function of the party was to educate the masses for the eventual and inevitable victory of socialism. They did not attach very great significance to elections and therefore electoral defeats were not of any great consequence.

Malaysia and “Indonesian confrontation” had created an unbridgeable gap between the English-educated and the Chinese-educated in the Labour Party. After the electoral defeat, many English-educated moderates who had led the party for more than a decade either became inactive or left the party. Those of the moderates who chose to continue to work for the party with a view to changing it were fighting a losing battle. Firstly, they had no mass base among any of the communities; a very large part of the membership of the party now consisted of the Chinese-educated. Secondly, the Chinese-educated, who had thus far allowed the moderates to remain in the party as they gave the party a certain respectability and saved them from severe repression at the hands of the anti-communist Alliance government, now had little use for them. The government had already begun viewing the party as a communist front organization and had shown little hesitation in using extreme methods to suppress it. The Chinese-educated were not interested, under the circumstances, in maintaining a facade of respectability for the party and a

¹⁰ Emphasis added. The Selangor Division at the time was known as one of the main strongholds of the Chinese-educated in the Labour Party.

moderate position on ideological and communal issues for public presentation; they were now forced to come out into the open and wage the fight for the inevitable victory of socialism. This led to the exit of the rest of the English-educated moderates from the Labour Party and by 1965 it had passed completely into the hands of the Chinese-educated Chinese who now openly committed it to an extreme position both on ideological and communal issues. This new stance of the party under the Chinese-educated caused the disintegration of the inter-communal Socialist Front. In late 1965, the Party Raayat withdrew from the Front as it was unwilling to associate itself with the new posture of the Labour Party on communal issues. The Labour Party too by this time had come to attach little importance to the idea of cooperation with the predominantly Malay Party Raayat. Firstly, in the 1964 general elections, the Party Raayat had failed to attract any support from the Malays; it had not won a single seat either in the State or Parliamentary elections. Secondly, in the new orientation and tactics of the Labour Party lack of Malay support was of little consequence. The party, obviously, had taken the decision to wage the struggle based on the support only of the Chinese in Malaysia.

At the 19th National Conference in Penang in August 1967, the party gave a clear expression to its new orientation:

In the great struggle of the current international situation, the international forces are distinctly divided into two antagonistic camps. The world counter-revolutionary and aggressive forces headed by US imperialism and Russian revisionism and other reactionaries of various countries serving these aggressive forces are encountering the vigorous retaliation of the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist forces in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the progressive forces headed by the revolutionary people of China. . . .

At present, US imperialists and Russian revisionists are piecing together an anti-communist, anti-people, anti-revolution and anti-China 'holy alliance' so as to accelerate the formation of an encirclement of China. They are bribing and abetting the reactionaries in various places to carry out a series of anti-Chinese activities.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution taking place now in China has shaken the whole world and has sounded the final deathknell of the US imperialists and Russian revisionists. . . .¹¹

It further said:

Regarding the question of the form of struggle, this Conference holds that: The Rahman-Leekuanycw regime supported by British and US imperialists and Russian modern revisionists are nothing but a fascist violent ruling organ. 'Parliamentary Democracy' is only a false face cover used to cover up their shame. Therefore, our party must break the old bondage of 'legalism' and we must shatter the superstition of 'parliamentary path'. We must resolutely take the line of mass struggle. . .

. . . the party must repudiate the thought of the 'parliamentary maniacs' and right opportunism that dominated the party for a long time. . .

Thus, the Labour Party, which had been established and had worked until the time of independence in 1957 as a democratic socialist non-communal organization, was converted into a full-fledged pro-Peking Chinese communal organization. It should be noted that this was the organization with the greatest potential to establish itself as a non-communal party given to bring together and work for all the communities in the country. This transformation of the party not only made it more unacceptable to the Malays but made it a representative body only of a small section of the Chinese community.

PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY

It was formed in January 1953 at Ipoh, Perak, by two lawyers of Ceylon Tamil origin, S.P. Seenivasagam and D.R. Seenivasagam, and was then known as Perak Progressive Party. The younger of the two brothers, D. R. Seenivasagam, had

¹¹ Labour Party of Malaya, *The Resolution of the 13th Delegates' Conference.*

earlier been associated with the Perak Labour Party and desired the new party to have a socialist orientation. But others involved in the formation of the new party were unwilling to accept socialism as the main creed of the party. However, there was no disagreement with regard to its non-communal character. The party at the time consisted primarily of an Ipoh-based group; its membership was very small, restricted largely to a small group of non-Malay professionals, many of them lawyers.

In its first political pronouncement, a fifteen-point memorandum to the Federal Elections Committee, on 14 October 1953, emphasizing its non-communal orientation it recommended that elections should be held only on a non-communal basis.¹² No organization or party organized on racial lines should be allowed to participate in the elections. But within the next two months, on 8 December 1953, the party itself decided to join the Alliance, a joint organization of the communally-based UMNO and MCA, for the purpose of contesting the coming town council elections in Perak. Justifying the decision, the party stated that although the UMNO and the MCA were communal organizations, the decision by their leaders to join hands and establish the Alliance was indicative of their desire to eradicate communalism and promote non-communalism. However, this cooperation largely based on expediency did not last for long. In February 1955, as a result of differences over the 1955 Federal Legislative Council elections, the PPP took the decision to leave the Alliance.

It contested the Federal Legislative Council elections on its own. But interestingly, at this time, the position of the party on contentious communal issues was not very different from that of the Alliance. The party's manifesto for the 1955 federal elections assured that in the future political set-up, based on a fully elected legislature, the position of Their Highnesses the Rulers would be maintained as constitutional rulers.¹³ It recognized Malay as the sole national language with English and Malay as two official languages. It maintained that ordinarily

¹² *The Straits Times*, 15 October 1953.

¹³ People's Progressive Party, *Manifesto, Federal Elections, 1955*, 8 June 1955.

the two official languages should be the medium of instruction in government and government-aided schools. But the non-Malay communities should have the right to conserve their languages and cultures and establish educational institutions of their own choice. On the touchy issue of multi-lingualism, it suggested that the choice of the members of the federal legislature with regard to the language of debates should not be restricted only to Malay and English. However, it emphasized that it was recommending multi-lingualism only as a temporary measure and that it should not be permitted after a period of ten years. Further, the manifesto promised that the party would "promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the Malays" and establish "schemes to encourage and assist the Malays in industry, professions and trade." It thus recognized the need to accord the Malays a special position. The party did not write off Malay vote. In all, the party did not attempt to establish a communal image and appeal among the non-Malay communities; it placed emphasis on its non-communal character and adopted a moderate and reasonable position on communal issues.

But this orientation of the party did not bring it any success in the elections. In the 1955 federal elections, the party had fielded only two candidates and both of them had lost their deposits.¹⁴ In the later state elections, in November 1955, it suffered the same fate.¹⁵ The electoral defeats led to rethinking of the party's appeal and image. There was a widespread feeling that the party's emphasis on non-communalism had been responsible for its failure to attract mass support. It was felt that if the party was to succeed, it would have to depend primarily on non-Malays, especially the Chinese, who formed a large part of the population in and around Ipoh, the centre of party's activities. And it was to achieve this that the party began to champion the cause of the non-Malay communities with regard to issues such as citizenship, language and multi-

¹⁴ One of these candidates was D.R. Seenivasagam, one of the founders of the party and its most prominent leader, who contested in his home town of Ipoh.

¹⁵ D.R. Seenivasagam again contested in the Ipoh East constituency and lost to Yap Yin Fah of the MCA.

lingualism and education, etc.

A complete reorientation of the party's policy began in 1956. On 15 March 1956, shouts of *jus soli* echoed in the Perak Library Hall where the party was holding its annual meeting. D.R. Seenivasagam declared: "The Chief Minister speaks of mobilizing the people but there will be no mobilization if there is no *jus soli*. We will not fight if we are not given *jus soli*."¹⁶ At this meeting the party's name was changed to People's Progressive Party.

This changing orientation of the party coincided with the tremendous disenchantment and dissatisfaction among the Chinese with the role that the MCA had played in the preparation of the Report of the Education Committee, 1956¹⁷ and in constitution-making. The controversy with regard to the issue of education had persisted after independence and there were serious disturbances in many Chinese schools all over the country in November 1957. In Perak, the PPP fully backed the Chinese-school students and their teachers in their demand that the Chinese community should be allowed complete freedom to maintain and sustain its own independent system of education. It was in the midst of this controversy that the by-election to the Federal Legislative Council in the

¹⁶ *The Straits Times*, 16 March 1956.

¹⁷ In September 1955, soon after the Alliance had formed the government following its victory in the 1955 federal elections, an Education Committee was set up under the chairmanship of Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein (later the Prime Minister of Malaysia). The committee's report which was published in 1956 made the following main recommendations:

Malay and English would be compulsory subjects in all primary and secondary schools.

Instruction in Kuo Yu and Tamil would be made available in all primary schools maintained in whole or in part from public funds when the parents of fifteen children from any school requested it.

The other language media schools would remain in existence.

All schools conforming to the Government education policy would be eligible for grants-in-aid.

A common syllabus and time table for all schools was to be enforced.

Federation of Malaya, *Report of the Education Committee, 1956*, Kuala Lumpur, Government Press, 1956.

Ipoh-Menglembu constituency was held on 23 November 1957.

The key issue in the election campaign was that of Chinese education and Chinese school students' riots. D.R. Seenivasagam defeated his old rival Yap Yin Fah of the MCA by a convincing margin. The electoral success was of crucial significance as it put the party firmly on the new course.

D. R. Seenivasagam was the first elected non-Malay representative to sit on the opposition benches of the Federal Legislative Council in independent Malaya and it did not take him long to establish himself as the chief spokesman and champion of the rights and interests of the non-Malay communities. The party now started moving further in the direction of an essentially non-Malay communal organization. This brought it immediate success. In early December 1958, the party was able to win all the four seats in the Ipoh Town Council for which elections were held.¹⁸ This gave the party control of the Ipoh Town Council.

On 6 August 1959, the party issued its manifesto, *Blueprint for Equality and Progress*, for the 1959 general elections. It emphasized the need to provide an equal status to all the people of the country. It asserted :

Every citizen of this land should have equal rights and privileges in return for the equal obligations which he owes to King and country. This is a fundamental principle of democratic socialism and to obtain this equality the People's Progressive Party of Malaya will strive to amend the Constitution. Any semblance of special treatment to any one race will inevitably lead to frustration and the establishment of a true Malayan nation will be retarded.

It thus rejected the special position of the Malays. Further, it demanded that the languages of the non-Malay communities be accorded the status of official languages. With regard to education policy, the manifesto reflected wholly the views of those within the Chinese community who were unwilling to accept the *Report of the Education Committee, 1956* and were insistent that the non-Malay communities must have the right

¹⁸ *The Straits Times*, 8 December 1958.

to maintain and sustain their own systems of education.

All this was aimed entirely at securing the support of the non-Malay communities, especially the Chinese. The chief aim of the party was to build itself up as the sole representative of the Chinese community in the State of Perak. The party did well in the 1959 general elections: it captured four seats in the Parliament and eight of a total of 40 in the Perak State Assembly. It emerged as the main opposition in Perak; it had secured 24.3 per cent of the total vote. However, the efforts to establish the party outside Perak proved unsuccessful.

The basis of the party's mass appeal was two-fold: (1) it had established itself as the main spokesman of the non-Malay communities in Perak through its championing of their interests, (2) the two Seenivasagam brothers had attracted large numbers of members and supporters, through legal help and their personal welfare efforts. The bulk of the membership of the party had been from the Chinese New Villages in Perak and the city of Ipoh and the areas around it. Most of the members were of working class origin and were Chinese-educated Chinese; there were some Chinese leaders of the party who were prosperous businessmen. In Ipoh, a large part of the membership consisted of Chinese trishaw-riders, hawkers, stall holders, petty traders, cycle repairers, etc. There were some Indian and Ceylon Tamil members of the party in and around Ipoh. These were generally younger men who had been helped by the Seenivasagam brothers or had been roped in through family connections.

Leadership of the party consisted of two main groups.

1. The two Seenivasagam brothers and a small number of Indians, Ceylon Tamils and Chinese who were loyal to the brothers.
2. A more extremist Chinese group.

The support enjoyed by the two brothers had been extensive. But it "has no depth." "If they were not lawyers they would be nowhere in politics. They are supported because the Chinese rank and file gets something out of them. If the same service and help could be provided by a Chinese they would

kick them out the next day.”¹⁹ S.P. Seenivasagam told the writer that “the party’s support is primarily because of the personal services rendered by us, two brothers. If we were to leave the party it would collapse immediately.”²⁰ The two brothers had always been conscious of this situation. The extremist Chinese group had never been happy about the special role played by the non-Chinese leaders of the party as they viewed the party solely as a party of the Chinese. It was this which had caused the Seenivasagam brothers to seek an electoral arrangement with the People’s Action Party of Singapore in the 1964 general elections.²¹ And as we shall see later, this made S.P. Seenivasagam decide in the post-1969 situation to cooperate with the Alliance in Perak.

THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The United Democratic Party was established on 21 April 1962 by a group of former leaders of the Malayan Chinese Association who had left the MCA after the crisis in the Alliance in 1959. The more prominent of these were Dr. Lim Chong Eu (President of the MCA in 1959), Too Joon Hing (Secretary General), Ng Ek Teong, Chin See Yin, Tan Suan Kok and Lawrence H.C. Huang.

Soon after the Alliance crisis there were widespread reports that these leaders were planning to form a new party as an alternative to the MCA. Strong pressure was put on Dr. Lim by them to lead the formation of the new organization. Dr. Lim, however, did not oblige them at the time as he thought that “these approaches were based on communal issues and a fight on these issues would have stirred up very strong and bitter feelings.”²² It was later the announcement of the plan to form a larger federation in May 1961 that made him change his mind. Dr. Lim told this writer that “when the Tunku decided to form Malaysia, I thought that this was the time to

¹⁹ Interview with a senior leader of the PPP, Ipoh, April 1964.

²⁰ Interview with S. P. Seenivasagam, Ipoh, March 1965.

²¹ See my *Politics in a Plural Society*, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-44.

²² Interview with Dr. Lim Chong Eu, Penang, May 1965.

look into the unresolved communal issues on a wider basis.”²³

Chin See Yin, one of the founders of the party, announced on 11 April 1962 that a “get together” of independent Councillors of the Seremban Town Council, their supporters, and others interested in the political development of the country in the context of the idea of the larger federation of Malaysia would be held in Seremban on 21-22 April. He further said :

This get-together will provide us with an opportunity to discuss fully the political problems arising in the Federation and other territories involved and to consider the desirability of forming a new party to solve the problems. . . . The new party will be formed on a strictly non-communal basis and based on a policy which will be acceptable to and benefit all sections of the people of the country as a whole.²⁴

However, Chin See Yin, one of the key leaders of the pro-Chinese group within the party, told the writer that the party was “formed for the protection of non-Malays, in particular the Chinese.”²⁵

Dr. Lim Chong Eu, who led the non-communal element, however, had a different view of the role of the new party. He declared at the inaugural meeting: “We are forming a truly patriotic national organization in which all citizens will enjoy equal rights. . . . It will not think in terms of communalism but will work positively for a united nation.”²⁶ In an interview with the writer, he outlined the following as the main motivation for the formation of the party:

1. Equality is the cardinal factor. Our experience in the Alliance indicated that the Alliance was fraught with danger. If fundamental issues came up in the Alliance the cleavage would be on communal lines whereas in a truly Malaysian type of organization if there was any cleavage it would be on economic and social lines. To create a balance rather

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *The Malay Mail*, 19 April 1962.

²⁵ Interview with Chin See Yin, Seremban, July 1964.

²⁶ *The Straits Times*, 22 April 1962.

than build up a new society is the basis of the Alliance policy. But to us the building up of a new society is of the greatest importance and this can be done only on the basis of equality.

2. Experience of the Indian National Congress in India and the Kuomintang in China is an indication of the process of the petrification of a national party. The building up of a loyal opposition which could eventually take over is imperative. Parliamentary democracy in Malaysia as a result of the petrification of the national party, the Alliance, has become less and less viable. To make it viable the United Democratic Party had to be formed and the establishment of the new Federation Malaysia was the right time for this.²⁷

Talking from a more personal view, he added:

Essentially the drive towards a non-communal Malaysia is a drive for identity and security. Colonialism did bring many benefits to this country. But at the same time it uprooted the cultural patterns of the various communities living in the area. Many of them today belong nowhere—East or West. They want the feeling of being accepted. They want facilities for the flowering of their genius. To them the new Malaysian nation represents the fulfillment of a basic human need. Communal politics denies this human need.

There was a clear split in the party between the non-communalists led by Dr. Lim and the extremist Chinese led by Chin See Yin. The latter did not subscribe to the views of Dr. Lim. The inaugural meeting of the party was largely dominated by the extremists; Chin See Yin was elected the Secretary-General and his close associate from Seremban, Quok Kai Dong, the Assistant Secretary-General. It is significant that the party was inaugurated in Seremban, a stronghold of Chinese chauvinists, and not in Penang, the home town of Dr. Lim and well known as an enlightened and cosmopolitan city. It was the pre-eminent role played by the extremists that

²⁷ Interview with Dr. Lim Chong Eu, Penang, May 1965.

made *The Straits Times* doubt the professions of non-communalism by the party leaders at the time of its formation.

It is more than likely, however, that the preponderant appeal of the United Democratic Party will be felt by a single community, bearing in mind the political background of most of its leaders and their past espousal of issues on which their political reputations have been built.²⁸

The party had expected that all the Chinese who had become disenchanted with the Malayan Chinese Association would be attracted by it. However, the response was extremely poor; the party failed to attract large membership. Very few branches were organized and there was little other activity. The major factor was the serious disagreement among its leaders with regard to the character, appeal and policy orientation of the party.

Relations between the two groups within the party deteriorated when in late 1962 and early 1963 Dr. Lim began to show interest in the formation of an anti-Alliance united front, including the radical Socialist Front. It was in the midst of mounting differences that the first Central Assembly of the party convened in Kuala Lumpur on 14 April 1963. In Kuala Lumpur the local party organization was controlled by moderates, Lawrence H.C. Huang and Ng Ek Teong, who were closely associated with Dr. Lim. The moderates were ascendant in the meeting and a showdown was inevitable. Dato Zainal Abidin bin Haji Abas, a very prominent Malay who had been associated with the formation of the UMNO as well as the IMP, was unanimously elected President. Chin See Yin and Quok Kai Dong, the two key leaders of the extremists, were ousted from the key positions that they had held in the past. They not only lost their positions as Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General but were unable to find places on the Executive Committee.

Within a few days the extremists left the party. First the six Councillors of the party in the Seremban Town Council and Quok Kai Dong resigned.²⁹ Chin See Yin, the foremost leader

²⁸ 24 April 1962.

²⁹ *The Malay Mail*, 18 April 1963.

of the group soon followed suit and declared that he did not share the views of Dr. Lim on forming a united front of the opposition parties. He maintained that in early 1962, when Dr. Lim had gone to him with the idea of the new party, he had agreed to the following:

1. To fight for the rights of the non-Malays, especially in education which should be based on a more reasonable policy than the Razak Report.
2. While recognizing Malay as the national language, multi-lingualism should be allowed in all councils.
3. To fight for fair distribution of land and equal employment in the administration and the defence of the country.³⁰

He further said:

Sometime in the later part of 1962, like a bolt from the blue, there appeared a newspaper report stating that Dr. Lim had discussions with Party Negara, the PMIP and the SF [Socialist Party] with a view to forming a united front.

Since that time Dr. Lim and I have not agreed with one another's views. I was also amazed to receive a telephone call one night from Dr. Lim asking me to attend an all-opposition parties' meeting in Penang to oppose the Alliance concept of Malaysia and condemn the arbitrary arrest of Inche Boestamam [President of Party Raayat]. . .

The choice of a former Deputy President of Party Negara [Dato Zainal Abidin] as the new President of the UDP clearly shows the reincarnation of the Party Negara in the body of the UDP.

The writer was told by Chin See Yin that the UDP was formed "for the protection of the non-Malays, in particular the Chinese. Communalism and chauvinism are a fact. Anyone who says that he is non-communal and not chauvinistic is a hypocrite."³¹ He further observed that when a Malay talks about

³⁰ *The Straits Times*, 19 April 1963.

³¹ Interview with Chin See Yin, Seremban, July 1964.

the rights and interests of Malays it is said to be nationalism and not communalism. But when a Chinese talks of Chinese interests he is branded as a communalist. He emphasized that a lot of the ills of the Malaysian society were a result of the inadequate system of education. In order to be effective the education system "must be made to mould the younger people through each community's culture."

With the exit of the extremists, the party was able to establish a limited measure of cooperation with the Socialist Front. Together the two organizations were able to form coalitions to assume control of Town Councils of Seremban, Taiping and Bentong in July 1963.³² Not long afterwards, at its Second Central Assembly held at Segamat on 12 January 1964, the party assumed a more progressive and less communal position. In a resolution it committed itself to the establishment of an egalitarian society based on the principle of justice for all.³³ It condemned the presence of foreign military bases on Malaysian soil. In an obvious attempt to placate the Malays, it promised that it will "promote and ensure the economic and cultural upliftment of all races particularly to improve the economic position of all workers and peasants *and those who are economically backward*."³⁴ On the contentious issue of education again the party attempted to present its position in a non-communal and unemotional manner: "We shall take into special consideration the failure of the Alliance educational policy to establish an adequate and proper development of the system of education in the national language and the suppression of the equal opportunity for development of schools teaching in other language media. . . ."

This new orientation of the party, especially on issues such as education, disappointed sections of the Chinese community who looked toward the party as a champion of the Chinese interests. The vagueness of the party's position on education was considered completely inadequate by them; they had expected the party to take a forthright and strong stand in favour of the

³² *The Straits Times*, 16, 18 and 24 July 1963.

³³ United Democratic Party, *Resolutions Passed by the Meeting of the Central General Assembly* (mimeographed), 12 January 1964.

³⁴ Emphasis added.

right of the Chinese community to operate its own particular system of education.

However, soon the party adopted a more definite and unambiguous position on the education issue in its manifesto for the 1964 general elections; it could hardly afford to disregard its support among the Chinese. The manifesto asserted:

All Malay schools and all Chinese, Tamil and English schools accepting Malay as a compulsory subject shall be entitled to equal treatment by Government and the medium of instruction shall be the medium of examination.

School Leaving Certificates, whether obtained in the National Language or in the other media, shall be accepted as of equivalent status in the seeking of employment and livelihood.³⁵

The party thus moved a some way to meet the position of the extremists in the Chinese community. It further pledged in the manifesto to "ensure that equal opportunities for securing employment and livelihood will be given to all citizens. . . ." This was an indirect attack on the special position of the Malays.

However, this new orientation of the party did not help it in the elections. It put up a large number of candidates and most of them did badly. All its successes, one seat in the Parliament and four in the State Assembly, were in the state of Penang, the home state of Dr. Lim. Elsewhere the party found only insignificant support. The party had put up as many as 36 Malay candidates all of whom were defeated, most of them losing their deposits.

This proved to be the beginning of the end of the party. As we shall later see Dr. Lim Chong Eu joined hands with the English-educated moderates of the Labour Party to form a new party based on non-communalism.

Thus, by the mid-sixties the parties of the non-Malays had become weak and ineffectual because of internal dissension and conflict and lack of consensus with regard to the parties' policy and programmes and attitude towards the crucial commu-

³⁵ United Democratic Party, *Election Manifesto—1964 Parliamentary Elections*.

nal issues. They were in no position to challenge effectively Malay political paramountcy. They had failed to articulate, organize and unite the non-Malay communities and as a result by the time that the new federation of Malaysia was formed in September 1963 a widespread general sense of helplessness and gloom prevailed among the non-Malays. The common mood was to accept the reality of Malay political paramountcy and learn to live with it.

V

MALAYSIA AND THE THREAT TO MALAY PARAMOUNTCY POLITICAL

UNTIL Malaysia was formed in September 1963, political paramountcy of the Malays had not been threatened in any serious manner by the non-Malays and their organizations within the Alliance and those outside in the opposition. The parties that challenged this basis of politics had largely failed to articulate, mobilize and unite the non-Malays. This situation, however, changed radically with the entry of Singapore into the new federation.

FORMATION OF MALAYSIA

The Malays and their leaders had long opposed the incorporation of Singapore into Malaya. In consequence in 1948, when the Federation of Malaya was inaugurated Singapore was delinked from Malaya. And in 1957, when Malaya emerged as an independent nation and the Crown Colonies of Penang and Malacca were merged into it, Singapore was left out and maintained as a Crown Colony. The Malay view was that Singapore, with its uproarious and sometimes violent traditions of radical left-wing politics, would be a bad influence on the generally placid politics of Malaya dominated by feudal and capitalist elements. It was also feared that it would introduce a more tough and determined leadership from across the causeway that could unite non-Malays and make them more assertive and demanding. Further, the Malays were seriously concerned about the racial balance of population which would be upset in favour of non-Malays with the inclusion of the predominantly non-Malay Singapore.

However, by 1961 the British were able to persuade Tunku

Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister of Malaya and the foremost leader of the Malays, that the joining together of Singapore and Malaya may not be all that bad; it certainly had its positive side. With the increasing influence of Chinese chauvinists and communists in Singapore, the British were able to impress on the Tunku that it was better for him to have them within the federation, where their activities could be controlled and their influence curbed, than allow them to remain outside as a communist Cuba to the United States. The analogy with Cuba was often mentioned at the time in Malaya. The British, on their side, with decolonization having been effected all around were increasingly coming to view their continued presence in Singapore and the Borneo territories as more of a liability; it seemed no more necessary for the protection of their vital economic and commercial interests and capital investments in the area. For the ruling party in Singapore, the People's Action Party, it was a matter of sheer survival. Merger with Malaya, ruled by the strongly anti-communist and Malay-dominated Alliance, seemed to the leadership of the People's Action Party to be the only way they could cope with the tremendous threat mounted by the Chinese chauvinists and communists in Singapore to the position of the PAP as the ruling party.

It was in these circumstances that in May 1961 Tunku Abdul Rahman made the surprise announcement of Malaya's approval of the idea of the larger federation including Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo, Sarawak and Brunei. In this, however, the Tunku did not carry with him the entire Malay community. Even within the UMNO there were significant sections who had grave doubts about the proposal. They, especially those belonging to the extremist faction, Syed Jaafar Albar, Syed Nasir bin Ismail, Ghafar bin Baba, warned the Tunku that he was playing into the hands of the British and committing a certain folly.¹ Their view was that Lee Kuan Yew, the foremost leader of the ruling People's Action Party of Singapore, had larger ambitions and would certainly attempt to extend his influence across the causeway into Malaya. But the extremists did not get very far in their opposition to Malaysia chiefly

¹ Interviews with Syed Jaafar Albar and Syed Nasir bin Ismail, Kuala Lumpur, August and September 1963.

because at this time the Tunku was at the height of his power. They were, however, successful in getting the UMNO to insist that the new States in the federation would be accorded the same status as enjoyed by the existing member States of the Federation of Malaya. It should also be noted here that UMNO's approval of the new federation was based on the view that Malaysia was a substantial step in the direction of their cherished goal *Melayu Raya* (The Great Malay Fatherland). The UMNO resolution of 4 November 1961 giving the Tunku the mandate to go ahead with the formation of Malaysia and all other UMNO documents relating to Malaysia never used the term Malaysia; they always referred to it as *Melayu Raya*.

In the negotiations for the formation of Malaysia, the Tunku agreed to accord Singapore a special status in the new federation; Singapore was given control over labor and education. This was done in exchange for a significantly lower representation for Singapore in the Malaysian Parliament. The UMNO extremists were very angry about it. Syed Jaafar Albar, then Secretary-General of the UMNO, told the writer that "these are the two areas [labour and educational institutions] where communists operate. They do not have jungles in Singapore where the communists can hide. They thrive only in Chinese schools and labour unions."² The view of the extremists was that Singapore control over labour and education would make it difficult for the federal Government (controlled by the Malays) to curb and contain the activities of Chinese communist and chauvinist elements in Singapore. They also maintained that Singapore, enjoying autonomy in the field of education, would pursue its own educational policy, giving recognition to Chinese and Tamil schools and according official status to Chinese and Tamil languages. This would make it more difficult for Alliance educational policy, based on national schools (teaching through the medium of English and Malaya and eventually only Malay medium) and Malay as the sole national language, to be accepted by the non-Malays in Malaya. The non-Malays would naturally look toward Singapore and the PAP and seek the introduction of the same policy in peninsular

² Interview with Syed Jaafar Albar, Kuala Lumpur, September 1963.

Malaya. They also believed that this would give the PAP an especially effective appeal among the non-Malay communities and enable it to establish itself as their main representative and spokesman.

There is no doubt that Tunku Abdul Rahman was fully conscious of the impact on Malayan politics of Singapore's entry into Malaysia. In order to significantly restrict Singapore's role in federal politics, it was allocated only 15 seats (about 9 per cent) in the Malaysian Parliament out of a total of 159 when it accounted for over 16 per cent of the population of the country.³ Further, a special Singapore citizenship was created which barred those possessing it (including most of the PAP leaders) from voting and contesting elections in Malaya. It is also widely maintained that Tunku was able to secure a gentleman's agreement from Lee Kuan Yew that he and his party, the PAP, would restrict their role only to Singapore politics; they would not enter the Malayan political arena.

INTENSIFICATION OF COMMUNAL AND POLITICAL CONTRADICTIONS

Conflict between the Singapore rulers and the Alliance leadership materialized sooner than expected. Within months of the formation of Malaysia, the occasion was provided by the decision of the PAP to contest the elections across the causeway in Malaya.

On 1 March 1964, only days before the date of nomination for the candidates, Dr. Toh Chin Chye, Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore and the Chairman of the PAP, while inaugurating a new Tamil newspaper in Singapore surprised everybody by diverging from the text of his speech to announce that his party would field a small number of candidates in the Malayan elections. Dr. Toh argued that the PAP, which had played an important part in the formation of Malaysia, must

³ In contrast, Sabah and Sarawak, with 4.5 per cent and 7.3 per cent of the total population of Malaysia were allocated 16 and 24 seats respectively in the Malaysian Parliament. In both, the Malays and the other indigenous people formed a very sizable part of the population.

Dari Dulu
 ini adalah pasal
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consider itself a national organization and therefore must participate in the elections. And conscious of the strong reaction that this was bound to evoke from the UMNO, he hastened to add that the PAP did not intend to fight the federal government or the UMNO.

*Far from it. It is our purpose to cooperate with UMNO and the Central Government of Malaysia to help Malaysia succeed. We will therefore play a token part*⁴

He further asserted:

If we are content only to remain a political party in Singapore, our task to build a happy and prosperous Malaysia will be restricted This election must be won by the pro-Malaysian parties. It is a matter of life and death for us that the Federation of Malaysia should succeed.

The principal aim of the PAP was to defeat the Socialist Front, vehemently opposed to Malaysia and closely linked with the pro-communist Barisan Sosialis of Singapore, in the urban areas of the country by exposing it as a pro-Indonesian communist-front organization. The manifesto of the PAP said:

We must realize quickly that the Socialist Front . . . is the advance guard of the Indonesian Communist Party . . .

In the urban areas because of the ineffectiveness of the MCA, the PAP has to help in the battle against the anti-Malaysia Socialist Front. The task of the PAP is to ensure that protest votes in urban areas do not become votes against Malaysia and for Sukarno.⁵

The fear of the PAP was that the MCA, dominated by prosperous businessmen and upper class Chinese, had lost its influence among the Chinese and as a consequence many Chinese, in order to show their disapproval of the MCA and its policies, might for lack of any other choice cast their vote for the Socialist Front.

⁴ *The Straits Times*, 2 March 1964 (emphasis added).

⁵ *Election Manifesto of the People's Action Party*, March 1964, p. 1.

In an attempt to further dispel UMNO fears of the PAP intervention, the party soon after nomination day withdrew the candidature of its small number of Malay candidates fielded against UMNO nominees in Johore.⁶ The Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, declared on 15 March that the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak in the UMNO "is vital to the survival and success of Malaysia." He further emphasized:

... it is in Malaysia's national interest to see that every UMNO candidate is supported in all the rural areas of Malaysia . . . If UMNO is returned in strength, then the policy of a Malaysia separate from Indonesia represented by the Tunku and Tun Razak would be that much underscored by the mass of the rural people . . . But no Malaysian will get any joy in seeing the policy represented by the Tunku and Tun Razak weakened by diminishing support in the rural areas through defections to obscurantist groups using religious bigotry as their main weapon to bring Malaysia closer to absorption by Indonesia.⁷

It was obvious that the PAP leadership was extremely keen to establish cooperation with the UMNO; they saw the UMNO as the only alternative to potentially powerful groups within the Malay community who were strongly wedded to the idea that the Malays could protect themselves against the Chinese in Malaysia only by linking their country with Indonesia. Lee Kuan Yew showed full understanding of the situation when he said:

It is true, if we wish to demonstrate the desire of the urban

⁶ "It was conscious and declared policy of the Party not to challenge the Malay leadership of the country as represented in UMNO. So two of our candidates nominated for Johore Bahru constituencies withdrew from the contest when their opponents turned out to be UMNO and not MCA candidates." "Statement of Objectives and Policy by the Central Committee of the PAP on its Tenth Anniversary," *Our First Ten Years*, 10th Anniversary Souvenir, Singapore, 21 November 1964, p. 111.

⁷ *The Straits Times*, 16 March 1964 (emphasis added).

population of Malaya to support economic and social policies designed to provide more equal opportunities, that we should field as many candidates as there are seats in the urban areas.

We will not do this for very compelling reasons. We believe that any massive intervention in the election can be misinterpreted and will be presented to the rural Malays as an attempt to challenge UMNO. This will be bad for Malaysia for it will encourage extremist Malay elements to work up feeling that *with merger and Malaysia the position of the Malays has been endangered and the Chinese in the towns are making a bid for power.*⁸

He further asserted:

If their [Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Razak] policy of a separate Malaysia in which our various communities are participating in full in the political, economic and social life of the country, can be made by Malay extremists to appear to lead to the Malays losing their safeguarded political position, then a dangerous situation will arise. For then the way is open for pro-Indonesian groups either inside or outside UMNO to emerge and replace the present leadership.

The PAP leadership felt that the MCA had little to contribute with regard to the future of Malaysia as a genuine multi-racial society. It began to view itself more and more as the right kind of organization to perform this role of building an integrated new nation with the help and cooperation of the UMNO. It believed that it was the only organization that could achieve this without losing the confidence of the non-Malay masses. It was this that made the leadership of the PAP give the clear impression that they sought to replace the MCA in the Alliance. However, the leadership of the UMNO had little interest in it; they had little faith and trust in the PAP leadership and they were certain that the PAP would hardly cooperate and work together with the UMNO on the basis on which they had built up the alliance with the MCA and the

⁸ *The Straits Times*, 18 March 1964 (emphasis added).

MIC. Soon the Tunku spurned the idea altogether in no uncertain terms. In an eve-of-election speech on 23 April 1964 he said that it was obvious that the PAP aimed to take the place of the MCA in the Alliance, but he would have none of it. He added:

I have said before that the MCA have served the Chinese and the country so well that even if there are only five members of the MCA left in the Parliament, I will still support this organization because of its achievements and its objectives.⁹

In all, the attempts by the PAP leadership to explain the reasons for their intervention in the Malayan elections and to seek cooperation and understanding with the UMNO were of no avail; UMNO leadership was not at all influenced by the neat arguments of the PAP intellectuals. They viewed it entirely as an attempt by the PAP to establish a foothold in Malaya and eventually use this to build itself up as the chief spokesman of the non-Malay communities.

The PAP's approach to the situation was on the whole a failure: it was not only not able to allay the fears of the Malays,¹⁰ it did very badly in the elections. Of the 15 seats it contested in the State elections it secured one and collected only 0.9 per cent of total vote. In the Parliamentary elections it fielded 11 candidates, only one of them being successful.¹¹ As a

⁹ *The Straits Times*, 24 April 1964. Lee Kuan Yew's response to the statement by the Tunku was the following: "In the heat of elections, it is said that even though there only five MCA MP's left, UMNO will carry on with the MCA. That may well be. But can UMNO leaders go through the awful predicament of pretending for the next five years that these five MCA MP's really represent the urban Chinese—five men who have won by UMNO's leave and license in Malay rural areas."

¹⁰ In a "Statement of Objectives and Policy" the party itself asserted: "The fears and anxieties of the Malay rural base, which would be aroused by large urban crowds mainly of Chinese and Indians rallying to our party banner, was underestimated." *Our First Ten Years*, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

¹¹ The failure of the PAP did not necessarily mean that it lacked attraction for the non-Malays. It was largely a result of the special

result, following the elections, the party initiated a new approach: realizing the urgent imperative of having some support and cooperation of the Malays of its own it made a desperate bid to make direct approach to the Malay masses on a class basis and the party's socialist character and programme.

It asserted in a "Statement of Objectives and Policy":

Our hope of orderly and sensible development is that more and more educated Malays trained in the humanities and the sciences will emerge as a leavening force in the Malay leadership. Such men, understanding the real reasons for Malay poverty and slowness in economic and social advancement, will find themselves in sympathy with the policies of the PAP. . . .

It is the role of the PAP in Malaysia to convince the moderate leadership of the Malays that there is a rational economic method to abolishing rural poverty. There is an identity of purpose here between us and the moderate Malay leadership. . . .

It is probable that democratic socialist policies as represented by the PAP may find acceptance and support in other areas in the Peninsula. This will come about more quickly not by present PAP leaders taking an aggressive lead and setting the pace of the politics, but more by helping to quicken the emergence of like-minded leaders domiciled in the Peninsula. The immediate role of the PAP therefore is to provide a catalyst, through ideas and examples for the emergence of like-minded leaders in the Peninsula sympathetic to the democratic socialist cause.¹²

felt

One of the key leaders of the PAP, told the writer that he felt that eventually the Malays would give up extreme Malay nationalism and realize that it did not help them in the long run. "But the PAP only hopes that this realization comes

situation brought about in the country by Indonesian confrontation and the party's lack of a proper organization and suitable candidates in Malaya and its negative election campaign. For full details see my "The 1964 General Elections in Malaya," *International Studies*, Vol. VII, No. 1, July 1965, pp. 39-56.

¹² *Our First Ten Years, op. cit.*, pp. 111-12.

before there is serious trouble. What we have decided and started doing is to launch an ideological offensive. We hope to attract the Malays to the PAP through ideology."¹³

However, the extremists in the UMNO were quick to see through this new approach of the PAP and immediately began their efforts to nullify it. They were instrumental in precipitating serious communal riots in Singapore in July 1964.¹⁴ At first, the PAP responded in a moderate manner. It called this "manifestation of extreme Malay nationalism as a temporary inevitable phase."¹⁵ But soon the growing vehemance of the UMNO propaganda against the PAP, the ascendancy of the extremist leaders within the UMNO and lack of any effort by Tunku Abdul Rahman to intervene and discipline the extremists convinced the PAP that the situation was far more serious than it had reckoned it to be. They came to believe that the Tunku was at least conniving at the extremists' attempts to provoke the PAP and force a showdown. Lee Kuan Yew said in a speech at Kuala Lumpur on 24 February 1965:

The last three weeks starting with the Tunku's Chinese New Year Message mark the beginning of a new phase of Malaysia. It is a turning point, for recent Alliance speeches give expression to a fundamental decision, which must have been taken by their leaders to write off any hope of winning over large urban areas like Singapore. By their series of public pronouncements they have disabled themselves from competing for mass support in Singapore and other sophisticated urban areas in Malaysia. Their primary interest now is to hold on to their base in Malaya. . . . He [Tunku Abdul Rahman] urged 'leaders of Singapore should concentrate their thought, efforts and work to build Singapore into the foremost city and the biggest port in Asia, because if they do so how happy it would be for all'. I find this a frank statement. If they wanted to compete, they must offer a better alternative

¹³ Interview with S. Rajaratnam, Foreign Minister of Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, December 1964.

¹⁴ For details see my *The Malaysian General Election of 1969*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁵ Interview with S. Rajaratnam, Kuala Lumpur, December 1964.

government. Instead, here was a frank admission that Singapore could not be won over by an Alliance type party. Therefore, as the Tunku added, all would be happy if Singapore leaders should concentrate all their energies to make this the biggest city in Asia.

What was left unsaid and so all the more underlined was that the People's Action Party should get out of Malaya and stop offering democratic socialism as an alternative to Alliancism, i.e. the policies of conservative Malay traditionalist leaders collaborating with Chinese compradores and capitalists for mutual benefit.¹⁶

He further asserted:

For the eight years 1955 to 1963, the Malay traditionalists felt supremely secure. But with Malaysia came newer alternative leaderships which had to be contended. One of them was the People's Action Party, preaching multi-racialism and Malaysian nationalism . . . [and] making an appeal to both Malay and non-Malay havenots for a more effective way of raising their educational and living standards.

So an attempt was made to break this multi-racial approach and to wrest back every bit of Malay support that had gone to the People's Action Party.

It was in response to this situation that the Singapore Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, turned away from the declared policy of the PAP not to take "an aggressive lead and setting the pace of politics"¹⁷ when he introduced the extremely effective slogan

¹⁶ Lee Kuan Yew, *Towards a Malaysian Malaysia*, Ministry of Culture, Singapore, 1965, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷ This policy had been formulated only a few months earlier. See *Our First Ten Years*, *op. cit.*, p. 112. It is significant to note that the response of the PAP leadership to the situation was quite different from that of the non-Malay leadership in Malaya. In 1959, when the new leadership of the MCA was confronted with the crisis in the Alliance it desisted from forcing a showdown, rather the leaders chose to withdraw from the MCA. Singapore leaders, not having been brought up in a Malay country and not having lived through an atmosphere of Malay paramountcy, showed little regard for Malay sensitivities and in the process wrecked

of Malaysian Malaysia.¹⁸ According to the PAP the "fundamental principles" on which Malaysia was founded were the following:

- (a) Malaysia should be a democratic society where legitimate differences of views provided they accept undivided loyalty to the Malaysian nation should be permitted and where individuals and political parties should have full freedom to persuade its citizens, by constitutional means, to their particular point of view.
- (b) Malaysia was conceived as belonging to Malaysians as a whole and not to any particular community or race.¹⁹

Unfortunately, as the PAP saw it Malaysia had degenerated into a *Malay* Malaysia where "the spirit and essence of Malaysia" was identified with "the interests and norms of one particular community or with the authority of one particular political party. For them, being a Malaysian means all other communities and groups adjusting themselves to the views and specific aspirations of a particular community."²⁰ The PAP leadership believed that this had happened because those who believed in a Malaysian Malaysia had remained passive and had not openly declared their loyalty to the concept of a Malaysian Malaysia.²¹ And therefore, the PAP initiated a move to organize and unite the pro-Malaysian Malaysia forces within the country. In early 1965, it held informal discussions with these groups which resulted in the formation of the Malaysian Solidarity National Conference. In this they were able to bring together the People's Progressive Party, the United Democratic Party and important political groups in Sabah and Sarawak.

their own position in the Federation of Malaysia and did tremendous harm to the position and future of the non-Malay communities.

¹⁸ The idea of Malaysian Malaysia was formulated in three speeches by Lee Kuan Yew in February-March 1965. They have been reproduced in *Towards a Malaysian Malaysia*, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ *Statement by the Convenors of the Malaysian Solidarity National Conference*, undated (mimeographed).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

This attempt to unite the non-Malay opposition alarmed the Malays; they saw it as nothing less than proof of dangerous ambition of the Singapore Prime Minister to extend his political influence and eventually establish control over the Peninsula. In consequence, extremism thrived among the Malays with greater vigor. Slogans, placards and posters demanding CRUSH LEE KUAN YEW, SUSPEND SINGAPORE'S CONSTITUTION, DETAIN LEE KUAN YEW, MAKE SINGAPORE A SECOND KERALA began appearing in Malay meetings. During the UMNO General Assembly meeting at Kuala Lumpur in mid-May 1965 there were repeated demands by speakers for the arrest and detention of Lee Kuan Yew. It was widely rumoured that the UMNO extremists were pressing Tunku Abdul Rahman to order the arrest of Lee Kuan Yew and take over the administration of Singapore. It was believed that Tunku's deputy, Tun Abdul Razak, was fully behind the extremists. It was a clear challenge to Tunku Abdul Rahman's leadership. Many Malays had come to feel that Tunku's benign leadership and approach had brought about this situation and they had begun openly talking about the necessity to have a stronger leader. Tun Razak's name was widely mentioned among them. The hostility and anger among the Malays had got to a point where Tunku Abdul Rahman was forced to take drastic action as much to solve the problem as to save his own position as the preeminent leader of the Malays. The Tunku, with his innate knack for avoiding headlong confrontation and serious communal violence, chose to tackle the problem in his own way by persuading Singapore to leave the federation even though this meant a serious loss of (his royal) face as he had been the one person in Malaya most responsible for the creation of Malaysia with Singapore as a member. On 9 August 1965, proclamations were issued in both Singapore and Kuala Lumpur announcing the separation of Singapore from Malaysia.²²

This desperate action of Tunku, however, failed to resolve the serious issues raised by the PAP. Even though the PAP was removed from the Malayan political scene its impact was there to plague Malaysian politics and eventually culminate in

²² For details see Ministry of Culture, Singapore, *Separation, Singapore's Independence on 9th August 1965*.

the bloody communal holocaust of May 1969. During its two years in the federation, the PAP had succeeded in awakening and articulating the non-Malay communities to a degree that the entire non-Malay opposition had failed to achieve over a much longer period of its existence and efforts. The Chinese and Indian communities which had largely reconciled themselves to the situation in the past (for they lacked a strong political organization which could give effective expression to their views and wishes) were now suddenly roused to action. They began to think and worry about their future and consequently the contentious communal issues once more became alive. The articulateness, vigor and strength of the PAP leadership gave the non-Malays courage; for the first time they began to feel that they were not helpless as a well-organized political force, which ruled Singapore, was behind them. They were severely shaken by the separation of Singapore for they believed that Singapore was forced out of the federation only because it had raised these issues and demanded a Malaysian Malaysia which they themselves had always cherished and hoped for in the future. Malaysian Malaysia was transformed from a mere vague and expedient slogan of Lee Kuan Yew into the clarion-call for non-Malay unity and action.

The PAP's activities had its impact on the Malay community too. It sharply intensified Malay fears of the non-Malays and the threats to their position in their country. It undermined Tunku Abdul Rahman's position as the preeminent leader of the Malays and Malaysia and his approach to the problems which preferred compromise to confrontation; the fear of the non-Malays forced the Malays to look for a tough leader who could be trusted not to make any compromise with regard to the fundamental interests of the Malays. And it was only a matter of time when Tunku was eased out.

In the circumstances, intensification of communal antipathies and confrontation between the Malays and the non-Malays was inevitable. For the first time in independent Malaya and Malaysia serious communal riots took place in Singapore and Bukit Meratjam (Penang) during July 1964. Dozens of people were killed and hundreds injured in these riots.

FORMATION OF DEMOCRATIC ACTION PARTY AND THE
GERAKAN RAKYAT MALAYSIA

It was in the context of this growing communal disharmony that two new political parties, the Democratic Action Party and the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysian People's Movement), were formed. The formation of DAP was of especial significance as it was far more homogenous and united than any of the opposition parties formed in the past and it presented a more pro-non-Malay and clear-cut policy and program. The party did not shun controversy and confrontation and therefore was successful in providing leadership and a rallying point for non-Malays angry and disillusioned with the MCA and the MIC. Through its open approach it was able to set the pace for politics and had an enormous influence on post-1965 Malaysian politics. It succeeded in doing this as its credibility had already been established by its parent organization, the PAP, during the period 1963-65.

After Singapore was forced to leave Malaysia one of the key leaders of the PAP and its only representative in the Malaysian Parliament from Malaya, C. V. Devan Nair, found himself stuck in Malaysia as he was a Malaysian citizen by birth. Under his leadership "a completely Malaysian-based PAP took over, in a much more modest fashion, of course, from where the largely Singapore-based PAP had left off."²³ However, the Malaysian Government deregistered the party on 9 September 1965 on the ground that it now had its base in a foreign country. Thereupon, the leaders of the party decided to organize it under a new name and after considerable controversy, the government approved the registration of the new party, the Democratic Action Party, on 19 March 1966.

Right from the time of its inception, the DAP presented itself as the champion of Malaysian Malaysia. Guided by the experience of the PAP in its complete failure to attract Malay support and earning the wrath of UMNO in the process, the DAP pursued a vigorous approach to communal issues hoping

²³ Democratic Action Party, "Central Executive Committee Report to the First Party Conference", 17 March 1968, quoted in DAP, *Who Lives if Malaysia Dies?*, 1969, p. 3.

that it would help establish the party as the chief representative of the non-Malay communities. It did not make any special effort to woo Malay support. Its "basic guiding policy and principles" were presented in *The Setapak Declaration* announced on 29 July 1967. The party committed itself to the ideal of a free, democratic and socialist Malaysia, based on the principles of racial equality and social and economic justice.²⁴ It called for the implementation of the principle of racial equality "at all levels of national life and in all fields of national endeavor political, social, economic, cultural and educational."²⁵ It laid great emphasis on demolishing the idea of racial hegemony by one community for it was not only undesirable but also unworkable in view of the racial composition of the population in the country. It maintained that the Malays did not constitute a "national majority" and that any single community, by itself, was outnumbered by the rest so as to make the idea of racial hegemony completely unworkable. It also took exception to the classification of citizens into *Bumiputras* and *non-bumiputras* and rejected the practice of discrimination against citizens in matters of "appointments and promotions" particularly in the public sector and now increasingly in the private sector on grounds of race."²⁶ This was a clear rejection by the party of the special position of the Malays guaranteed under the Constitution. Even the PAP, when it had introduced the slogan of Malaysian Malaysia, it had avoided an open attack on the special position of the Malays; in fact, it had publicly committed itself to uphold the privileges enjoyed by the Malays.

On the contentious issues of language, education and culture, the DAP again adopted a more extreme position than that taken by the PAP earlier. The DAP rejected the premise that "the propagation and permanence of the national language can only be finally secured on the basis of the eventual deculturation of two major communities in Malaysia—the Chinese and the Indians."²⁷ It asserted that the constitutional guarantee

²⁴ Democratic Action Party, *The Setapak Declaration*, p. 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

with regard to the free use of the languages of the Chinese and the Indians had been "rendered sterile by an educational policy which did not permit the free use of the Chinese and Tamil languages as media of instruction and of examination in national-type secondary schools."²⁸ It promised to restore the constitutional guarantee and in addition secure the use of Chinese and Tamil for official purposes.

This tough approach of the party was successful; in a short period of time it was able to attract a large number of younger people in the non-Malay communities. And its further shift, at the time of the 1969 general elections, towards a pro-non-Malay position was to bring it the support of an even wider cross-section of the non-Malay communities, especially the Chinese. It was soon able to establish itself as the main non-Malay opposition party.

The Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia was inaugurated on 24 March 1968. The key sponsors of the party were Dr. Tan Chee Khoon and V. Veerappen (both former leaders of the Labour Party), and Dr. Lim Chong Eu (the foremost leader of the United Democratic Party). The nature of the leadership of the party determined its popular base; in the main it was able to attract the English-educated moderates of the Labour Party and those Chinese supporters of Dr. Lim Chong Eu in the United Democratic Party who were not chauvinistic in their orientation. The Party's leadership also made a special effort to attract the support of trade unions. In its attempt to establish a genuinely non-communal political party, the leadership considered the support of trade unions, the largest single non-communal force in the country, as of crucial importance. In this it was successful. Soon after its formation, the party was able to bring in Yeoh Teck Chye, a leading trade unionist and the President of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress, as its Vice-Chairman and V. David, another well-known trade union leader, as Deputy-Secretary-General. Many other trade union leaders were to join the party later and soon it was able to establish itself as the party most closely associated with the trade union movement in Malaysia.

At the same time it made a special effort to attract Malays

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6

to the leadership and rank and file so as to strengthen the non-communal character of the party. It elected a respected and well-known Malay intellectual, Professor Syed Hussein Al-Atas, as its first Chairman. Five of the sixteen members elected to the *pro-tem* committee of the party were Malays. The fundamentals of the party's policy and programme announced on 15 April 1968 laid great emphasis on non-communalism and a made special mention of the needs of the Malays.

We recognize the need to accord special attention and emphasis on the economically weak Malays and other indigenous peoples. Their problems require a special approach and special remedies. They should be protected from exploitation and assisted to compete with other communities on a just basis in business, trade and the professions.²⁹

With regard to the problems of nation-building in general it asserted:

We strive for a Malaysian nationhood evolved out of the existing communities in Malaysia. The process of formation should be left to historical growth. The state participates in its formation by eliminating obstacles to harmony and inter-community acculturation. It should not impose cultural elements or indulge in artificial experiments such as introducing a common dress, dance, ritual and ceremony without regard to the receptivity of the communities in Malaysia. We emphasize common experience and the sense of a common destiny as the decisive essentials of nationhood rather than cultural, religious or ethnic uniformity.

There was no doubt that the party's attempts to secure Malay support were successful to a significant extent: this was reflected in some of the electoral successes of the party in 1969.

On the whole, the party had failed to establish a substantial mass base; its support was restricted largely to urban areas.

²⁹ A mimeographed document circulated by the party on 15 April 1968.

especially in Selangor and Penang, where it was able to attract trade unionists, educated middle class groups and some of the working class. Many of these had been attracted by the personalities of Dr. Tan Chee Khoon and Dr. Lim Chong Eu.

THE 1969 GENERAL ELECTIONS

In view of the intense controversy generated by the PAP following the 1964 general elections, the 1969 general elections were reminiscent both of the year 1959, when the first country-wide elections after independence were held, and also of the immediate pre-independence period of 1956-57, when the country was confronted with the issue of the future of the non-Malay communities and their political status. In fact, in 1969 the situation was even more serious. Both in 1956-57 and 1959, the non-Malay communities were generally unsure of themselves. For long they had remained aliens in Malaya and therefore during the uncertain period of the transition to independence they possibly were less unwilling to concede that Malaya belonged to the Malays in so far as they were the *bumiputras*. However, their general mood in 1969 was different; they were less willing to accept the compromises made as during the intervening period they had become more sure of themselves and the PAP during its short period of participation in Malaysian politics had articulated and united them. They were now willing to consider more positive action to protect and promote their interests. The critical issues of the political position of the non-Malays and the role of their cultures, languages and education were reopened, now in a much more intense form.

This had its own impact on the Malay community; their fear and suspicion of the non-Malays was heightened. Militancy was rampant and the extremists in the UMNO were in the ascendancy. Tunku Abdul Rahman, who had kept the country together and had generally succeeded in avoiding serious communal confrontation through his charismatic leadership, had lost his hold on the Malay masses. He was under heavy pressure from the extremists within the UMNO

who were openly seeking a change of leadership. It was widely believed that he would not last long after the elections. His support and charisma among the Malays had eroded to the extent that certain sections of the Malay community had burnt his effigies. Most of the blame for the loss of Malay power, as the Malays saw it, was placed on his leadership and the way he had led the Alliance and administered the country.

In the situation a showdown between the Malays and the non-Malays was bound to occur at the time of the 1969 general elections. Matters were complicated further by the fact that for the first time in the history of the country most of the non-Malay parties in the opposition were able to establish an electoral arrangement among themselves. This alarmed the Malays and their leaders in the government as they considered this as an attempt by the non-Malays to "gang up" against them and pose a serious threat to their special position and political paramountcy.

In February 1969, the three non-Malay parties in the opposition, the DAP, the PPP and the Gerakan, were able to agree to an electoral arrangement.³⁰ Under this they divided both the Parliamentary and State constituencies among themselves on the basis of their organization and an estimate of electoral support in the constituencies. The crucial result was that they did not field candidates against each other thus depriving the Alliance the chance to gain victories, as in the past elections, in multi-party contests where the non-Malay vote was split among the many contenders for it.

The Election Campaign

Despite clear indications, the Alliance leadership completely failed to take into account the changed mood of the non-Malay masses in its campaign strategy. Taken in by the surface quiet, the Alliance showed full confidence and optimism with regard to the non-Malay vote; it showed little inkling of

³⁰ For details see my *The Malaysian General Election of 1969*, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-23.

the disaster that it was to face once the votes had been counted. The Alliance evaluation of its prospects among the non-Malay voters was based negatively, as in the past, on the multiplicity of the opposition parties and the dissipation of their efforts and energies largely in fighting each other. The Alliance leadership completely failed to realize that instead of the non-Malay parties going to the non-Malay voters to seek their vote, in their new mood it would be the electorate which would seek out the opposition to deliver their vote. Treating the UMNO base among the Malays as of critical importance with regard to the viability of the Alliance, the Alliance led by the UMNO, had always been rather casual in its approach to the non-Malay masses; not much effort had been made to build up an effective and popular image among them.

In view of the serious losses suffered by the non-Malay opposition parties in the 1964 general elections and the persisting disunity and general demoralization within their ranks, the Alliance leadership believed that they would pose no serious threat, especially to the MCA. Since the 1964 elections the inter-communal coalition in the opposition, the Socialist Front, had been dissolved. The Labour Party, split and under the control of the Chinese-educated extremists, had decided to boycott the representative bodies and elections and was calling upon voters to abstain from voting in the 1969 general elections. It was believed that this boycott would keep a large part of the more radical and extremist Chinese electorate away from the polls which had traditionally not voted for the MCA. It was certain that if the boycott was successful it would do more harm to the non-Malay opposition parties than to the MCA.³¹

As we noted earlier, there was a tremendous ferment and disquiet among the Malays; in their case, unlike that of the

³¹ There were indications at the time that the Government gave indirect encouragement to the campaign of the Labour Party; it uncharacteristically made no attempts to curb the boycott campaign. In March 1969 just before the elections the Government released a very large number of left-wing politicians (mostly from the Labour Party) who had been arrested in November 1968 during the police swoop on militant "communists".

non-Malays, it was visible and obvious. They had been seriously alarmed by the activities of the PAP leaders, especially their attempts to unite the non-Malay masses under the banner of Malaysian Malaysia. The Singapore and Bukit Meratjam (Penang) communal riots of 1964, the control of the Labour Party by the Chinese-educated extremists, and the controversy with regard to the question of national language in 1967³² all had further intensified Malay fears of the non-Malays and created a serious sense of insecurity among them. Many Malays, especially in the northern and east coast States of Kelantan, Trengannu, Kedah and Perlis where they have remained insulated and more conservative because of a lack of any substantial contact with non-Malays, had come to feel strongly that the Alliance, based on the principle of inter-communal cooperation, had largely failed to protect them against the non-Malays. They had become disillusioned with the Alliance policies and approach and had begun looking for alternatives to protect their community and its interests. With the knowledge of the local Sultans, Malay groups in the northern and east coast States had organized small private religious armies which had played havoc during the Penang riots in late 1967.

This is where the attraction of the Pan Malayan Islamic Party came in. Even though the PMIP had failed badly in achieving significant economic progress in Kelantan, where it had ruled since 1959, it had maintained its hold on the Malay masses in the State. It is less the lack of rapid economic progress that stirs the Malay than the fear of the non-Malays. Malays generally have maintained that economic advancement has brought greater benefit to the non-Malays than the Malays; it is essentially the Chinese contractor, businessman and entrepreneur who has benefited from it. This naturally made the extremist position of the PMIP more attractive to many in the Malay community as they felt that it went to the root cause of the Malay predicament, that is, the presence of large numbers of non-Malays in the country and the freedom and status enjoyed by them which have enabled them to establish themselves

³² For details of the controversy see my *The Malaysian General Election of 1969*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

in a superior position to the Malays in many spheres. The result was a significant revitalization of the PMIP which in turn considerably increased UMNO fears of it.

This new mood of the Malay masses was seen as a grave threat to UMNO and the viability of its inter-communal front, the Alliance. The Alliance and the entire fabric of politics in the country had been built around a strong UMNO. The UMNO, therefore, could not afford to allow the PMIP to inflict any serious electoral defeats on it and thereby challenge its position as the chief representative and spokesman of the Malay community. In consequence, the Alliance placed primary emphasis during the election campaign on maintaining Malay support of the UMNO and defeating the threat to it from the PMIP. The image of the Alliance, its past achievements and promises for the future were presented largely in terms only of attraction to the Malay community; no special effort was made to attract non-Malay support and the MCA and the MIC were generally left to fend for themselves.

With regard to the PMIP, the Alliance strategy in the election campaign was two-fold. First, it attempted to link the PMIP with the remnants of the Malayan Communist Party around the Thai-Malaysian border.³³ Second, and more important, it emphasized the failure of the PMIP to achieve any economic progress in Kelantan, where the party had maintained its control over the State government since 1959. A grim picture of economic stagnation and decay was painted. On 10 April 1969, the UMNO issued a special election manifesto for the State of Kelantan.³⁴ The "New Deal" Manifesto contained a \$550 million blueprint for economic advancement in the State. In a foreward to the manifesto, Tunku Abdul Rahman asserted: "I have made this statement with all sincerity as a man who wants to see that the people of this country enjoy the benefits of prosperity and with a hope that the people of Kelantan would not be left in their state of poverty."³⁵ The manifesto

³³ For details see my *The Malaysian General Election of 1969*, *op cit.*, pp. 26-27.

³⁴ This was the first time that a special manifesto was issued for one of the constituents of the Alliance and for a member state of the Federation.

³⁵ *The Straits Times*, 11 April 1969.

pledged to redeem 700,000 acres of land in Kelantan which, according to it, the PMIP had mortgaged to foreign firms and included provision of low cost houses, boats (for fishermen), and bicycles (for students), all on easy terms. It offered further help to students by granting them \$250,000 for school books and promised a "proper" religious education and more than \$10 million to be spent on building mosques, prayer houses and religious schools in the state. It made many more generous offers of this nature. The President of the PMIP, Dato Mohammad Asri, justifiably called it "daylight political bribery".³⁶

As for the non-Malay opposition, the Alliance singled out the Democratic Action Party as the only party that could pose a serious threat by championing the cause of the non-Malay communities. The two themes of the Alliance attack on the DAP were, first, that the party was an anti-Malay communal organization working to deprive the Malays of their rights and status in the country, and secondly, that it was a mere adjunct of the Singapore PAP, operated and controlled from Singapore. In an election meeting, Tunku Abdul Rahman warned that the DAP was out to destroy the Malay rights.³⁷ Suggesting that this was bound to alarm the Malays, he added: "After all, what do the Malays have? All the wealth in this country is in the hands of the non-Malays. The factories and commercial organizations are in the hands of the non-Malays, so if they grab the rights of the Malays, the Malays will have to flee to the jungle." In a later election speech Tunku asserted that the DAP was only an offshoot of the Singapore PAP and was peddling the concept of Malaysian Malaysia. He described the concept as a mischievous slogan aimed at creating antagonism between the Malays and the non-Malays. "It was because of this and to prevent possible racial strife that we divorced Singapore. As a result, they nurtured a feeling of animosity towards Malaysia and were bent on vengeance."³⁸

With regard to the rest of the opposition the Alliance did not worry too much; it considered it adequate to just condemn

³⁶ *The Straits Times*, 16 April 1969.

³⁷ *The Straits Times*, 15 April 1969.

³⁸ *The Straits Times*, 19 April 1969.

them all as Chinese communal organizations committed to destroy the special position and rights of the Malays.

Conscious of the increased concern among the non-Malays with regard to their status in the country and needed by the vehemence of the Alliance condemnation of them, the non-Malay parties on their side launched a much more tough and hard-hitting election campaign than in elections in the past and assumed an increasingly stronger pro-non-Malay position. In this, the pace was set by the DAP which, in the absence of the Labour Party (which in the past had been seen as the largest non-Malay organization), attempted to establish itself as the chief representative of the non-Malay communities. In general it adopted a far more extreme position than assumed by the PAP when it launched the demand for a Malaysian Malaysia in 1964. The party presented its election manifesto under the title "Towards a Malaysian Malaysia". According to it the triple objectives of the party were: political democracy, social and economic democracy, cultural democracy. By political democracy it meant a state where all citizens regardless of race, language or religion, enjoy equal political status, rights and opportunities. It alleged, however, that the Alliance had divided Malaysians into "two unequal classes of citizens"—*bumiputras* and non-*bumiputras*. It condemned this and demanded "an equal place under the sun" for all Malaysians.

Under its concept of social and economic democracy the party sought the eradication of exploitation of man by man, class by class, and race by race. It rejected the Alliance view that the party was anti-Malay and maintained that high priority must be given to the elimination of Malay peasant poverty. But it added:

The Alliance Government . . . ignores the principle of the indivisibility of Malaysian prosperity and social justice. They often forget that the have-nots in Malaysia are of all races. They are found in rural areas as well as in urban slums. The campaign against poverty and backwardness must accordingly be a national campaign, based on the criteria of need and not on that of race. Unfortunately, the Alliance government have managed to give a racial twist and bias to all their social, economic and educational programmes.

Here the party made no special effort to emphasize its socialist character, policy and programme.³⁹ It did not believe it would help it especially to gather non-Malay votes; the strong feeling was that it was only its stand on the issues of the special position of the Malays, the status of Chinese and Tamil languages and schools, and the political status of the non-Malay communities which would determine the fate of the party in the elections.

The party, therefore, placed great emphasis on its concept of cultural democracy and asserted that it was compatible and consistent with the development of national unity. It pointed to the success of such multi-racial and multi-lingual nations as Switzerland, Canada and the Soviet Union. It alleged that the Alliance policies had created a deep sense of "cultural insecurity" among the non-Malays. It presented the following as its major objectives:

- a) Official status for the Chinese, Tamil and English languages, and acceptance of Malay as the national language of expression and communication among Malaysians.
- b) Free use of Chinese, Tamil and English in the Parliament, State Assemblies, and in public notices and government correspondence.
- c) Abolition of the distinction between national and national-type schools.
- d) Adoption of an integrated education system, where schools using the major languages as media of instruction and examination are recognized as National Schools, provided the content of education imparted is Malaysian-oriented and the national language is taught as a compulsory second language.

³⁹ It should be noted here that many of the key leaders of the party held strong socialist sympathies and the party itself had established close links with the Socialist International. And in its earlier manifesto for the Serdang by-election in December 1968 (the first election contested by the party after its inception) the party had promised "to help bring about a new Malaysia where there is socialist and cultural democracy." But the term "socialist" was dropped from the party manifesto for the 1969 general elections and was substituted by political and social and economic democracy.

- e) Retention of the services of an impartial Cambridge Examinations Syndicate to conduct the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate examination to remove any possibility of the use of racial criteria in the marking of examination papers if this was done under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.
- f) Development of a Malaysian culture from the free interplay and interaction of the diverse cultural elements in Malaysia, and not proceeding from the hegemony of any one culture.

The People's Progressive Party, which was closely linked with the DAP, adopted an even more extreme position; unlike the DAP which showed some caution in not explicitly condemning the special position of the Malays, the PPP election manifesto asserted: "It will be the determined object of the PPP to continue to strive to have the Constitution amended to abolish privilege granted to any particular race."⁴⁰ It took over the slogan of Malaysian Malaysia as its goal and interpreted it to mean "that the nation and the State is not identified with the supremacy, well-being and the interests of any one particular community or race." It further sought recognition of Chinese and Tamil as official languages and demanded an educational policy which provided for media of instruction and examination in accordance with the wishes of parents, i.e. Malay, Chinese, Tamil or English. It was obvious that the party was only interested in wooing the non-Malay voter; it showed no regard for Malay sensibilities.

It was only the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia among the non-Malay opposition parties which attempted to maintain its non-communal character and woo the Malay voter; in the communally charged atmosphere it resisted the temptation of establishing itself as a champion of the non-Malay communities so as to effectively gather their support. The party's 30 point manifesto was essentially an unemotional document; it reflected the party's non-communalism and took a reasonable position on contentious communal issues. The party concentrated its efforts mainly

⁴⁰ *Malaysia for Malaysians*, People's Progressive Party of Malaya Manifesto 1969, 2 May 1969.

TABLE 9
Parliamentary Elections: Seats won and votes polled
by parties, 1959, 1964, 1969

Parties	Seats won			Seats contested			Votes polled (in %)		
	1959	1964	1969	1959	1964	1969	1959	1964	1969
1. The Alliance									
UMNO	52	59	51	70	68	67	35.94	38.14	33.67
MCA	19	27	13	31	33	33	14.82	18.68	13.50
MIC	3	3	2	3	3	3	1.02	1.55	1.24
	74	89	66	104	104	103	51.78	58.37	48.41
2. Democratic Action Party	—	1	13	—	11	24	—	2.06	13.73
3. Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia	—	—	8	—	—	14	—	—	8.57
4. People's Progressive Party	4	2	4	19	9	6	6.30	3.65	3.87
5. Pan Malayan Islamic Party	13	9	12	58	52	59	21.27	14.45	23.75
6. Party Raayat	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	—	1.24
7. Independents	3	—	—	27	8	2	4.76	0.66	0.34
8. Socialist Front	8	2	—	38	63	—	12.92	16.15	—

9. United Democratic Party	—	1	—	—	27	—	—	4.30	—
10. Porty Negara	1	—	—	9	4	—	2.11	0.36	—
11. Malayan Party	1	—	—	2	—	—	0.86	—	—
	104	104	103	257	278	213	100.00	100.00	99.91 ¹

¹0.09 per cent of the total was polled by UMCO in Negri Sembilan.

TABLE 10
 State Elections: Seats won and votes polled by parties, 1959, 1964, 1969

Parties	Seats won			Seats contested			Votes polled (in %)		
	1959	1964	1969	1959	1964	1969	1959	1964	1969
1. The Alliance									
UMNO	140	164	133	191	189	187	36.98	37.70	33.50
MCA	59	67	26	78	82	80	16.29	17.39	12.71
MIC	7	10	3	13	11	10	2.25	2.53	1.74
	206	241	162	282	282	277	55.52	57.62	47.95
2. Democratic									
Action Party	—	—	31	—	15	57	—	0.90	11.76
3. Gerakan Rakyat									
Malaysia	—	—	26	—	—	37	—	—	8.78
4. People's Progressive									
Party	8	5	12	39	26	16	5.75	4.51	4.79
5. Pan Malayan									
Islamic Party	43	25	40	200	158	179	20.80	15.25	22.80
Party Raayat	—	—	3	—	—	37	—	—	1.53
7. Independents	5	—	3	76	39	38	3.61	1.09	2.29
8. Socialist Front	16	7	—	124	167	—	9.71	16.30	—
9. United Democratic									
Party	—	4	—	—	64	—	—	3.94	—
10. Party Negara	4	—	—	96	17	—	4.29	0.39	—
11. Malayan Party	—	—	—	6	—	—	0.32	—	—
	282	282	277	823	768	641	100.00	100.00	99.90 ¹

¹0.10 per cent of the total was polled by the United Malaysian Chinese Organization in Negri Sembilan.

to capture the State Government in Penang, the home state of many of its leaders, especially Dr. Lim Chong Eu.⁴¹

The open attempt of the Alliance to primarily espouse the Malay cause and the tendency of the non-Malay opposition in general to seek only the non-Malay vote naturally led to a tough and hard-hitting election campaign. The whole exercise assumed the form of a communal showdown. Communalism was rampant and the Malays and the non-Malays were pitted against each other. It was natural that the outcome of the elections was seen only in terms of a victory for one and a defeat for the other.

The Election Results

In the communally charged atmosphere the election results had an immediate electrifying impact; it was not so much in terms of the actual number of seats won by the opposition as in its psychological dimension. The Malays saw it as a victory of the non-Malay communities and as a beginning of the end of their paramount position in the politics, administration and government of the country. The non-Malay communities were ecstatic and openly and vociferously proclaimed it to be the beginning of a new era, that of a Malaysian Malaysia "where people, regardless of their race, religion and different cultural backgrounds, should get a just share of the good things of life as citizens of equal worth."

The Alliance suffered serious reverses, but the crushing blow was dealt mainly to the MCA. In the State elections, the Alliance secured only 162 seats out of a total of 282 and 47.95 per cent of the vote whereas it had won 206 (55.52 per cent) and 241 (57.62 per cent) seats in the 1959 and 1964 elections respectively. Similarly, in the parliamentary elections, it won 66 seats out of a total of 104 and 48.41 per cent of the vote whereas it had secured 77 (51.78 per cent) and 89 (58.37 per cent) seats in the 1959 and 1964 elections respectively. A significant point was that the Alliance return to power with a significant majority in the Parliament was based only on a minority vote. More, with only 66 seats won by the Alliance in West

⁴¹ For a fuller account of Gerakan campaign see my *The Malaysian General Election of 1969*, pp. 33-35.

Malaysia, it looked extremely unlikely that it would have a two-thirds majority in the Malaysian Parliament once elections were held in Sarawak and Sabah for 40 Parliamentary seats. A number of senior ministers and top-ranking leaders of UMNO and the MCA were not re-elected. The majorities of almost all the ministers, including Tunku Abdul Rahman, were drastically reduced. The most dramatic results, however, came from State elections in Selangor, Perak and Penang, where the MCA was almost completely demolished and the Alliance was deprived of its majority in the State legislatures. In Selangor, the Alliance won 14 seats out of a total of 28 and in Perak 19 out of 40. The most crushing blow was in Penang where the Alliance was able to secure only 4 seats out of 24.

Despite the Alliance's emphasis on its campaign against the PMIP (than against the non-Malay opposition) the PMIP was able to recover the losses it had suffered in the 1964 general elections and to retain control over the state government in Kelantan. Furthermore, for the first time the PMIP was able to seriously challenge the UMNO outside the two east coast states of Kelantan and Trengganu, making significant gains in Kedah, the home state of Tunku Abdul Rahman, and Perlis. The PMIP success was largely a result of the increasing emphasis on race and religion among the Malays, especially in the northern and east coast states. The growing demand for a Malaysian Malaysia among the non-Malays and the threat that it posed to the Malays caused many Malays to look for more drastic answers to the problem. Many had lost their faith in the UMNO and its idea of inter-communal cooperation and were attracted by the more extreme ideas of the PMIP.

All the non-Malay parties in the opposition did extremely well. The best performance, however, was that of the DAP which emerged as the largest opposition party in the Parliament and the chief representative of the non-Malay communities. The party's strongly pro-non-Malay program and policy had proved extremely effective in attracting substantial support for it from both the Chinese and Indian communities. The Gerakan's greatest success was in Penang where it was able to win 16 of the 24 seats in the state legislature thereby ensuring its control over the state government. The Party was also successful

in wooing some Malay voters: three of its Malay candidates (1 in the parliamentary and 2 in the state elections) were elected. (Two Malay candidates of the DAP were also successful in the state elections.) This was of great significance as it was the first occasion that any Malays had been elected as candidates of non-Malay parties.

From our point of view, the election results had three crucial aspects. One, the Alliance claim that it represented the nation through its three communal constituents, the UMNO, the MCA and the MIC, had been seriously challenged. The MCA had been so badly mauled that it was no more in a position to make the claim that it represented the Chinese in Malaysia. Even the UMNO base among the Malays had been seriously threatened by the PMIP. This was of the greatest importance as it raised grave doubts about the viability of the Alliance and its inter-communal character. Second, there were clear indications that a significant number of Malays had cast their votes in favor of the candidates of the non-Malay opposition thus posing a serious threat to the unity and solidarity of the Malay community which had always been considered a *sine qua non* for the paramountcy of the Malays. In Singapore, a large Malay vote for the PAP in the September 1963 elections was the root cause of the communal riots of mid-1964. The UMNO leaders were rattled by this development and as in the case of Singapore they were bound to nip this in the bud. Finally, the results were seen by the Malays as an unprecedented and completely unacceptable threat to their dominant control over politics, government and administration of the country. A non-Malay political organization had captured political power in Penang where they were waiting to install Dr. Lim Chong Eu as the Chief Minister of the State whose removal from MCA Presidency had been engineered by the UMNO in 1959. In two other large and economically very important states, Perak and Selangor, the Alliance had failed to win majority of seats in the state legislature. This was a completely shattering development to the Malays. Thus far they had accepted the Alliance arrangement, based on inter-communal cooperation, and the idea of representative government, including the principle of one man one vote, as Malay political paramountcy had been ensured within its

framework. This was the vital condition and therefore, following the 1969 general elections, when it became obvious that this could not possibly be sustained for long in the future, the Malays had no more any interest in the Alliance arrangement and representative government. They were completely unwilling to let their vital interests be seriously jeopardized. And this attitude of the Malays proved to be the beginning of the end of the Alliance as an inter-communal coalition of the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians.

Its Aftermath: The Communal Explosion

Immediately after the elections, as the full implications of the election results were realized, extremists within the UMNO began demanding a completely new approach with regard to Malay political paramountcy and the basis of the Alliance and the UMNO's role within it. Leaders of the UMNO who were involved in directing the election campaign met in Kuala Lumpur on 12 May 1969 after the election results were announced and demanded from the party's national leadership, especially Tunku Abdul Rahman, that the composition of the new cabinet should reflect the popular base of each of the three partners in the Alliance. Their spokesman maintained that the MCA had suffered a "shocking defeat" while in the case of the UMNO 51 of its 67 candidates in the parliamentary elections had been successful.⁴² "This clearly shows that UMNO is in power, and one has to accept this fact." What was being suggested was that since the MCA had failed to secure Chinese support for the Alliance its role in the government should be reduced and that the UMNO should assume a more dominant position. They maintained that some of the important portfolios in the cabinet which had been allocated to the MCA in the past should be taken away from it and assigned to UMNO nominees. They specifically proposed that the portfolios of Commerce and Industry and Finance be given to UMNO nominees. They also suggested that Tun Dr. Ismail bin Dato Abdul Rahman be brought back to the Cabinet to "strengthen" it

⁴² *The Straits Times*, 13 May 1969.

and the two recognized leaders of the strongly pro-Malay elements in the UMNO, Syed Nasir bin Ismail and Ghafar Baba, be given cabinet posts. In all, they maintained that since the Alliance had retained its position as the ruling party thanks largely to the Malay vote, it was proper that the Alliance, the cabinet and the government reflected a dominant pro-Malay bias. In effect, they sought the introduction of Malay rule.

The sense of anxiety and anger among the Malays was even greater in Selangor and Perak where the Alliance had secured 14 seats out of 28 and 19 out of 40 respectively. It was obvious that the Alliance could not form a government in these two states without going into coalition with one of the non-Malay parties. The situation was tense in Selangor, where the federal capital is located and where the state organization of the UMNO was controlled by extremists. To maintain Malay control of the state government, Dato Harun bin Idris, the state UMNO President and the incumbent *Mentri Besar*, made strong efforts to woo the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia to join the Alliance in a coalition government. (Cooperation with the DAP, the other successful non-Malay party, was out of the question as it was considered an extreme Chinese communal organization by the Malays.) However, the Gerakan party had little interest in cooperation with the Alliance as its leaders at the time believed that any link with the Alliance would be considered a sell-out and betrayal by the roused non-Malay masses and would certainly lead to a loss of the party's new found mass base. Dr. Tan Chee Khoo, the party's Secretary-General, announced in uncharacteristic language: "I have said many times that I will not sleep with Alliance partners. Now more than ever when they are castrated. . ."⁴³ This naturally created serious anxiety among state UMNO leaders, especially when they were aware that if fresh elections were held to break the deadlock they could lose even more seats in view of the strong anti-Alliance trend in the elections. They were afraid that more non-Malays might be persuaded to vote for the non-Malay opposition since these parties had come so close to capturing political power in the state.

⁴³ *The Straits Times*, 13 May 1969.

The Malay sense of insecurity in Selangor was further immensely accentuated by the determined and often very vocal attempts by the leaders of the Democratic Action Party, especially by Goh Hock Guan, to forge a DAP-Gerakan coalition in the state. Even though it was obvious that the two parties together did not have a majority in the state legislature, only 14 seats out of 28, the sheer noise about it unnerved the Malays. For example, when Goh Hock Guan maintained that his party's lawyers had found that there was no constitutional bar to a non-Malay assuming the position of *Mentri Besar* in Selangor he was taken seriously and his attempts to form a DAP-led government caused panic among the Malays.⁴⁴

The DAP, under the abrasive and bumptious Goh Hock Guan, basking in the glory of its new found prominence and status as the largest opposition party in the country, unfortunately, continued to heat up the already charged political atmosphere. Even so late as the morning of 13 May 1969, when feelings were running high among the Malays, Goh Hock Guan visited Dr. Tan Chee Khoon, the Secretary-General of the Gerakan, and attempted to persuade him to join the DAP in a coalition government in Selangor; he offered Dr. Tan the position of deputy *Mentri Besar*. He was unsuccessful as the Gerakan leaders had already taken a decision the previous night to adopt a policy of neutrality in Selangor and Perak, that is not to join either the UMNO or the DAP in the formation of coalition governments in the two states. However, the Gerakan decision was not immediately announced. The conditions that

⁴⁴ Selangor State Constitution is explicit about the question. Article LI (2) states: "Subject to the provision of Clause (4) of Article LIII no person shall be appointed to be *Mentri Besar* unless he is of Malay Race and professes the Muslim Religion." And Article LIII (4) provides: "In appointing a *Mentri Besar*, His Highness may in His Discretion dispense with any provision in this Constitution restricting His choice of a *Mentri Besar*, if in His opinion it is necessary to do so in order to comply with the provisions of this Article." His Highness being the Malay Sultan of Selangor, it was unthinkable that in the tense atmosphere of the post-election situation he would have exercised his discretion to dispense with the restriction to install a non-Malay from an opposition party as the *Mentri Besar* of his state.

prevailed in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, on 13 May are described by Goh Cheng Teik, a Malaysian who was in the city at the time and was following the developments:

Dr. Tan, who was keen on maximum publicity for his party's statement, was persuaded by *Straits Times* journalist, Felix Abishenagan, to withhold his announcement until 14 May. The author saw Dr. Tan at approximately 2.30 p.m. as he was leaving for his office. Dr Tan said that Gerakan would definitely not team up with the DAP or PPP. The Malays, he added, were extremely angry and he intended to say something to calm them down. Later in the afternoon, the then Editor-in-Chief of the *Straits Times* Group, Tan Sri Leslie Hoffman, rang up Dr. Tan at his office and advised him to release his statement at once as the Malays were very angry. He assured him prominent space for his statement in *The Straits Times*. At 4.45 p.m., Gerakan's neutral stand in Perak and Selangor was announced to a hurriedly-summoned press conference.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, this deliberate attempt by the Gerakan leadership to defuse the situation came too late. Malays were in a very angry mood and their leaders in Selangor had already begun organizing them to face the new situation brought about by the election results. The Malays had been especially hurt and enraged by the jubilant and sometimes rude manifestations of "victory" by the non-Malays. After the results were announced

...bands of youthful sympathizers from the DAP and the Gerakan headed towards Dato Harun's house in Jalan Raja Muda and rudely invited him to quit his state residence since he was allegedly no longer *Mentri Besar*. At processions held to celebrate individual opposition successes, youthful Chinese and Indian supporters booed and jeered at Malays they encountered or at Malay houses they passed. The slogans which they shouted showed that they interpreted the

⁴⁵Goh Cheng Teik, *The May Thirteenth Incident and Democracy in Malaysia*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1971, p. 19.

political stalemate in Selangor as directly a defeat for UMNO, the leading Malay political party, and indirectly a defeat for the Malay people.⁴⁶

The Selangor UMNO organized a counter victory procession. Dato Harun bin Idris, the Selangor *Mentri Besar* and one of the leaders of the extremists in the UMNO, gave the following account in a statement to the police after the riots:

In the beginning I tried to discourage them from holding a victory procession by stating that something untoward might happen. However, after I was given the assurance that the procession would be held in a peaceful and orderly manner and that a Police permit would be obtained for it, I agreed to their suggestion about holding the procession. . . .As I felt that I should advise the crowd before the procession commenced, I told them that the participants should assemble in my compound, *I could then also take the opportunity to inform the Malays of my intention to form the State Government. Thus I might be able to allay any fear they might have on this matter.*⁴⁷

This was the starting-point of the communal holocaust of 13 May 1969. Malaysia was engulfed in the worst racial rioting the country had ever experienced. Thousands of people were killed or injured. Tun Dr. Ismail who had just been brought into the new cabinet as the Minister of Home Affairs at the insistence of UMNO extremists, dramatically proclaimed: "Democracy is dead in this country."⁴⁸

It is not our purpose here to apportion blame for the tragic events of May 1969. Our interest is to underline the fact that the Malays were immensely disturbed and shaken by the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21. I have deliberately quoted this, written by a Malaysian university lecturer and published in Malaysia, rather than accounts by foreign journalists to avoid any controversy with regard to what happened immediately before the communal riots.

⁴⁷ National Operations Council, *The May 13 Tragedy, A Report*, Kuala Lumpur, 9 October 1969, pp. 40-41. Emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Bob Reace, "Requiem for Democracy?", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 May 1969, p. 437.

election results and were unwilling to allow the non-Malay opposition parties to form governments in Selangor and Perak.⁴⁹ The election results had created a serious disenchantment with the Alliance and representative government among the Malays and they desperately began to look for a new arrangement that would safeguard their vital interests more adequately and effectively. They also lost faith in Tunku Abdul Rahman for he was the architect of the Alliance arrangement.

It was in this circumstance that extremists in the UMNO began to assert themselves and seek a larger role for themselves in the organization. The communal holocaust tremendously boosted their position and brought them the backing of a large part of the rank and file of the UMNO. They renewed with vigour their effort to discredit and undermine Tunku Abdul Rahman's position as leader and his entire approach to the crucial communal issues. Some in Malaysia even believe that the tragic communal confrontation itself was precipitated by UMNO extremists to strengthen their position, bring about unity and solidarity among the Malays, and undermine Tunku Abdul Rahman's idea of inter-communal cooperation.⁵⁰

The bloody communal riots helped the UMNO extremists to assume ascendancy. And it was their pressure which was responsible for the Government's overreaction to the crisis: the Government's response was geared not only to cope with the immediate problem of the communal explosion but also to thwart the unprecedented threat to Malay political paramountcy resulting from the 1969 general elections. The crisis was taken

⁴⁹ By contrast, the Malays did not worry too much about Penang where the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia had won 16 seats out of 24 in the state legislature. The reason for this was that during the entire period of British rule Penang had been a Crown Colony; it had never been a Malay state with its own Malay Ruler. The Malays had tended to view Penang, like Singapore, as a Chinese city state. Since independence, the Malays and the UMNO had willingly accepted the appointment of Chinese from the MCA as Governor and Chief Minister of the state.

⁵⁰ It was not the first time that UMNO extremists had reacted to the situation in this manner. It was their intervention which was largely responsible for the serious communal riots in Singapore in mid-1964. See my *The Malaysian General Election of 1969, op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

advantage of by the Malay leadership of the government to reappraise the situation with regard to the fundamental issues: the position of the Malays and their Rulers, the national language and culture, and the position of the non-Malays and the conditions under which they were to be allowed to live in the country and play a political role.

On 14 May, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong issued a proclamation of emergency. The next day, under heavy pressure from the extremists in the UMNO, Tunku Abdul Rahman announced the establishment of a National Operations Council with Tun Razak as the Director of Operations.⁵¹ It is important to note that Tun Razak, as Director, derived his powers directly from the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. He had emerged as the strongman of Malaysia; as Director of Operations he was entrusted with full responsibility of administration. Tunku Abdul Rahman was relegated to the position of a figure-head and his Cabinet, left over from before the general elections, was merely to advise the National Operations Council.⁵²

Soon Tunku came under fire from within the UMNO. An open revolt against him was led by Dr. Mahathir bin Mohammad, a former UMNO member of Parliament from Kedah (home state of Tunku). The starting point of the showdown was Dr. Mahathir's letter of 17 June to the Tunku in which he had called upon the Tunku to resign from his position as the Prime Minister and the President of UMNO as he had lost the confidence of the Malay people, including those in the civil service, police and the armed forces, and the rank and file of the UMNO. He had asserted that the dissatisfaction was so deep that there was a distinct danger of an army takeover. Dr. Mahathir had alleged that the Tunku had been soft towards the Chinese and under his policy of "give and take" had given them all they wanted. According to him, the Tunku was obsessed with his image as the "Happy Prime Minister" and was primarily concerned with preserving

⁵¹ The Council had the following Members: Tun Dr. Ismail, Tun Tan Siew Sin, Tun Sambanthan, Hamzah bin Dato Abu Samah, Tunku Osman Jiwa (Chief of the Armed Forces), Tan Sri Salleh (Inspector General of Police), and Tan Sri Ghazali bin Shafie.

⁵² *The Statesman* (New Delhi), 17 May 1969.

it than facing the problems.⁵³

The widespread disenchantment with the situation and fear about the future manifested itself in anger against Tunku Abdul Rahman. Malay students and staff members at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur issued a statement outlining their views with regard to the situation.⁵⁴ They said that Malays must forget their political differences and establish complete unity of their community. They must not ask for a return to parliamentary democracy and the country should continue to be ruled by the National Operations Council. The country's armed forces must be enlarged as they have been truly faithful to the Malays. If the non-Malays demand equal political rights, the Malays should not remain on the defensive; they must demand the reopening of the question of citizenship and seek to deprive non-Malays of citizenship by holding tests on Malay language, religion and custom. The Malays must find new friends such as Burma, Indonesia, Thailand, Kenya, etc., revolutionary countries which have already recognized the reality that democracy is not practicable in developing countries. These sentiments were then branded by the Malay leadership of the government as extremist views expressed in an especial atmosphere of excessively heightened fear. However, they reflected the views of the general masses of the Malay society and came to have a very substantial impact on the thinking and policies of the ruling Malay leadership.

During July-August 1969, the leaders of UMNO associated with the government, made a lot of noise about re-establishing the prestige of Tunku Abdul Rahman among the Malays. On 19 July, *The Straits Times* headlined on the front page "BACK THE TUNKU" APPEAL BY RAZAK. Razak called upon the people of Malaysia to "stand solidly behind the Prime Minister. We in the government stand solidly behind the Tunku and I would like to see all Malaysians—whatever their racial origins—do the same."⁵⁵ Denying rumors of a coup

⁵³ Letter from Dr. Mahathir bin Mohammad to Tunku Abdul Rahman, 17 June 1969.

⁵⁴ *Perjuangan Orang Bukan Melayu: Sikap Kita*, Statement by Malay students and staff members at the University of Malaya, (June ?) 1969.

⁵⁵ *The Straits Times*, 19 July 1969.

against the Tunku, Tun Dr. Ismail said :

I can say definitely that there has been no coup, and there is not likely to be one. We are the government of the country and Tunku Abdul Rahman is the Prime Minister. The intellectuals and the younger generation will have to accept that the Tunku is the Prime Minister.⁵⁶

All this effort, however, was only a public relations exercise, the primary purpose was to allow the Tunku to retire gracefully. Tunku had lost his position once and for all and there was little that could be done to salvage his position. Within a few months he retired and Tun Razak, who was acceptable to UMNO extremists and the rank and file of the Malay community, succeeded him. And this signified the end of an era in Malaysian politics, and the beginning of a period in which Malay political paramountcy was to lead on to the establishment of the foundations of Malay rule.

⁵⁶ *The Straits Times*, 15 August 1969.

VI

END OF THE ALLIANCE & TOWARDS MALAY RULE

It was under the influence of Tun Razak that the government over-reacted to the crisis brought about by the communal riots that took place in the wake of the 1969 general elections.¹ The government's response was geared not only to cope with the immediate problem of the communal explosion but also to contend with the primary political problem created by the elections, viz. the unprecedented threat to Malay political paramourncy. (It took advantage of the crisis to reappraise the entire bases of politics in the country: the position and status of the Malays and their Rulers, the national language and culture, and the status of the non-Malays and the conditions under which they were to be accepted in the country and allowed to play a political role.)

The National Operations Council, headed by Tun Razak and the virtual government, began taking drastic action. Parliamentary government was suspended and elections in East Malaysia were postponed for an indefinite period. Political meetings and all political party publications were banned. Strict censorship was imposed and editors were forbidden from printing any material or photographs "likely to be prejudicial to public order or national security."² The government began to examine all publication matter before it was printed. Foreign publications were scrutinized and offending articles were removed

¹ "As far as the condition of the country was concerned, a few weeks after the May 13, 1969 riots the government had the situation under control Yet democracy was suspended for twenty-five months." Syed Hussein Alatas (Professor of Malay Studies, University of Singapore, and a former Chairman of the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia), "The Politics of Coalition in Malaysia," *Current History*, December 1972, p. 271.

² Felix Abishagenaden, "What's Next for Malaysia?", *Hong Kong Standard*, 7 September 1969.

before allowing circulation. All this was done primarily to ensure that the National Operations Council was able to effect the necessary fundamental (changes in the constitutional-political framework and lay the foundation of Malay rule without having to worry too much about the response of the people, the press and the political opposition.) The government also decided "to mobilize four all-Malay battalions, ostensibly for the purpose of warding off an increasing communist threat on the Thailand-Malaysia border, but more candidly for bolstering up Malay defences against possible Chinese counter-attack." At the beginning of November, it was announced that all those who had acquired citizenship under Article 30 of the Constitution before 1 October 1962 must surrender their certificates for review by the government. This affected the future of at least 250,000 Malaysian citizens, all of them non-Malays. This naturally caused panic among the non-Malays who had come to take at least their citizenship for granted by now. Even the MCA was forced to issue a statement asserting that the action of the government was "wrong."⁵ It asserted that a person was a citizen until it was proved that he had obtained his citizenship by fraud, false representation or concealment of any material fact and that the onus of proving this was on the government. The purpose of this action on the part of the government was not really to deprive many non-Malays, especially the "trouble-makers" among them, of their citizenship but to serve notice on them that under Tun Razak the government meant business and, if required, it would have no hesitation in reopening the citizenship issue. It was also geared to appease extremist elements among the Malays, now far more vocal and powerful, and to establish among the Malays the credibility of Tun Razak as a tough man who could be relied upon to protect the interests of the community.

On 9 October 1969, the National Operations Council

³ Omay Mehmet, "Race Riots in Malaysia," *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. LXXVIII, No. 2, Summer 1971, p. 215.

⁴ *The Straits Times*, 4 November 1969.

⁵ *Ibid.*

published its report on the May 1969 communal explosion.⁶ It asserted that the Malaysian constitution contained certain "entrenched provisions" which

represent binding arrangements between the various races in this country, and are the underpinnings on which the constitutional structure such as fundamental liberties, the machinery of government and a score of other detailed provisions are built. If these entrenched provisions are in any way eroded or weakened, the entire constitutional structure is endangered, and with it, the existence of the nation itself. It was the failure to understand and the irresponsible and cavalier treatment of these entrenched provisions that constituted one of the primary causes of the disturbances on May 13, 1969.⁷

And to cope with the paramount political problem it prescribed the following. Firstly, the citizens of the country, especially the non-Malays, must understand the significance of the "entrenched provisions". Secondly, the government must enact laws to prevent anybody from provoking communal illwill and hostility. Thirdly, Article 152 of the constitution (relating to national language) must be established as part of the 'entrenched provisions' of the constitution and be protected in the same manner. Finally, the constitution must be amended to protect Article 159 (5)⁸ by providing that this clause could not be

⁶ Only a few weeks, earlier, in September, Tunku Abdul Rahman had published his own report on the riots, *May 13, Before and After*, in which he had taken to task some of the UMNO extremists, who were now ascendant in the UMNO.

⁷ National Operations Council, *A Report: The May 13 Tragedy*, Kuala Lumpur, 9 October 1969, p. 85. It is of the utmost importance to note here that what were now being designated as the "entrenched provisions," the main one being with regard to the special position of the Malays, were not at all treated as such at the time of constitution-making in 1957. In fact, what the constitution at the time had clearly sought to entrench as paramount was the principle of equality of political status, one man one vote, for all regardless of their racial origin. For a fuller discussion see Chapter 2.

⁸ Article 159 (5) states: "A law making an amendment to Article 38 (relating to Conference of Rulers), 70 (Precedence of Rulers and Governors), 71 (1) (Federal Guarantee of State constitutions), or

amended to or repealed without the consent of the Conference of Rulers.

Starting from August 1970, the National Operations Council began to execute this program of action. At first, the government approved and gazetted amendments to the Sedition Act and a number of other acts to ensure that the Malaysian people and political parties were prevented from raising issues that could arouse the feelings of certain people in the country.⁹ Amendments to the Sedition Act made it an offence for anyone to incite racial feelings. The penalty on conviction for a first offence was up to three years in jail or a fine of up to \$5,000 or both. Under this change the questioning of any matter, right, status, position, privilege, sovereignty or prerogative established or protected by the constitution of Malaysia under Articles 152, 153 and 181 constituted a seditious act. As a result, matters relating to the National Language, the Special Position of the Malays, and the sovereignty and position of the Malay Rulers could not be questioned or criticized. At the same time, amendments to the Election Offences Act, 1954 and the Local Government Elections Act, 1966 disqualified anyone convicted under the amended Sedition Act from being a candidate for election to Parliament, the State Assemblies, the municipal, town or local councils for a period of five years. Further, an amendment to the Societies Act, 1966 provided for the cancellation of any society's registration (without which it could not exist) by the Registrar of Societies for the "habitual" contravention by its members of the amended Sedition Act.

Later, at the beginning of 1971, the government initiated moves to amend the Malaysian constitution. Presenting the Constitutional (Amendment) Bill to the Parliament on 23 February 1971, Tun Razak, the Prime Minister, asserted that the two broad objectives of the changes were, firstly, to remove certain sensitive issues from the realm of public discussion so as to ensure the smooth and continuing functioning of parliamentary democracy, and secondly, to correct racial imbalance

153 (Special Position of the Malays) shall not be passed without the consent of the Conference of Rulers."

⁹ *The Straits Times*, 13 August 1970.

in certain sectors of the nation's life.¹⁰ The Prime Minister explained:

A new generation has grown to adulthood since independence which is unmindful of the delicate and careful compromises agreed upon by the various races before we attained independence in 1957.

There are also unscrupulous individuals who seek to ride to power by inciting and exploiting racial emotions, fears and mistrust.¹¹

The amendment sought: (1) to empower the Parliament to pass laws prohibiting the questioning of the constitutional provisions relating to National Language, Special Position of the Malays, the sovereignty and status of the Malay Rulers, and citizenship; (2) to revoke the immunity from judicial proceedings enjoyed by members of parliament and state assemblies with regard to what they said in the legislatures; and (3) to vest the Yang di-Pertuan Agong with the power to direct any university or college or post-secondary educational institution to reserve for Malays and other natives certain proportion of places in selected courses of study.¹² These were debated in the parliament for a week in a highly charged atmosphere. At the very beginning of the debate the Prime Minister warned: "I hope the amendments will be approved otherwise we cannot return to parliamentary democracy."¹³ One of the leading opposition leaders, S. P. Seenivasagam of the PPP, warned that even though the government had presented the amendment as a temporary measure to cope with the immediate problems in the country once it was passed any move in the future to revoke it would in itself constitute a seditious act and therefore it could never be moved in the parliament without the consequent criminal proceedings as this amendment

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 24 February 1971.

¹¹ *Asian Almanac*, Vol. 9, No 15, April 1971, p. 4519.

¹² *The Straits Times*, 24 February 1971.

¹³ James Morgan, *Far Eastern Economic Review* correspondent in Kuala Lumpur called this as the "heads-I-win-tails-you-lose attitude of the Alliance." "Parliamentary Questions," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 20 February 1971, p. 21

would have already removed parliamentary immunity from criminal proceedings. The two parties, the PPP and the DAP, which maintained their opposition right through were bitterly attacked during the debates and were charged of being anti-national and anti-Malay. The Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Ismail, was the most severe in his attacks on the two parties and their leaders. He accused the DAP members of the parliament of behaving like "ruthless, tricky, smooth, suave, slick political rogues" who used sensitive issues to trick the gullible public into electing them to the parliament.¹⁴ He called S.P. Seenivasagam of being a "political scamp" who used his "twisting tongue" to arouse the animal in men.¹⁵ Another senior leader of the UMNO and the Minister of National and Rural Development, Abdul Ghafar bin Baba, threatened: "Only the DAP and the PPP are against the Bill. There is yet time for them to change their stand. I would appeal to them to do so lest they will be engulfed by anger of the people."¹⁶ The amendment was finally approved by the parliament on 3 March 1971 by a majority of 125 to 17. The opposition parties—the PMIP, the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia, the Sarawak National Party (SNAP), the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP)—voted with the government. It was left only to the DAP and the PPP to register their opposition to the amendment by voting against it.

After thus having armed itself with full power and having reduced the opposition to complete impotency, the government now set itself to the task of improving the lot of the Malay *raayat*. This had been long overdue as under the *quid pro quo* arrangement of the pre-1969 period there had been only a marginal improvement in the economic position of the Malays.¹⁷ The government had been able to attain little in

¹⁴ *The Straits Times*, 4 March 1971.

¹⁵ When S.P. Seenivasagam asked the Speaker of the House for a ruling if a member could use such language as had been used by the Deputy Prime Minister against him and the DAP members of the parliament, he was told: "Why don't you use it later when you get a chance." *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3 March 1971.

¹⁷ In the pre-1969 period, the government in its attempt to woo the Malay *raayat* had placed great emphasis on building of mosques and

this respect as it had tied its own hands by the very nature of the arrangement with the big business leadership of the MCA which had precluded any substantial state interference in the economy of the country to secure the Malays a larger share and participation. It would be useful here to have an idea of the extent of the disparity as in 1970, so many as thirteen years after independence (see Tables 11 to 13).

The disparity was even greater with regard to ownership of share capital of limited companies; here the level of foreign ownership is significant.

For more than a decade since independence and through two general elections, the leadership of the UMNO had been able to maintain its mass base among the Malays despite the fact that it had done little to improve their economic lot and remove the tremendous disparity with regard to economic and commercial power between them and the Chinese. However, as we noted earlier, the 1969 general elections radically changed this situation. The election results gave a clear indication that large numbers of Malays were seriously dissatisfied with the *quid pro quo* arrangement and were no more willing to accept it as it had secured them only political paramountcy and had denied them an equitable share of economic and commercial power. The government, now headed by Tun Razak, was also fully conscious of the fact that it had substantially lost support among the non-Malays through its actions since 1969 (considered by the non-Malays as against them) and through the

community houses in their *kampongs*. This was, firstly, to cope with the pressure of the PMIP, which emphasized the Islamic religion as the basis of its appeal and was committed to the establishment of an Islamic state, and secondly, there was little more that the government could do under the constraint imposed by the *quid pro quo* arrangement. In 1960, Aziz Ishak, then the Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives, had attempted to promote Malay participation in trade and commerce with a great zeal and seriousness and the result had been that he was promptly removed by Tunku Abdul Rahman. He could not be allowed to upset the *quid pro quo* arrangement. See my *Politics in a Plural Society*, *op. cit.*, pp. 278-82 and 291-92. Also, those days the government, under the influence of Tunku Abdul Rahman and the leaders of the MCA, was strongly anti-communist and was opposed to any significant state interference in the economy of the country as it smacked of communism to them.

TABLE II
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME, PENINSULAR MALAYSIA, 1970*

Income range (per month)	Urban households as % of total households						Rural Households as % of total households						Total											
	M		C		I		O		M		C		I		O		M		C		I		O	
\$1 - 99	4.4	4.3	1.2	0.1	80.1	5.3	3.7	0.9	84.5	9.6	4.9	1.0												
\$100 - 199	7.3	12.0	4.4	0.1	53.5	12.9	9.6	0.2	60.8	24.9	14.0	0.3												
\$200 - 399	10.2	21.8	4.2	0.1	30.1	24.2	9.3	0.1	40.3	46.0	13.5	0.2												
\$400 - 699	11.6	30.6	6.6	0.5	20.0	25.1	5.5	0.1	31.6	55.7	12.1	0.6												
\$700 - 1499	11.7	42.4	9.2	2.0	11.5	19.1	3.3	0.9	23.2	61.4	12.5	2.9												
\$1500 - 2999	8.5	48.5	10.7	6.6	5.5	13.6	2.9	3.7	14.0	62.1	13.6	10.3												
\$3000 and above	6.8	42.7	16.0	13.3	5.4	9.3	1.3	5.3	12.1	52.0	17.3	18.6												

*Income includes cash income, imputed income for earnings in kind plus transfer receipts.

M = Malays, C = Chinese, I = Indians, O = Others.

Malaysia, *Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-75*, Table 1-2, p. 4.

TABLE 12
OWNERSHIP OF ASSETS IN MODERN AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY, PENINSULAR MALAYSIA, 1970

Ownership	Modern agriculture (planted acreage)				Industry (fixed assets)			
	Corporate sector		Non-corporate sector		Corporate sector		Non-corporate sector	
	000 acres	%	000 acres	%	million \$	%	million \$	%
Malaysians	515.0	29.2	697.6	94.1	559.7	42.8	167.2	97.6
Malay	5.0	0.3	349.3	47.1	11.2	0.9	3.9	2.3
Chinese	457.0	25.9	243.3	32.8	342.3	26.2	158.0	92.2
Indian	4.9	0.3	74.8	10.1	1.5	0.1	3.9	2.3
Other	48.1	2.7	13.2	1.8	187.2	14.3	1.4	0.8
Government	—	—	17.0	2.3	17.5	1.3	—	—
Non-Malaysians	1,249.6	70.8	44.0	5.9	747.3	57.2	4.1	2.4

Malaysia, *Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-75*, Table 1-4, p. 12.

TABLE 13
OWNERSHIP OF SHARE CAPITAL OF LIMITED COMPANIES,
BY RACE AND SECTOR, PENINSULAR MALAYSIA, 1970

	Malay		Chinese		Indian		Foreign	
	000 \$	%	000 \$	%	000 \$	%	000 \$	%
Agriculture, forestry & fisheries	13,724	0.9	177,438	22.4	16,191	0.1	1,079,714	75.3
Mining & Quarrying	3,876	0.7	91,557	16.8	2,488	0.4	393,910	72.4
Manufacturing	33,650	2.5	296,363	22.0	8,880	0.7	804,282	59.6
Construction	1,258	2.2	30,855	52.8	447	0.8	19,937	24.1
Transport & Communications	10,875	13.3	35,498	43.4	1,903	2.3	9,845	12.0
Commerce	4,715	0.8	184,461	30.4	4,711	0.7	384,549	63.5
Banking & Insurance	21,164	3.3	155,581	24.3	4,434	0.6	332,790	52.2
Others	13,349	2.3	220,330	37.8	13,348	2.3	182,862	31.4
	102,611	1.9	1,192,083	22.5	52,402	1.0	3,207,889	60.7

Malaysia, *Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-75*, Table 4-7, p. 83.

retirement of Tunku Abdul Rahman who had enjoyed a certain charismatic appeal among them. Its political base was now largely restricted to the Malay community and it had to be strongly secured; any significant erosion in Malay support would make it difficult for the government to survive. It was in these circumstances that the government inaugurated a New Economic Policy with the overriding objective to promote "national unity" through the two-pronged strategy of

- 1) eradicating poverty by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians, irrespective of race. . . .
- 2) accelerating the process of restructuring Malaysian society to correct economic imbalance, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function. Programmes for this purpose include the modernization of rural life, the rapid and balanced development of urban activities, the establishment of new growth centres and the creation of Malay commercial and industrial community in all categories and at all levels of operation. The objective is to ensure that Malays and other indigenous people will become full partners in all aspects of the economic life of the nation.¹⁸

It was argued that in the past economic development priorities had been wrongly based on a "growth first" principle. Under the new policy this had to go. Now the primary emphasis was placed on the removal of racial economic imbalance.

The New Economic Policy was entrenched into the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-75, which was presented to the parliament on 12 July 1971. In presenting the plan, Prime Minister Tun Razak asserted that the aim of the plan was to create "a viable and thriving Malay industrial and commercial community" and to accelerate employment of Malays and the other indigenous people at all levels of manufacturing to reflect the racial composition of the population.¹⁹ He further announced that in

¹⁸ *Malaysia, Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-75*, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Asian Almanac*, Vol. 9, No. 34, 28 August 1971, p. 4754.

order to achieve these objectives the government under the plan would take a number of policy measures, including the following:

Special measures to promote Malay entrepreneurship and ensure adequate supply of finance;
accelerated development of the necessary skills and attitudes among Malays and other indigenous people;
facilities and support for Malay and other indigenous traders and small businessmen to acquire or rent suitable and well-located premises;
wider and more active participation by the public sector;
the design of measures to enlist assistance of non-Malay and foreign owned companies in providing Malays and other indigenous people in-service training, technical and advisory services, cooperation in marketing and purchasing activities, and in the financing of new enterprises;
a new stock exchange based on the trading operations of the MARA Unit Trust would be set up to build up Malay and indigenous ownership of capital assets.²⁰

At the same time the Prime Minister asserted that one of the main programs to strengthen national unity was the stage-by-stage implementation of *Bahasa* Malaysia as the medium of instruction in West Malaysia, with English as a second language. According to this programme, all subjects except languages were to be taught in *Bahasa* Malaysia in English-medium primary schools by 1975, and in secondary schools up to the pre-university level by 1982.²¹

The Malaysia Plan established a 30 per cent rule, which meant that in twenty years, by 1990, the Malays and the other indigenous people "will own and manage at least 30 per cent of the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 4754-55. Earlier, on 12 February 1971, the Minister for Commerce and Industry had asserted: "The government will, therefore, continue to enforce mandatory conditions on manufacturing concerns to ensure that the objectives of the new economic policy are met. These measures and conditions require that employment structure in industrial establishments should reflect, at all levels, the multi-racial composition of the country's population." *Ibid.*, p. 4755.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4751.

TABLE 14
GROWTH OF MALAY SHARE CAPITAL IN LIMITED COMPANIES, PENINSULAR MALAYSIA 1970-90
(IN \$ MILLION)

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990
Share capital of limited companies	5,289	8,663	14,624	25,650	46,821
Annual growth rate of share capital (%)		10.4	11.1	11.9	12.8
Malay share capital of limited companies	102.6	779.7	2,340.3	5,899.5	14,075.5
Proportion of Malay share capital in the total (%)	1.9	9.0	16.0	23.0	30.1
Annual growth rate of Malay share capital (%)		50.0	25.0	21.0	19.0

Malaysia, *Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-75*, Table 4-8, p. 84.

total commercial and industrial activities of the economy in all categories and scales of operation."²²

The government stated that as this colossal restructuring of the economy would be effected in the context of a rapidly expanding economy there should be "no grounds for fear or anxiety on the part of other Malaysians that Government intervention in the private sector on behalf of the Malay community will lead to deprivation of the rights or prospects of non-Malays."²³ It maintained that the only sector to suffer a decline would be the foreign sector; its share would be reduced from 61 per cent in 1970 to about 30 per cent in 1990. And this substantial reduction in the overall share of the foreign sector would be brought about by a continuing decline in foreign private investment in estates and tin-mining, where currently it accounts for nearly 45 per cent of the total foreign investments in the country. The growth in foreign investments would be restricted only to the industrial and commercial sectors of the economy.

The government, at the same time, took urgent action to rectify the imbalance in the racial composition of students at various levels, especially the tertiary level. In this the government was extremely effective and as the figures in Table 16 indicate, by 1973, it was able to reverse the position.

This attempt to remove the economic bases of ethnic discontent and conflict was certainly the most positive thing that the new government had done since May 1969; in it may lie the chief hope for the future of the multi-racial society of Malaysia. Once, over the next two or three decades, a large and independent Malay middle class involved in the professions, business and industry (not restricted predominantly to civil service as in the past) comes into being politics may be able to shed its communal millstone and operate increasingly on a non-communal basis.

At the same time things were happening within the MCA which were to have an impact on the future of the Alliance. The poor performance of the MCA in the 1969

²² Malaysia, *Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-75*, p. 81.

²³ *Ibid.*, 85.

TABLE 15
ENROLLMENTS BY RACE AND BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION, PENINSULAR MALAYSIA, 1970-73
(IN PER CENT)

	1970			1973			
	M	C	I	M	C	I	O
Primary	53.4	36.0	10.0	54.2	35.4	9.8	0.6
Lower Secondary	50.9	38.8	9.6	52.3	37.9	9.2	0.6
Upper Secondary	48.8	43.4	7.0	52.7	40.5	5.9	0.9
Post-Secondary	43.3	49.6	6.0	49.8	44.2	5.2	0.8

M=Malays, C=Chinese, I=Indians, O=Others.

Malaysia, *Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-75*, Table 11-3, p. 192.

TABLE 16
ENROLLMENTS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION BY RACE, 1970-73

	1970				1973			
	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O
<i>Diploma and Certificate courses</i>								
Number	2,865	537	36	19	6,954	1,125	75	30
Per cent	82.9	15.5	1.0	0.6	85.0	13.7	0.9	0.4
<i>Degree courses</i>								
Number	3,237	4,009	595	307	6,188	4,565	907	89
Per cent	39.7	49.2	7.3	3.8	52.7	38.8	7.8	0.8
<i>Pre-University and Preliminary courses</i>								
Number	520	1,141	47	11	704	1,442	108	5
Per cent	30.3	66.4	2.7	0.6	31.2	63.8	4.8	0.2
Total	6,622	5,687	678	337	13,846	7,132	1,090	124
	49.7	42.7	5.1	2.5	62.4	32.1	4.9	0.6

M=Malays, C=Chinese, I=Indians, O=Others.
Malaysia, *Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-75*, Table 11-5, p. 195.

general elections and many of the actions of the National Operations Council had caused serious dissatisfaction and internal dissension within the MCA. Powerful and extremely vocal groups emerged within the organization who began to question and challenge the established leadership that had placed the primary emphasis on MCA-UMNO cooperation within the framework of the Alliance. They sought a complete reappraisal of the party's role and position in the Alliance and in the country's politics in general. Immediately after the elections, in May 1969, the Central Working Committee of the MCA had taken the decision not to join the national government as well as the State Executive Councils. This uncharacteristic assertion of independence from the UMNO, however, did not last for long. Within a few weeks the leadership of the party was able to reestablish its relationship with the UMNO and its representatives rejoined the government. But the ferment within the party continued unabated. A powerful Chinese Unity Movement emerged with the aim "simply to instill the spirit of unity among Malaysian Chinese so that they can play their role effectively in nation-building."²⁴ The party's "old guard," which had accepted subservience to the UMNO, came under severe pressure from the "Young Turks" and in a number of States the party organization seemed to be passing into the hands of the latter. There were even attempts made during mid-1971 to bring together the bitterly anti-MCA Democratic Action Party and the MCA for the sake of the unity of the Chinese people. The significant result of this situation was that the UMNO could no more depend on the MCA and take for granted its relationship with it, especially the basis on which the two organizations had worked together in the pre-1969 era. With the excessive ferment within the Chinese community the UMNO could not at all be certain that the "old guard" could last for long as the leaders of the MCA. And the new generation of leadership that was emerging could not be bound by the *quid pro quo* arrangement and the *modus operandi* of the Alliance of the past.

Moreover, all that had been achieved from the Malay point

²⁴ *The Straits Times*, 17 April 1971

of view in respect of the constitutional-political framework and the economy since May 1969 had been effected during the rule of the National Operations Council, that is, outside the framework of the Alliance. The 1969 general elections, as we noted in the last chapter, had already destroyed the *raison d'être* of the Alliance and since then the organisation had ceased to function and had remained in existence only in name. In the pre-1969 period, the Alliance had been used effectively as an instrument to maintain Malay paramountcy in government, politics and administration that was then the key objective of the ruling Malay leadership. The paramount objective changed drastically after 1969: it was now more than Malay paramountcy and was geared to establishing the foundation of a Malay Malaysia and the Alliance was not considered to be an adequately effective instrument to achieve that. In the circumstances, it became imperative to the leadership of the UMNO to restructure politics and the political base of the government. A two-pronged effort was initiated. First, a successful attempt was made to build a solid and united Malay core behind the government. In the new circumstances Malay unity had assumed even greater importance. Taking advantage of the fear and suspicion of the non-Malays resulting from the 1969 communal explosion, the UMNO leadership was able to persuade the leaders of Parti Islam (formerly the PMIP),²⁵ which had secured a significantly increased support among the Malays during the 1969 general elections, to cooperate and work with them to forge Malay unity and jointly provide the absolutely essential Malay core behind the government. A certain change in the Parti Islam attitude towards the UMNO in the post-1969 setting had already been evident: in 1971, the party had fully backed the UMNO effort to amend the Malaysian constitution and sedition laws and the New Economic Policy geared to improving the economic lot of the Malays.²⁶ The effort toward unity was further facilitated by the fact that in

²⁵ The name was changed at the party's 17th Annual Congress held at the end of July 1971.

²⁶ In the pre-1969 period, the Parti Islam attitude of hostility towards the UMNO was a source of deep disappointment among the UMNO leaders, especially the extremists among them, who believed that

the recent past the influential left-wing and pro-Indonesian group within the party, led by Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, and vehemently opposed to the idea of cooperation with the feudal UMNO, had lost its influence and the leadership of the organisation had passed into the hands of those leaders who saw the problems faced by the country in more strictly communal terms. Soon the UMNO was able to establish coalition governments with the Parti Islam in a number of states and at the national level. Dato Mohammad Asri, the President of Parti Islam, joined the federal government as a cabinet minister.²⁷

Second, the leaders of the UMNO conceived the idea of a *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) to replace the Alliance. The Front has been thought of as a device to provide a multi-racial facade around the Malay core provided by the UMNO. The important advantage of the new arrangement is that it is not based on a "permanent" coalition of the UMNO, the MCA and the MIC, representing the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians respectively, as was represented by the Alliance. The new arrangement's permanent core is provided by the UMNO (and other Malay organisations associated with it), representing the Malays, and the non-Malay organisations, including the MCA and the MIC, are acceptable in the Front only so long as they "cooperate" with the Malay core. Non-Malay representation, not being restricted only to the MCA and the MIC

Malay unity was absolutely essential to safeguard the community's vital interests. They had always lamented at the fact and had felt that if only the Parti Islam were to cooperate with them they would have little difficulty in coping with the non-Malay problem. Interviews with Syed Jaafar Albar, Ali bin Ahmad, and Syed Nasir bin Ismail, Kuala Lumpur, August and October 1964.

²⁷ UMNO cooperation with the Parti Islam did not last for long. In 1977, the party was split and one group, named Berjasa, maintained cooperation with the UMNO and the National Front and the official group severed relations with the Front. In the 1978 State elections in Kelantan, the Parti Islam was soundly defeated; it won only 2 seats in the State Assembly while 11 seats were won by Berjasa and so many as 23 seats, a clear majority, went to the National Front. The July 1978 general elections confirmed the eclipse of the Parti Islam nationally; it won only 5 seats in the Parliament and 9 seats in the various State Assemblies when it had secured 14 federal seats and so many as 50 State seats in the 1974 general elections (it had then contested as a constituent of the National Front).

and not being organised on a permanent basis, inevitably gives them only an extremely weak bargaining position vis-a-vis the Malay core, certainly much weaker than the one enjoyed by the MCA and the MIC in the pre-1969 period within the framework of the Alliance arrangement. Not being in possession of the exclusive responsibility and right to mobilise and deliver the Chinese and Indian vote, as was the position under the Alliance arrangement, in the new set up the MCA and the MIC have come to have only a greatly reduced influence. Moreover, if any of the competing non-Malay organisations ceased to secure the support of the people it sought to represent it could easily be removed from the Front without causing any serious damage to the larger entity. If and when new organisations of the non-Malays emerged with significant support they could be brought into the Front without any difficulty as under the new arrangement no one organisation of the Chinese or the Indians is given recognition as the representative body of the community concerned and entrusted with the sole responsibility to mobilise and organise its support. Under the new arrangement, around the Malay core there are a whole set of competing non-Malay organisations, none of them in a position to assume its membership of the Front as a permanent one. And in the context of the special situation in the country in the post-1969 era, the UMNO leaders had little difficulty in "persuading" a number of the parties of the non-Malays to join the National Front and the government.

The *Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia* and the Sarawak United People's Party, which earlier in 1971 had supported the government with regard to amendments to the constitution and the Sedition Act, were the first ones to join the government and later the National Front. Soon afterwards, the People's Progressive Party also fell in line. In the case of the *Gerakan Rakyat* it was the personal ambition of Dr. Lim Chong Eu, the party's pre-eminent leader and the Chief Minister in Penang, and the internal split within the organisation that provided the motivation. Those in the party who were opposed to cooperation with the government left it in mid-1971 and later formed the Social Justice Party. In the case of the SUPP, its anti-communist leaders, Ong Kee Hui and Stephen Yong, had decided to join an Alliance-led

coalition government in Sarawak in July 1970 in order to protect their position within the party which was then being seriously threatened by its large and radical Chinese rank and file and middle level leadership.²⁸ As for the PPP, which had vehemently opposed the government with regard to the constitutional amendments in 1971 right up to the end and in the process had earned its special wrath, the decision to join the National Front again represented primarily an attempt on the part of the party's non-Chinese leader, S.P. Seenivasagam, to protect his position against its strongly Chinese chauvinist leadership and rank and file.²⁹ The only parties which have been able to maintain their existence outside the fold of the National Front are the deeply distrusted DAP, the Social Justice Party of the religious and idealistic Dr. Tan Chee Khoon, and the largely Iban Sarawak National Party (SNAP) led by Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan, who at one time had worked within the Alliance and later had come to have a deep distrust and hostility against it mainly because of the way it had manipulated his ouster from the Chief Ministership of Sarawak after he had begun to assert himself and his independence from Kuala Lumpur to a certain degree.

Having thus created the broad framework for Malay rule, the Malay ruling group began in an organised manner to extend direct Malay control over all key instruments of power in the country. In the political sphere the UMNO had already assumed full control of the National Front, the ruling party. The influence and bargaining power of the non-Malay political organisations had been reduced to a minimal. Key portfolios, such as Finance and Commerce and Industries, which had been always held by the representatives of the MCA during the pre-1969 period had now been placed under the charge of Malay Ministers. The present 23-member Malaysian Cabinet consists of 16 Malays, 6 Chinese and 1 Indian. The non-Malay Ministers preside over the following ministries: Works and Public Utilities, Science and Technology, Housing and Local Government, Health, Labour

²⁸ See my *The Malaysian General Election of 1969*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²⁹ For a fuller discussion see Chapter 4 above.

and Manpower, Primary Industries and Transport.³⁰ Except for one or two of the 23 ministries where non-Malays have been appointed in the last few months, all permanent heads are Malay civil servants. The top-ranking positions in the armed and police forces are again held by Malays. Non-Malays, on the whole, have been excluded from the top decision-making bodies of the government. There is a clear and consistent movement towards complete Malay control and rule.

³⁰ In October 1962, before the formation of Malaysia, the cabinet consisted of 14 members (9 Malays, 4 Chinese and 1 Indian). The Ministries of Finance and Commerce and Industries were headed by representatives of the MCA.

VII

CONCLUSION

THE political system of Malaysia has suffered from a critical internal contradiction. During most of British rule, Malaya was maintained as *Tanah Melayu*, the country of the Malays. The non-Malays were treated as aliens without any political rights. This had coincided with the Malay view of their country and their own position within it. However, after the Second World War, the British initiated a drastic change in the polity of the country. Having failed with their first attempt through the Malayan Union plan of 1946, in 1948, they established the Federation of Malaya which fully incorporated the fundamental principle of the earlier plan: according the non-Malays a legal status with political rights and obligations. The Preamble to the 1948 agreement, that had been agreed to by the representatives of the Malay people, had stated "that there should be a common form of citizenship in the said Federation to be extended to all those who regard the said Federation or any part of it as their real home and the object of their loyalty." Under this, significant numbers of non-Malays were given citizenship of the Federation of Malaya. At the same time, in symbolic terms the country was maintained as *Tanah Melayu*. At least the Malays were never told in explicit terms that there was any change in this regard. It is this which introduced the fundamental internal contradiction. The Federation of Malaya Agreement of 1948 inaugurated the vital new principle that Malaya belonged not only to the Malays but also to those among the non-Malays who considered it "as their real home and the object of their loyalty." It is significant that this principle also formed the fundamental basis of the constitution of independent Malaya introduced in 1957. The constitution accorded an equal political status to all the people of the country, irrespective of

their ethnic origin; it enshrined the principle of one man one vote. It accepted the principle of *jus soli*, i.e. citizenship to be available by the operation of law to all those born in the country on or after *Merdeka* day irrespective of their racial origin, and introduced extremely reasonable requirements and qualifications for citizenship for those non-Malays who as yet had not been able to acquire citizenship under the existing regulations.

However, not long after independence, once the initial euphoria of the times had dissipated itself, the leadership of the Malays began a gradual but certain process to effectively reestablish Malaya as a Malayo-Muslim country, as *Tanah Melayu*. (It was not without reason that throughout the Government of Malaya was officially designated as *Persekutuan Tanah Melayu*, Government of the Land of the Malays, and the country's railways as *Kareta Api Tanah Melayu*). The leaders knew that this was how the Malay *raayat* viewed the country despite the presence of vast numbers of non-Malay citizens and they had no intention of educating them to be pragmatic and accept the constitutional reality of Malaya as a multi-racial nation. Most of the Malay leaders were themselves firmly committed to the view that Malaya belonged to the Malays, though they refrained from stating it publicly. Among the Malays, they consistently maintained this view and attempted to counter their increasing misgivings during the post-independence period when under the Alliance arrangement non-Malays had come to "share" political power that they should not go by the formal constitutional-political system but by the reality of who wielded power in the final analysis and for what purpose. They assured the *raayat* that they had nothing to worry about the facade, real power was in Malay hands and would remain so. Until the formation of Malaysia in 1963 this worked and the contradiction did not precipitate serious and open ethnic confrontation because of the successful official myth-building around the charismatic personality of Tunku Abdul Rahman and the lack of political articulation and sophistication and unity among the non-Malays. However, the inauguration of the new federation in 1963, which allowed Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and his non-communal People's Action Party to participate in Malaysian politics, altered the situation drastically. In the less than two

years of their existence as part of Malaysia, Lee Kuan Yew and the People's Action Party were able to politically unite and articulate the non-Malay communities to an unprecedented degree. In the circumstances, intensification of the fundamental contradiction and communal confrontation were inevitable. The non-Malays were now determined to convert the multi-racial nation of the Malaysian constitution into a genuine reality while the Malays began to look for more effective and lasting means to protect and promote Malaysia as *Tanah Melayu*.

The fundamental problems of politics in Malaysia during the pre-1969 period were the following:

1: During the Tunku Abdul Rahman era, 1955-1969, from the time of the euphoria of independence to the cruel reality of the bloody communal explosion, while the demands and expectations of the non-Malay communities in general showed a movement towards moderation, the demands of the Malays on the whole assumed increasing extremism. In the immediate pre-independence period, the non-Malays showed an intense concern for the preservation of their languages and educational institutions. They demanded that their languages be accorded recognition as official languages and that schools belonging to their communities (which were the foremost centres of Chinese and Indian nationalisms) be left untouched. However, the Alliance government considered it necessary to establish "a national system of education". And with this objective in mind, it set up a high level Education Committee in September 1955 under the chairmanship of Tun Abdul Razak, then Minister of Education. On the basis of the report of the committee, legislation including the following main points was enacted in 1957:

Malay and English would be compulsory subjects in all primary and secondary schools.

Instruction in Chinese and Tamil languages would be made available in all primary schools maintained in whole or in part from public funds when the parents of fifteen children from any school requested it.

Schools teaching through the medium of Chinese and Tamil would remain in existence and the special examinations for

them (in the vernacular languages) would continue to be conducted and recognised by the government.

A common syllabus and timetable for all schools would be enforced. All schools conforming to the government education policy (incorporating a common syllabus and time table and standard qualifications for teachers) would be eligible for government grants-in-aid.

The point to note here is that the Chinese response to these eminently reasonable recommendations at the time was extremely hostile. The legislation had not only precipitated strikes by students in many Chinese schools but there were serious riots in several cities over the whole country. The Chinese concern was then centred around the compulsory teaching of Malay and English and the common syllabus and time table. They were then insistent on the complete autonomy of Chinese education and language.

However, during the post-independence period, from 1957 to 1965 (the year Singapore was separated from Malaysia), the non-Malays and their political organisations showed full regard for the reality and the compulsions of the multi-racial society. Except for a small and uninfluential extremist fringe among them, they all endorsed the government's education policy contained in the 1957 legislation and fully supported the constitution of the country including the special position of the Malays. These included not only the MCA and the MIC, the non-Malay parties in the Alliance, but also the parties in opposition, such as the Labour Party and the United Democratic Party. It was only the People's Progressive Party which remained committed to its demand of recognition of Chinese and Tamil as official languages in the post-independence period. But significantly, the PPP too then did not explicitly reject the special position of the Malays and in general it approved of the constitution of the country.

It is to be underlined that non-Malays and their political organisations after independence on the whole displayed a definitely defensive attitude. ^{post-independence} In retrospect, they possibly had come to realise that they had not done badly in the transition to independence; large numbers of them had not only secured citizenship

through quite liberal citizenship requirements but what is more important the constitution, the Malay special position notwithstanding, had set up a polity which at least in theory was based on the principle of equality of political status for all, irrespective of racial origin. Their interest and preoccupation essentially was to ensure that the constitution was not tampered with to make it strongly pro-Malay. The non-Malay swing towards extremism in 1959 was largely a response to the increasing extremism among the Malays and their success in using their pre-eminent position in the Alliance and their control over government to excessively promote Malay interests. A strong sense of frustration began to emerge among the non-Malays that the Malays and their leaders in the government were not genuinely committed to an integrated multiracial nation but that they were primarily interested in maintaining Malaya as a Malayo-Muslim nation. They began to feel that unless they made efforts to protect their position the gains they had made at the time of independence could be nullified.

Until the time of independence, the leadership of the MCA was in the hands of the *towkay* group, men with big business interests. And this leadership was then generally acceptable to the rank and file of the Chinese community. But independence brought about a significant change: the subservient role and status of the MCA within the Alliance, forming the basis on which it had worked together with the UMNO, was no more acceptable to many of the members and supporters of the MCA. In the new situation of independence, when they were citizens of equal worth, they sought partnership as the basis of their party's relationship with the UMNO rather than a status of subservience of the immediate pre-independence period. This manifested itself in a complete change in the leadership of the MCA: in 1958 Dr. Lim Chong Eu defeated Tan Cheng Lock, the founder of the MCA and its President since its inception in 1949, for the Presidentship of the party and other members of the new group assumed other positions in the party hierarchy. The old guard was completely removed. The new leaders had gained power on the basis of their commitment to an equal status and rights for all the people of Malaya, a principle that was firmly entrenched in the constitution of the country.

This change in the leadership of the MCA was seen by the UMNO as a development of critical significance. It viewed it as a unilateral change in the political status quo engineered by the Chinese. It seriously unnerved the leadership of the UMNO. They believed that they had negotiated in good faith with the leadership of the Chinese in the MCA at the time of independence and had come to an amicable agreement, which had formed the basis of the constitution and had given the Chinese citizenship and a political status. Now the Chinese community by removing that leadership of the MCA had questioned the very agreement of 1957; if the leadership that had negotiated the deal was not at all acceptable to the Chinese where was the guarantee that they would abide by the deal of 1957. Besides this the UMNO saw the change in leadership of the MCA as the beginning of an attempt by the Chinese to make a bid for political power and a rejection of the *quid pro quo* arrangement organised at the time of independence that had given the Malays political paramountcy and had ensured for the non-Malays free play in the spheres of trade, commerce and industry. As a result, the UMNO reacted strongly. Even before the new leadership had been elected, the UMNO had openly warned in strong terms that the Chinese would be ill-advised to effect the change; it would do certain harm to Malay-Chinese cooperation and the nation. And as they failed to stop the change, as we noted in Chapter 3, they refused to cooperate with the new leadership and within a year successfully manipulated their ouster and the restoration of the old guard in the MCA.

This naturally created an intense concern among the Chinese who began to doubt the UMNO's commitment to a multi-racial Malaya. They began to feel that the Malays were unwilling to accept non-Malays as citizens of equal worth. Many of them left the MCA and joined opposition parties, such as the Labour Party and the PPP. The displaced leadership of the MCA eventually formed a new party in 1962, the United Democratic Party. Under pressure from the new entrants, the major organisation of the non-Malays, the Labour Party, began moving in a pronouncedly pro-Chinese direction. The crisis had generated such anxiety and anger

among the Chinese that all non-Malay parties in order to enhance their appeal among the Chinese assumed an increasingly pro-Chinese posture and orientation¹. In the 1959 general elections, the MCA lost heavily and the Labour Party and the PPP were able to make substantial gains on the basis of the new-found Chinese support. The MCA claim as the sole representative organisation of the Chinese community began to be seriously threatened.

This further intensified Malay fears of the non-Malays and the UMNO assumed an extreme and unrelenting pro-Malay posture. It took immediate action to protect Malay interests. In February 1960, the government appointed a committee headed by the then Minister of Education, Abdul Rahman bin Talib², to review the implementation of the educational policy introduced by the *Report of the Education Committee, 1956* (Razak Report) and to make recommendations with regard to its future working. In its recommendations the Committee went far beyond its terms of reference and recommended drastic changes in the educational system; the recommendations were seen by a senior leader of the Malay extremists in the UMNO to have "undone the harm done by the Razak Report of 1956."³ The two key recommendations of the committee were:

1. Secondary schools receiving partial assistance from the Government which failed to make arrangements to conform fully with all the statutory requirements as from the beginning of 1962 or earlier "should be regarded as independent schools ineligible for any assistance from Government funds as from the beginning of 1962."
2. All the "official, national, public examinations"—the

¹ See my *Politics in a Plural Society, op. cit.*, for a fuller discussion, Chapters 3, 6 and 9.

² Rahman bin Talib was then viewed as a pro-Malay extremist in the UMNO who was closely identified with such extremists as Syed Jaafar Albar and Syed Nasir bin Ismail.

³ Interview with Syed Nasir bin Ismail, Kuala Lumpur, October 1964. It was also stated by Syed Nasir that in 1956-57 Tun Abdul Razak had lost considerable support within the UMNO because of his Report.

Lower Certificate of Education and the Federation of Malaya Certificate of Education Examinations—should be held only in the nation's two official languages, Malay and English. The Ministry of Education should cease to recognise examinations in Chinese, i.e. the Junior Middle III Examination, the Chinese Secondary Schools Promotion Examination and the Chinese Secondary School Leaving Certificate, with effect from 1961.⁴

The effect of this was that all those secondary schools run by the Chinese community, both the partially-assisted and independent, where the medium of instruction was Chinese had to accept of necessity one of the two official languages as the medium of instruction, for the recommendations were to make it virtually impossible for students from these schools to sit in the public examinations recognised and conducted by the government. And if these schools conducted their own examinations they would not have the recognition of the government and therefore would make it very difficult for students taking them to secure suitable employment or pursue higher studies. In effect, the recommendations made schooling through languages other than Malay and English of little use. And therefore, this was seen by many in the Chinese community as dealing a death blow to Chinese language and education. It is important to recall here that the Razak Report of 1956 had clearly acknowledged that schools using Chinese or Tamil as the medium of instruction and examination were not *per se* an obstacle to creating "a Malayan outlook" and that so long as they abided by the conditions considered necessary by it for integration (compulsory teaching of Malay and English, a common syllabus and time table and standard qualifications for teachers) they had a legitimate place in the country's educational system and as such were eligible for government financial support.⁵

Further, in 1960 and 1962, extremely significant changes

⁴ Federation of Malaya, *Report of the Education Review Committee, 1960*, Kuala Lumpur, 1960, pp. 28-33.

⁵ For a fuller discussion on education policy see my "Politics of Education and Language in Malaysia: A Review Article", *Southeast Asia*, vol. II, no. 3, pp. 356-62.

were made in the constitution that we discussed in detail at the end of Chapter 2. It should be noted that these were effected despite a clear assurance by Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman at the time of the Alliance crisis of 1959 that the national constitution would be maintained unchanged. We have also discussed in detail in Chapter 5 the Malay response to the activities of the People's Action Party of Singapore and its leader, Lee Kuan Yew, and how the extremists in the UMNO were able to precipitate the separation of Singapore from Malaysia in less than two years after the larger federation had come into being. All this naturally created an intense disenchantment among the non-Malay communities. They began to seriously worry about their future in the country. They strongly believed that the Malays were determined to use their substantial control over politics, administration and government to establish a *Malay* Malaysia that was completely contrary to the principle of a multi-racial nation enshrined in the constitution of the country in 1956-57 and then again in 1963 when the larger federation was inaugurated. The consequence inevitably was a tremendous resurgence of extremism among the non-Malays who now openly began to question even some elements of the compromise that they had accepted in 1957. They now began to challenge the special position of the Malays and vehemently revived the claim that Chinese and Tamil languages should be recognised as official languages of the country. This change was fully reflected in the position taken by the Democratic Action Party and the PPP in the years following the separation of Singapore in 1965, especially during the election campaign of 1969. Both the parties were able to make very substantial gains in the elections; the DAP, in fact emerged out of the elections as the largest opposition party.

In the circumstances, the various ethnic groups in the country moved headlong on an inevitable collision course. Within days of the 1969 general elections, the terrible communal explosion took place. And since then extremism among Malays has been rampant with a very greatly increased vigour. The Malays, in their anger, did not even spare Tunku Abdul Rahman, the popular and respected *Bapak* Malaysia; feelings ran so high against him that his removal from the

Prime Minister's position was openly sought and at times his effigies were burnt. And since Tunku's exit, the Malay leadership under his successors has given up the pretence of their commitment to a multi-racial nation and have taken deliberate action clearly geared to establishing a *Malay Malaysia*. The chief protagonist and proponent of a *Malay Malaysia*, Dr. Mahathir bin Mohammad, who had been expelled from the UMNO in 1969 and whose book, *The Malay Dilemma*, had been proscribed by the government on the basis that it incited racial disharmony and conflict, has not only been welcomed back into the UMNO but more recently has been inducted into the Malaysian cabinet and given the controversial and key position of the Minister of Education. Later, after the death of Tun Razak, when Dato Hussein Onn took over as the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir was appointed the Deputy Prime Minister thereby implying that he could succeed Dato Hussein Onn as the Prime Minister of the country.

2. During the Tunku Abdul Rahman era, 1955-59, little serious and genuine effort was made to resolve the key communal contradictions; the dominant desire was to contain or accommodate them. The basis of accommodation between the Malays and the non-Malays was the *quid pro quo* arrangement that guaranteed the Malays political paramountcy and allowed the non-Malays free play in the spheres of trade, commerce and industry. The significant result of this was that the fundamental ethnic antipathies remained alive, especially among the Malays. The *quid pro quo* arrangement also precluded any substantial improvement in the economic lot of the Malay *raayat* and in this added to their fears about their future in their own country. In the new situation of independence when the Malays could no more seek and depend on British protection, their fear and suspicion of the non-Malays became even more intense. They excessively worried that unless they remained united and extremely vigilant their fatherland, *Tanah Melayu*, would be taken over by the non-Malays. The *quid pro quo* arrangement, further, perpetuated and strengthened the ethnic basis of party politics in the country. Contentious communal issues which could have been resolved on the basis of a genuine give and take at the time of independence and in

the years following by taking advantage of the atmosphere of initial euphoria and goodwill were largely left unsolved. The Tunku Abdul Rahman view was that the Chinese love of money and good life would keep them busy and occupied and given time they would certainly lose the intensity of their interest in some of the contentious communal issues. It was also believed that cooperation at the top, between the Malay ruling class and the big business leadership of the Chinese, was adequate to maintain a viable political system and communal harmony.

3. The emphasis on Malay unity and solidarity assumed added importance during the post-independence period. The result was that very few Malays dared to cross the ethnic line and join non-communal political organisations. And those few who did show the necessary courage of their conviction soon found themselves completely alienated from the rank and file of the Malay community. In fact, they were to be treated as outcasts of the community and in the process they became politically ineffective. With the known lack of assertive individualism among the Malays and their emphasis on viewing good and proper life as being possible only as integral members of the community it was too much to expect many to rebel from their own community in the cause of non-communalism. The crucial consequence was that non-communal political parties formed during the pre-independence period found it extremely difficult to maintain their non-communal character and during the mid-fifties they all assumed the image of essentially non-Malay parties, parties with an almost entirely non-Malay leadership and rank and file. And once the process began, the parties got caught in a vicious circle: the lack of support from the Malays began turning them into essentially non-Malay parties and that made them even more unattractive to the Malays who anyway were not too keen to join non-communal parties, parties which were not specifically committed to protect and promote the interests of their community. What is more, as a result of the complete lack of support from among the Malays the leaders of these non-communal parties, many of whom had a genuinely non-communal orientation, found it increasingly difficult to withstand the pressure from the non-Malay rank and file and lower level leadership to

convert the parties into instruments for the protection and promotion of the interests of the non-Malay communities. Over the years, these leaders mostly succumbed to the pressure and those few who resisted were forced out. If Malay support, however, had been forthcoming in a significant manner they could have successfully promoted the view that exclusive commitment to non-Malay interests would cost the parties their Malay membership and support. But this was not the situation and therefore all non-communal political parties, over the years during the pre-1969 period, assumed the character of communal organisations of the non-Malays in varying degrees.

4. The Malay leadership failed in two critical areas and this badly affected the viability of non-communal politics and multiracialism in the country. Firstly, the leadership of the UMNO, despite the fact that their organisation led the inter-communal coalition of the Alliance, failed to impress on the Malays during the post-independence period that their traditional view of Malaya as a Malayo-Muslim country, *Tanah Melayu*, was untenable in the new circumstances when large numbers of non-Malays had been accepted by them as citizens of equal worth and the supreme law of the land accepted by them enshrined the principles of one man one vote and multiracialism. The UMNO leaders consistently maintained to their constituents that Malaya, and later Malaysia, was still *Tanah Melayu* and sought their allegiance and support on the chief basis that theirs was the only organisation that could adequately and effectively protect and promote this concept. They told the Malays that the Pan Malayan Islamic Party (later *Parti Islam*), their chief adversary that was openly and firmly committed to a *Malay* Malaysia, was incapable of establishing it as it was an exclusively Malay organisation, lacking any support at all among the non-Malays. And in the new circumstance of the electoral reality of the post-independence period when a significantly large part of the electorate was non-Malay, a party exclusively dependent on Malay support suffered from an inherent disadvantage. Moreover, it was not only incapable of establishing a *Malay* Malaysia but in attempting to do so would inevitably precipitate communal disharmony and collision. They emphasised that the virtue of the UMNO approach was that through the inter-communal

Alliance that it led and substantially controlled, the UMNO not only could successfully establish a *Malay* Malaysia but that in doing so it would not necessarily precipitate communal confrontation as it would tend to establish it with the concurrence and support of the two chief communal organisations of the non-Malays, the MCA and the MIC, which were linked to it in the Alliance. The important point is that the UMNO leadership did not tell the Malays explicitly that the concept of a *Malay* Malaysia that they espoused was wrong and impractical; on the contrary, they told them that they should look towards the UMNO for its realisation rather than the PMIP. It is not being suggested that this could have been achieved easily and during a short period of time; it was an extremely delicate and difficult task especially when it is taken into account that the UMNO had to compete for Malay support against the extremist PMIP which was openly committed to a *Malay* Malaysia and was always waiting for the opportunity to pounce on the UMNO if it ever relaxed in its pro-Malay orientation and commitment. However, given a genuinely dedicated leadership the Malay *raayat* could have been moved in the direction slowly. Tunku Abdul Rahman, with his special charisma and his acknowledged position as *Bapak* Malaysia, was certainly in a position at least to attempt it.

Secondly, the UMNO leadership did not attempt to improve in a significant way the economic lot of the Malay *raayat*. They had not only handicapped themselves by the terms of the *quid pro quo* arrangement which gave the Malays political paramountcy and the non-Malays free play in the spheres of trade, commerce and industry but they lacked the urge to attempt it as they had little confidence in the ability of their own community. For long it was widely believed that the people of the Malay race lacked the capacity for hard work and that material rewards were not adequate to attract them to do so. They were easily satisfied and they lacked enterprise. Their culture and tradition reinforced this as it viewed good life as that which had an unhurried pace and that allowed the time and the conditions to fully enjoy the good things of life—family, friends and neighbours and good food and the nature around. The UMNO leadership, especially Tunku

Abdul Rahman (a Prince from the traditional, lush and blissful setting of Kedah), took this too seriously and believed that even if the Malays were to be helped along to participate in trade, commerce and industry, they would not be able to survive against the enterprise and the capacity for hard work of the non-Malays. They saw Malay survival chiefly as superannuants living off government support and charity or as public servants in the employ of the state. This had the tragic effect of maintaining the Malay lack of confidence in themselves and naturally exaggerated and intensified their fears of their fellow country-people, the non-Malays.

The 1969 general elections and their aftermath, however, drastically changed all this. A complete reappraisal of the position of the Malays and their objectives was made. Politics had to be organised on entirely new bases. The key symbol of the pre-1969 style of politics, Tunku Abdul Rahman, was eased out of the Prime Ministership and the Presidentship of the UMNO and the Alliance. In the new circumstances of the post-1969 era the *quid pro quo* arrangement of the past was discarded and the pretence that the Alliance was a genuinely multiracial coalition geared to the creation of an integrated new nation through "the politics of accommodation" was given up once and for all. Even Malay political paramountcy was viewed as completely inadequate and definite steps were taken to secure an increasing concentration of power in the hands of the Malays inevitably leading to Malay rule. Politics and government, in consequence, have largely been completely reorganised and are now being operated on the basis of the following fundamentals:

1. It has been unequivocally established that Malaysia is a country of the indigenous Malays. Its Malayo-Muslim character is sacrosanct and must be accepted by all without question. The non-Malay peoples who intend to continue to live in the country must accept this and any questioning of this on their part would be considered a sign of disloyalty to Malaysia. The multi-racial character of the country is not to be taken to mean that a special status is to be conferred on the languages and cultures of the non-Malay peoples. The country's language and culture are those of the indigenous Malays. Malaysian culture is to be equated with Malay culture and is not to be

viewed as a composite of the cultures of the various ethnic components of the Malaysian population. Non-Malays are to be permitted to continue to practice and use their own languages, religions and cultural ways so long as they do not conflict with the same of the Malays.

2. The special position of the Malays, which was written into the country's constitution of 1957 as a temporary measure, and the status of their Rulers have now been entrenched into the constitutional-political framework in such a way that they could never again be challenged and threatened by the non-Malay communities through the ballot-box or through other legal political action. Any questioning of these by the non-Malays would not only constitute an unlawful act but also would be viewed as an indication of their disloyalty to Malaysia.

3. Malay unity has been established on a much more solid footing than during the pre-1969 era. At first, the UMNO and the Parti Islam, the two main political parties representing the Malays, worked together and provided the basis for Malay political power and rule. Later, following the withdrawal of the Parti Islam from the *Barisan Nasional* the situation in this respect has not significantly changed as this issue resulted in a split in the ranks of the former and a decision by a large section within it with a much greater electoral support to remain loyal to the *Barisan Nasional*. Thus, Malay political power is no more to be dependent on the *quid pro quo* arrangement with the non-Malay communities and their communal organisations, especially the MCA; electoral support of the non-Malay communities is no more necessary to maintain the Malay ruling class in power as during the pre-1969 era.

4. Malay political power is no more to be the end in itself as it was during the pre-1969 era. It is now being used to give the Malays a reasonable share of economic and commercial power so as to ensure unity and solidarity among them and maintain their loyalty and support for the present Malay leadership. Rapid and substantial economic growth has to be achieved and maintained to ensure communal peace and harmony as only a rapidly expanding cake can be used to offset the non-Malay fears that the increasing Malay participation in trade, commerce and industry would necessarily be at their cost.

Though the government has been facing serious difficulties in the achievement of this objective, it is clearly the first major positive attempt on the part of the Malay leadership to view the problems of the multi-racial society of Malaysia on a long-term basis and seek a lasting solution of a fundamental problem. The wide disparities between the Malays and the Chinese in respect of standards of living and economic and commercial power have been responsible in a substantial manner for the suspicion, distrust and fear of the Chinese among the Malays. So long as these disparities remain ethnic relationships could not be built on a foundation of goodwill, give and take, and mutual respect and understanding. During the pre-1969 era, not much was done to rectify this situation as the Malay leadership under Tunku Abdul Rahman was more attracted to political power and was unsure of Malay's ability and fitness to assume such responsibilities. Furthermore, they were afraid of disturbing the *quid pro quo* arrangement with the Chinese big business leadership and in view of the special pro-Western orientation of Tunku Abdul Rahman they were unwilling to impose any curbs and limitations on the role of foreign capital. However, fortunately the experience of the 1969 general elections began to change this orientation of the Malay leadership; this was one of the more positive features of the elections and their result. The significant losses in Malay support suffered by the ruling party, the UMNO, in almost all over the country led to a reappraisal of the bases of the party's mass support and a fresh evaluation of things that influenced and moved the Malay *raayat*. It was as a result of this that a new emphasis was placed on giving the Malays urgently a reasonable share of the wealth of the country and economic and commercial power. Once this critical redistribution of wealth and economic and commercial power is achieved, hopefully a more solid and lasting foundation of a genuinely multi-racial society would have been laid.

5. The Alliance has given place to *Barisan Nasional* in which the Malay core is provided by the Malay communal organisations, the UMNO and the associated Malay organisations. The Front is not based on a "permanent" relationship between the UMNO, representing the Malays, and the MCA and the MIC, representing the Chinese and the Indians respectively,

as was the case with the Alliance. Non-Malay support for the Front is no more indispensable: it is no more required to maintain the organisation in power and to enable its leadership to contain and curb extremism within its Malay base. Post-1969 changes in the delimitation of electoral constituencies have given further weightage to Malay vote thus enabling it to return a majority of members to the Malaysian Parliament; non-Malay voters by themselves can neither vote a government in nor vote one out of power.

The nature of the composition of the Front, in contrast with that of the Alliance, allows for the non-Malay vote and support to be organised and delivered by a set of competing political organisations of the Non-Malays. No single party is entrusted with the special responsibility of mobilising the Chinese or the Indian vote for the Front as was the case under the Alliance arrangement of the pre-1969 era. No organisations of the non-Malays are treated as "permanent" members of the Front; they can remain in the Front so long as they wish to and so long as they are useful to the collectivity. Non-Malay organisations cannot take their membership of the Front for granted.

6. All these key characteristics of politics in the post-1969 era are geared to provide the foundation for eventual Malay rule. The pretence and public relations effort of the past to present Malaysia as a genuinely multi-racial society where peoples irrespective of their ethnic origins could expect to be accepted as citizens of equal worth have almost entirely been discarded. The Malay leadership seems to have come to the conclusion that either they rule the country or others, the non-Malays, would take over and establish their control; the choice is between their being relegated to the status of second-class citizens or they assuming full power and control.

The country is inevitably moving in the direction of a Malay Malaysia. The non-Malay peoples and their political organisations have lost much of the leverage that they had possessed in the past. They have little bargaining power left to them in view of their lack of control or influence over the key instruments of power, such as the military and police forces and the bureaucracy, and the fact that the government and its Malay leaders are no more dependent on non-Malay

electoral support for their existence. The nature of the organisation of the ruling *Barisan Nasional* has further weakened the position of the non-Malay political organisations. In recent months, three or four non-Malay have been appointed to some top-ranking positions in the civil service and the Prime Minister. Dato Hussein Onn, has made a few public statements attempting to soothe the feelings of the non-Malays and assure them about their future in the country. However, as in the past, these are of little consequence as they have meant little change in respect of the fundamental objectives of the Malay-controlled government and the ruling Malay elite. The clear drift towards a *Malay* Malaysia has been a matter of such concern to Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister of the country from 1957 to 1971, that he recently chose to express his fears and warn publicly:

When I hear now of UMNO people shouting out at the top of their voices for Malay rights, it strikes me that the country is going back to where we started before Independence . . . This is a very dangerous trend in Malaysia's political thinking among UMNO leaders today, and in their efforts to outdo Parti Islam they have broken their words to their allies. No nation can resist time, and as time marches on, the nation must progress ahead. To be quite honest the Malays have never had it so good, and it is not like what it was in the colonial days. We are Heads of State, Executive Heads of Government and State Councils, Heads of Armed Forces, Heads of Departments, Heads of some banks and some business houses. Give some thought to this good and lovely country of ours as a whole and less to our personal selves, and with this there will be peace and plenty for all time and happiness for all people.⁶

One can only hope with Tunku Abdul Rahman that the warning is heeded and the foundations of a multi-racial Malaysia are firmly reestablished.

⁶ Tunku Abdul Rahman, *Viewpoints*, Heinemann, Kuala Lumpur, 1978, pp. 107-8.

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