MALAYSIAN POLITICAL MYTHS

KUA KIA SOONG

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Dedicated to our people
of all walks of life and ethnic origins
who can tell —
black from white
wrong from right
freedom from oppression
democracy from dictatorship
justice from injustice
equality from inequality
courage from capitulationism
honesty from opportunism
consistency from duplicity
information from secrecy
national interest from vested interest
national policy from partisan policy
integration from assimilation
monoculturalism from multiculturalism
chauvinism from fraternalism
racism from anti-racism
rhetoric from the-real-thing
accountability from getting-away-with-murder
development from dependence
imperialism from self-determination
(big words from little ones)
solidarity from splittism
secularism from immorality
realism from idealism
extremists from moderates
immigrants from nationals
Trojan horses from Trojan donkeys
holy alliance from unholy Alliance
and above all,
truth and clarification
from
myths and mystification.

For
Olive Morris,
Jitendra Mohan,
and anti-racists
everywhere

Contents

Introduction

This collection of selected articles by Kua Kia Soong is a diary of events and issues from the time he returned home to Malaysia at the end of 1982 up to mid-1986.

For the major part of the seventies, he was furthering his studies in Britain although he claims his first three years working in one labouring job after another were his formative years. The monstrosity of the U.S. war in Vietnam and other social factors all served to trigger a quest for social enquiry that has never faltered since.

During his ten years or so abroad he traveled widely, mainly by hitchhiking. This included an overland journey from Britain eastward to Malaysia in 1978. He traveled through Iran just before the Islamic Revolution and through Afghanistan just before the Soviets entrenched their rule there.

A firm believer in first-hand experience of life's situations and social problems, he has for example, visited and stayed in Belfast to learn about the "troubles" in Ireland; gone to talk to workers in order to understand the issues involved in many industrial disputes, as well as the problems of

1

racism faced by black immigrants in Britain. These experiences have helped him to acquire an empathy with people from all walks of life and nationalities.

Besides his strong commitment to social awareness, his wayfaring has provided the occasional spiritually-chastening interludes such as treks in English, Welsh, Irish and Scottish highlands, the French and Italian Alps, the Rockies, the Nepalese Himalayas, Bande Amir in Afghanistan, the rushes of northern Thailand. But despite a ready response to such solitary muses and aesthetic pursuits, Kia Soong believes in the preponderance of social truth.

Apart from pursuing his intellectual development in the social sciences — history, philosophy, economics, politics, sociology, anthropology — he has followed keenly political events in Britain, Europe, United States, Soviet Union, Latin America, Asia and Africa. This broad intellectual an international prespective has helped him in his approach to Malaysian development problems, which was the focus of his postgraduate studies.

In this collection, the range of topics he has touched on reveals a concern for Malaysia and its peoples, his deep sense of internationalism, as well as a penchant for wit and humour.

Some of these have been mystified by the powers-that-be, e.g. the Look East policy, democracy in the Third World, communalism. Others have been committed also by Malaysian intellectuals, such as the question of vernacular education, National Culture and Chinese Malaysian politics. In fact some of his most spirited writings have been seen in polemical debates with several intellectuals on these issues*. They have had to be left out of

this collection to be fair to these intellectuals.

Most of these articles appeared in the 'Opinion' column of 'The Star', which during this period provided a rare opportunity for Malaysians to express their views on the pressing issues of the time. These articles are therefore a useful gauge of the extent of freedom of expression prevalent in Malaysia during this span of time.

Press freedom in Malaysia, as is well-known, is dependent on the controlling interests of newspapers, the integrity and courage of editors, the attitude of the Home Affairs Ministry, as well as the existence of laws that inhibit free expression.

Consequently, Malaysian writers and journalists invariably exercise a fair degree of self-censorship.

Through trial and error, the writer learns to adapt to the permissible range and to circumvent the sacred (or "sensitive") cows.

Even so, no amount of writer's guile can beat the newspaper editor's ultimate power to decide what goes into the public media. Kua Kia Soong, like many others, has had articles rejected before. These which have been deigned "unsuitable" for public consumption by the editor can actually provide an insight into how the Establishment decides what is "fit to print".

At this juncture in mid-1986, Kia Soong has suffered more rejections of his articles than usual. Judging from the dearth of gutsy articles in the 'Opinion' page of the newspaper recently, this appears to have been the fate also of many other intellectuals whose views used to grace those centre pages. Maybe the looming general elections and the

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*The debate on Malaysian cultural policy in The Star can be found in 'Malaysian Cultural Policy and Democracy' (ed: Kua Kia Soong, The Resource & Research Centre, Kuala Lumpur, 1990)

change in editorship of 'The Star' has something to do with political party prudence of the newspaper.

This is therefore an appropriate point in time to publish his articles. I hope Kia Soong will continue to write notwithstanding. If his writings continue to fall on barren newsprint, we can at least expect the next collection of "Media Rejects" if it comes to that.

His efforts at exploding myths and clarifying mystification (or as he has put it — cutting through the *taurus turdo*) are to him no more than the ordinary citizen's right to speak out in the defence of democracy, justice, freedom and the truth. It is perhaps the biggest myth of all that "politics" in Malaysia is propagated as the sole preserve of politicians and political parties.

In his modest efforts, Kua Kia Soong is merely reclaiming politics for school boys and school girls, clerks and secretaries, peasants and workers, fathers and mothers , teachers and civil servants, in fact, concerned Malaysians of all our ethnic communities. Whether this collection will be officially recommended for the new 'Kertas Am' syllabus is a different matter altogether.

Tang Eng Teik
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June 1986.

4

Look East: Models and Myths

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad's assertive stance against Britain in October 1981 sent the blood of many a Malaysian racing. But the current infatuation with Japan has dashed many nationalists' hopes. The Look East policy has tended to portray Japan as the perfect model nation, apparently peopled by selfless workers and selfless bosses. But is this strategy for development valid?

The phenomenal growth of the Japanese economy and industry cannot be attributed simply to the "Japanese work ethic" and seen as a peculiar cultural trait to follow. Japan's defeat in World War II did not lead to its complete downfall. The United States Occupation did not destroy the Japanese *zaibatsus* (large financial-industrial combines) but only a few trading companies and armament industries connected to the wartime regime. By 1948, the US was actively working to rejuvenate Japanese industry. The Korean War also accelerated the process of revitalising Japanese industry through increased US expenditure.

Tie-ups between Japanese and American capital

5

and lavish funds from the World Bank and other funding organisations — in which the US had a big say — provided a further push. In the 1950s, the US established a triangular trade arrangement by which Washington put up funds for Southeast Asian countries to purchase Japanese exports. At the same time, Southeast Asia's exports of raw materials played a key role in Japan's manufacturing industries. The terms of trade were invariably weighted against the raw-material producers.

Japan's "reparations" programme after the war similarly served to pump tax-payers' money into industry by bringing Japanese exports back into most of the former Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. By 1969, Japan had overtaken Britain as an "aid" giver, second only to the US. As every development specialist knows, much of this aid is merely trade promotion of one kind or another in export credits.

But it was not until 1965 that the Japanese began to invest vast amounts of capital in Southeast Asia, gaining dominance in the vital manufacturing sectors of most of the Southeast Asian economies. The expansion of the Vietnam War after 1965 was a further boon to Japan in the form of military contracts worth US$505 million, and other war-related contracts for the delivery of goods valued at US$1.2 billion. Against this background came the remarkable rise of "Japan Inc."

It can be appreciated that the comparative strength of the Japanese economy — in relation to, for example, Britain's — owes much to a high rate of capital accumulation in its post-war recovery. This in turn has been achieved through a close relationship between private capital and its supervision and aid by the government, which comprises

6

something like 90% of all Japanese government activity devoted to nurturing business, unparalleled in other industrialised countries.

On the other hand, Japan has the most inequitable overall tax system of the advanced countries and spends least on social services. Can such a choice be acceptable in Malaysian society in the context of the New Economic Policy (NEP) objective of eradicating poverty?

Thus, while Japan's post-war recovery involved massive capital investment and frantic innovation, the other industrialised countries such as Britain merely relied on their colonies and former colonies — such as Malaysia — to 'prop up their ailing economies. The simple logic of inter-capitalist competition foreclosed the outcome. Britain's present predicament is the result of that outdated laissez-faire capitalism, not the so-called British disease that pins the blame on the "lazy British worker."

As a result of the Japanese Government's control over capital accumulation, it ensured an economic structure very different from that of Western countries. Japan has the heaviest-based industrial economy in the world. This strong heavy-industry sector has ensured Japan's continuing export competitiveness and shaped its import needs.

The predicament of the Third World today has shown that this option is no longer open to most developing countries since even most of the already industrialised Western countries cannot compete with Japan, where concentration of capital has gone hand in hand with monopoly and oligopoly. Erstwhile *zaibatsu* rivals like Mitsubishi, Mitsui and Sumitomo now collaborate and coordinate their operations. Besides banking, there is a high degree

of concentration in the key sectors of steel, motor vehicles and computers.

In recent years, Japanese industry has increased its direct overseas investments mainly because of three phenomena related to its growth: rising wages, pollution, and further rationalisation of its industries. The rise in Japan's industrial wages has been sharp (15–18% a year) but not out of step with increases in productivity. All the same, together with the revaluation of the yen, wages there are about 10 times higher than wages in Southeast Asia. The militant protests against environmental pollution in Japan, the likes of which TV audiences all over the world saw at Narita, also influenced the policy of finding off-shore sources for Japan Inc.

Tariffs set up by most countries throughout the world after the war further necessitated moving production abroad. At the same time, the host countries in the region offered lavish incentives to the foreign investors. Rationalisation within Japanese industry itself meant that labour-intensive industries such as textiles and electronics-assembly could be hived off to countries such as Malaysia. This has been true for all the Japanese companies whose names we see in neon lights in much of the Third World — Matsushita, Sony, Toyota, Nissan, and the rest.

Admirers of the "Japanese miracle" often present the stereotype view of the Japanese company being made up of loyal, thrifty, hard-working workers and the paternalistic benevolent boss looking after the extended-family enterprise. But writers on Japanese affairs have pointed out that the paternalistic system and "quality control circles" we hear so much about apply only to a few

big companies, and not the vast majority of average and small companies. The main component used by the Japanese companies to buy loyalty has been the offer of long-term employment. It is this rather than the mythical Japanese cultural trait that has ensured loyalty and company consciousness.

But while this was possible during the boom years in the 1960s, it had become increasingly difficult for companies to deliver, especially during a recession. In 1971, large-scale sackings were reported in the electric, steel, car, shipping, textile and chemical industries. The trend towards automation and the attraction of cheap labour abroad has also encouraged Japanese management to trim its local labour force and to introduce a code of worker control. The enfeebled trade unions could scarcely respond to rationalisation in the interests of capital. Again, it is time to ponder on retrenchments in Malaysian industries which are foreign-dominated.

To explode more myths about Japanese "human relations": older employees are the ones who get the chop during a recession, though for some time now, the retirement age has been extended from 55 to 60. The social-security and welfare system in Japan has not been developed enough to meet current needs. The position of women in Japan is hardly enviable. Their dominance in part-time work, increasingly common in the recession, means that they do not get the benefits of regular staff. The same applies to home-workers in the garment, toy, textile and electrical sectors, who number more than a million.

In this respect, Japanese women have a rougher deal compared with women in the West. Women's subordination after all has a long history in

Japanese society. Is this aspect of Japanese culture so exemplary? How can this aspect of the Look East policy be compatible with the tenets of Islam which preaches the equality of women and men? Or indeed with universal principles of egalitarianism that are embodied in the NEP? Women everywhere are increasingly forming an important section of the workforce and showing that they are not prepared to accept the old servility.

If one examines the management-labour relationship in the Japanese system, one finds that strong hierarchical relations and a shop-supervisory system lie at the root of Japanese management. Japanese polls reveal that the commonly held view that Japanese workers are happy is just a myth.

The current spate of retrenchments in Malaysia has prompted some government officials to call for unionisation, especially of the electronics workers. That is truly laudable if it arises out of concern for protection of Malaysian workers. However, union leaders are rightly anxious about the idea of in-house unions, which will not protect workers as effectively as unions based on industry. In this respect, it is worth noting some characteristics of Japanese unionisation. Firstly, many Japanese workers, especially blue-collar workers, are not unionised at all. Secondly, Japanese unions are in-house rather than on industry in order to inculcate loyalty to the enterprise. Once again, it is difficult to see how this aspect of the Look East policy can meet the aim of the NEP: to eradicate poverty.

Do we really need "models" of the sort that developing countries are continually told to emulate from the already industrialised countries? The problem of the Third World today is a testament against the "stages of growth" theory of W.W

Rostow: that developing countries will eventually catch up with the West by degrees, but more importantly, by allowing the advanced countries to invest in them. The supposed "transfer of technology" is illusory, as Finance Minister Tunku Razaleigh Hamzah has said: "Foreign companies are still bogies ... They have not transferred their technology to our people, they have not brought in capital, they are relying on domestic funds and borrowing from banks here, and they have not trained our people. They are still the same..." (FEER, Aug. 22, '80). Are we then to believe that somehow Japanese companies are different?

It is Malaysia's indigenous industries which have to be nurtured (as the Japanese initially did with theirs) in step with the country's rural economy but without the exploitation that accompanied the process in the West and Japan. By leaning on yet another foreign capital (and in the present world league, any government would be crazy to have a Look West policy!), it is hollow to talk of an independent road.

*[Far Eastern Economic Review, 31 March 1983;
The Star, 7 March 1983;
Nanyang Siang Pau, 22 July 1985;
Nadi Insan, May 1983]*

Non-Aligned Movement and Double Standards

Asean countries must be applauded for their trenchant defence of the Kampuchean people's right to self-determination at the summit conference of the non-aligned movement in New Delhi early this month. The question of whether Kampuchea is returned to its rightful place at the conference is intimately bound with the fundamental principles upon which the movement was founded and also its future prospects.

But if the non-aligned movement is to maintain its integrity member countries must not hesitate to condemn *all* imperialist encroachments, whether these be perpetrated by the Western or Eastern powers. If it is to have any credibility, each member must be certain that it does not uphold double standards.

From the selected listing below of past and recent instances of duplicity by large and small countries alike, we will examine the record of the Asean countries.

The superpowers usually do not apologise for their interventionist actions. But for ideological

purposes they are forced into making duplicitous arguments to justify their actions. But whether these be for "the defence of democracy" or "the defence of socialism", the imperialist interests are only too clear.

The US intervention in Vietnam was perhaps the main headline grabber during the 1960s. In hindsight and after the heavy toll of American casualties, even the Americans themselves have admitted their mistake.

Yet most if not all the countries in Asean did not raise a voice of condemnation, while not a few actually profitted from that monstrous war. By the end of the war, the US justification of "the defence of democracy" had worn rather thin.

US intervention in Latin America, notably in Cuba, Chile and now El Salvador, flagrantly disregards the principles of the non-aligned movement, first declared at the Bandung Conference in 1955:

- Respect for the rights of peoples and nations to self-determination;
- Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states;
- Non-interference and non-intervention in the internal affairs of states; and
- Peaceful co-existence among states.

For the record, we should note that the issue of the rightful representative of Kampuchea had been raised in 1970, before the Lusaka summit. Then, Sihanouk had been rejected in favour of Lon Nol even though the former had been unseated as head of state by the complicity of American and South Vietnamese troops.

But in recent years, the threat to the principles of non-alignment and world peace has come from

13

the Soviet Union. The high-water mark of this was reached at the Havana summit in 1979, when Cuba tried to present the Soviet Union as the "naturally ally" of the movement. The hollowness of this claim was exposed by the Soviet's brazen occupation of Afghanistan and its backing for Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea.

The other big powers are by no means absolved. A more recent instance of duplicity was provided by Britain's defence of "the sovereignty of the Falkland Isles". Although she despatched her military thousands of miles into the Atlantic Ocean to defend that right, she was not prepared to grant that right to Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

As usual, the national sovereignty of the island base had to be sacrificed for "the defence of democracy". (Diego Garcia has been leased to the US by Britain.)

Some lesser powers have likewise flagrantly ignored those fundamental principles of the non-aligned movement. But in most cases, they have acted with the connivance of the big powers. Israel's abomination in the Lebanon is but the latest in a long history of Zionist denial of the national rights of the Palestinians. Vorster's barbarous apartheid regime is another notorious violator of human rights.

Indonesia, an Asean member, has also infringed that right of nations to self-determination. Although in June 1974, Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, stated (in a letter to Jose Ramos-Horta of Fretilin) that "... the government of Indonesia adheres to the fundamental principle that the independence of every country is the right of every nation, with no exception for the people

in East Timor" ... in December 1975, the Indonesian military invaded East Timor.

Have the Asean countries voiced their condemnation of *all* these instances of violation of nations' right to self-determination? It is clear that not only the aggressor countries but also silent members of the non-aligned movement are guilty.

At the New Delhi summit, the duplicity of the Indian government over the issue of Kampuchea's representation did not escape international criticism. Out of deference to Hanoi, the host country tried to keep the rightful representatives of Kampuchea — the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea — out of the conference. In Havana in 1979, the Cuban hosts had manipulated the proceedings in such a way that led to the "vacant seat" formula for Kampuchea. That too has been roundly recognised and denounced.

The Indian authorities tried to dismiss the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea out of hand, and also rejected any historic claims on Prince Sihanouk's behalf as one of the founder members of the non-aligned movement. But supporting the empty-seat formula favoured by Vietnam (which amounts to a unilateral disenfranchisement of Kampuchea as a member of the non-aligned movement) the Indian government has sought recourse to dubious precedents and arguments, in particular, by insisting on the need for "consensus" (i.e. unanimity). This they knew was not feasible as a precondition for allowing Democratic Kampuchea to occupy its rightful place at the conference.

If the non-aligned movement is to become a "moral force", member states must not harbour

15

double standards but must at all times take a principled stand against all encroachments on the national sovereignty of any state.

If it is to become a political force, the movement must give unconditional support to all anti-imperialist movements in the Third World. Only then will no member state be tainted either by the stigma of being "the Trojan horse of Western imperialism" or that of "surrogate of Moscow".

The recent idea floated by Singapore's Mr Rajaratnam that small states should maybe choose an umbrella of one of the superpowers ("while remaining non-aligned") if only to spare us the need for excessive military expenditure, is inconsistent.

That is a departure from the principled stand which must be the basis for the non-aligned movement and which was laid down at the Belgrade summit: The refusal to join any bilateral or multilateral military pact which would implicate them in the East-West disputes.

While Mr Rajaratnam may argue that he had stressed that small states can still remain aloof of superpower rivalries, there is still a contradiction between his proposal and the need to give unconditional support to all anti-imperialist movements. The failure to do the latter would lead to a non-aligned movement that is simply another wind bag that no one takes seriously.

The strength of the non-aligned movement lies in the unity of its member states of the Third World, based on a common heritage and similar aspirations. As far as our region is concerned, the Kampuchean struggle against Vietnamese occupation is not only for the right of the Kampuchean

16

people to self-determination and national independence, it is also for the peoples of South-east Asia to determine their future without the interference of the superpowers.

The national struggle of the Kampuchean people against Vietnamese occupation is the quintessential expression of the principles of non-alignment.

[The Star, 30 March 1983]

Eritrea: The World's Longest War

The world's longest but least publicised war has been raging in the Horn of Africa for over 20 years. Eritrea has been fighting a war of national independence from Ethiopian rule for that long by relying almost entirely on the resolve and commitment of it's own people.

The poor media coverage of this war in the West can perhaps be explained by the fact that the state of war between Ethiopia's Soviet-directed forces and the seemingly indestructible Eritrean guerillas is of great interest not only to Moscow but also to the Western powers.

This is further compounded with the phenomenon of "left" apologists of the so-called "Marxist-Leninist" regime of Chairman Mengistu Haile Mariam who see the Eritrean struggle as "merely a nationalist struggle" against a supposed "progressive" Ethiopian regime.

Against all these odds, it is remarkable that the Eritreans have continued to deal severe blows against each Ethiopian offensive. Mengistu's Sixth Offensive (Red Star) launched last year met the same ignominious fate as the previous ones. Nerve

gas is now likely to be used on an increasing scale by the Soviet-assisted Ethiopian forces. Indeed Eritrea has become a testing ground for Soviet weapons.

As if the ravages of the war were not enough, East Africa has been one of the regions worst afflicted by drought over the last 12 years. It has been especially serious in Eritrea where the effects of the drought have been compounded by a weak economic base caused by the 20-year-old war. Consequently, Eritreans are living under extremely difficult conditions.

The war has so far claimed over 100,000 lives and has forced 500,000 — one-seventh of the total population — to flee. About half that number live in refugee camps in neighbouring Sudan, many others are dispersed throughout the Middle-East and elsewhere.

The length and intensity of the war is due to foreign involvement: US, Soviet and Western European. With a 600-mile coastline on the Red Sea, Eritrea is at the centre of great-power rivalry. It borders western trade routes and the strategically important approach to the oilfields of the Middle-East.

During the 19th Century scramble for Africa by the European powers, Eritrea was formed through Italian colonisation. It remained under Italian domination until the Second World War when the British seized control of it.

After the war, the UN decision as to the future of Eritrea was subjected to conflicting pressures. The majority of Eritreans desired independence (an aspiration at the time supported by the Soviet Union). The British wanted to retain control of the country; while the US pressed for it to be

19

federated to Ethiopia, to come under the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie who was a close ally of the West.

The US was able to impose its solution because of its dominance at the UN, and in 1952, Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia against the wishes of the Eritrean people. The limited self-government which this gave Eritrea was discarded by the Emperor in 1961 when he dissolved the Eritrean parliament and forcibly annexed the country.

Among other policies introduced to create the "greater Ethiopia", Amharic, the language of the ruling group was imposed on all the other national minorities. The armed struggle for Eritrean independence dates from that period.

The Ethiopian army, equipped and trained by the US and Israel was unable to defeat the liberation movement. In 1974, amidst widespread famine, demoralised Ethiopian troops stationed in Eritrea mutinied, sparking off a mass protest movement in Ethiopia.

Very rapidly, the power of the Emperor was undermined. For a brief period, peasant associations took control of the distribution of land in Ethiopia while trade unions and students began to demand freedom of expression, so long denied to them. But a section of the army took advantage of the situation, seized power after deposing the Emperor, and suppressed the freedoms that had been gained.

Trade unions were soon disbanded, their leaders imprisoned, thousands of students and intellectuals were butchered and the press was turned into a mouthpiece of the military government. At the same time, the war against the

liberation movement in Eritrea was relaunched.

In 1977, when the US suspended its military supplies to Ethiopia, the military regime turned to the Soviet Union for support. The war against Eritrea has since resumed with increasing use of Soviet weapons and military advisers.

The main political and military force in the Eritrean liberation movement is the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF). It split from the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in order to link the struggle for national independence with a programme of social transformation throughout the country.

In the villages liberated by the EPLF, representatives who are democratically elected by mass organisations of workers, peasants, women and youth, look after the running of daily life. Systematic health care, literacy, and education programmes for all Eritreans are being carried out for the first time in Eritrea's history.

Women, for centuries denied many human and social rights, are now gaining equal rights with men and gradually achieving equal participation in economic, social and military life. One-third of EPLF fighters are women.

The feudal system of land ownership is being replaced with an equitable distribution of land and equipment among the peasants. A network of small workshops produces and repairs essential agricultural and military equipment. At the same time, EPLF fighters also take an equal part in the productive work of planting and harvesting crops.

Most of the EPLF's weapons and their more sophisticated equipment have been captured from the Ethiopian forces. The Eritrean frontline fighters have even learnt to make their own

primitive but effective gas masks, made from rubber with layers of carbon filter. In addition, they are issued with a syringe and atropine, an antidote against nerve gas poisoning.

In 1977, when the Soviet Union intervened on the side of Ethiopia with the supply of $2 billion worth of arms, the two liberation fronts were controlling the entire Eritrean countryside and all but five major towns. The military superiority the Soviets gave to the Ethiopian army forced the liberation fronts to withdraw from most of the towns.

The Ethiopian army, made up largely of peasants press-ganged into military service, has launched six offensives against the Eritreans since 1976 in an effort to suppress the resistance. But the EPLF continues to control most of the countryside even around the capital city of Asmara.

After the failure of each offensive, the Mengistu regime has resorted to ever more drastic tactics. The military commitment of Ethiopia continues to rise as not only Eritreans but the people of Western Somalia, Tigray, Oromo and Afar are taking up arms in support of their demand for self-determination within Ethiopia.

Ethiopia's defence budget has almost doubled to about $331 million in four years. There are 230,000 personnel in its armed forces, including about 11,000 Cubans, 1,300 Warsaw Pact technicians and advisers operating aircraft and heavy equipment, as well as South Yemeni troops.

Bearing in mind that against them are pitted merely 10,000 EPLF guerillas, it is remarkable that the Eritreans have managed to turn Mengistu's dream of victory into a nightmare of defeat.

Towards the end of last year, the direction of

the Ethiopian war strategy against the Eritreans was taken over by Soviet top brass in Addis Ababa and in Asmara, in northeastern Eritrea.

Field Marshal Dimitrov from Moscow is now fully responsible for the war and operations against the EPLF. He has thus relieved Mengistu as Supreme Commander of the Ethiopian forces.

In addition, at least two Soviet generals are said to be directing battlefield operations, aided by an estimated 2,000 Russian military advisers, more than 200 of whom have been serving in the field with Ethiopian troops.

A Soviet-style political structure has also been introduced to ensure that Ethiopia will stay within Moscow's bear hug. Apart from everything else, Ethiopia owes the Soviet bloc some £1,250 million ($4,500 mil) for arms and other supplies.

Mengistu is in no position to resist the Russians ever since his former preeminence was deflated by the ignominious defeat of his "Red Star" campaign which was launched last year to smash the Eritrean guerillas "once and for all". Ethiopia, with its 33 million people and its strategic significance, is a power base in Africa which the Soviet Union will not easily abandon.

The Soviet Communist Party and the Ethiopian "Commission to Organise the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia" (COPWE) have also signed a "friendship agreement" to allow a full flood of "fraternal advice".

While the Ethiopian regime receives military backing from the Soviet Union, it also receives economic support from the European Economic Community.

The Soviet Union and the western powers compete for influence over the military regime but

23

collude to maintain a "greater Ethiopia" because neither expects their interests to be served by the emergence of an Eritrean nation that is determined to assert its independence. This explains why the western media are largely silent on a war in which the Soviet Union is as actively involved as it is in Afghanistan and Kampuchea.

Although the wars in Eritrea and Somalia continue, Addis Ababa and the central highlands are firmly under government control. British business visitors are coming by the hundreds to Ethiopia and Export Credit Guarantee cover is provided for the sizeable exports, which amounted to £15 million ($54 mil) in the first half of 1982.

Italy has also agreed on a new assistance deal with its ex-colony. The niggly compensation issue between the two countries has also been finally settled.

Italy has made Ethiopia a soft loan of $280 million for the completion of development projects and the purchase of material and equipment from Italy. Compensation settlements have similarly been reached with Dutch and British plantation companies.

But the European Development Fund is by far the largest donor to Ethiopia. After the compensation issue had been settled, the World Bank once again resumed assistance, from $35 million in 1980/81 to $250 million in 1982/83. Other major donors are European countries, Scandinavia, Italy, France, Canada, West Germany.

[The Star, 9 May 1983;
Sin Chew Jit Poh, 25–26 April 1983]

24

Is Kampuchea Now Better Off?

The articles by Bob Secter *(Kampuchea Now Better Off* and *The Vietnamisation of Kampuchea,* The Star, April 27) belong to a trend mounted by various apologists for Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea. To them, this task has become all the more urgent when it is realised that Vietnam's action is "irreversible". Articles like these are meant to "routinise" the status quo, to get us used to the idea.

It might be forgivable if sufficient evidence was provided to show how Kampuchea is "now better off". But the reader is treated only to some comments that could have been written without the journalist having been to Kampuchea, never mind having done some exhaustive investigation. All we got was a picture of a row of children drinking milk and the assertion of the Kampucheans' relative well-being by the journalist himself.

James Webb's comment-piece on *The Final Solution in Kampuchea* is an ideological justification of the old familiar "defence of (western) democracy" variety. Thus, his bemoaning of Vietnam's actions in Kampuchea has only one aim: the absolution of the US' former crimes in Indochina.

Bob Secter's reporting of the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea bears the same formula as the other apologists of Vietnam who contrast horrors of Democratic Kampuchea under Pol Pot with the return to "normality" under Heng Samrin.

In the West, this propaganda operation is mounted by a section of the European "left" to obscure or justify Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea. They are prepared to sanction invasion and oppression in the name of "internationalism" and "socialism". There is the parallel apologia of the Ethiopian regime and the Soviet-backed Kabul regime. They have a notion of a Vietnam fixed in time – the heroic Vietnam of the late sixties and early seventies.

An inseparable component of their conception · is that of a single contradiction underlying all the developments of South-East Asia over the last two decades: viz. Vietnam vs US imperialism. Other elements are mere adjuncts of this basic premise. Thus, for example, China is a mere US proxy that is encouraging Kampuchea to attack Vietnam.

Indeed in these "left" apologies for Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea, one never gets any analysis in political or class terms, merely "cameos" of supposedly satisfied peasants.

Presenting "vietnamisation" as a return to "normality" is an essential part of the Vietnam apologist's trade ... "Anything rather than the return of Pol Pot" is the corollary of that argument. With the looming spectre of Pol Pot, "... things can't be that bad" after all.

The suggestion that the Kampucheans themselves are somehow not capable of controlling their own destiny is quite common in the reports by

26

these Vietnam apologists.

We have also noted the fantastic lack of corroborating evidence for his other claim that "Kampuchea is now better off". In fact evidence shows that the Vietnamese are hated by the Kampuchean people particularly in Phnom Penh where more than 50 per cent of the population today are Vietnamese: cadres, political commissars, business people.

The Vietnamese are no better than the former colonial power since Kampuchea's economic resources are being pillaged while vast agricultural tracts are being settled by the Vietnamese.

A former official of the Heng Samrin regime who has fled to the West tells of how the Vietnamese behave like masters. These facts are corroborated by M. Dy Lamthol, private secretary to Hunn Sen, foreign minister in the puppet government, and who has recently defected to Chun Buri refugee camp in Thailand.

M. Ly Dan, former director-general of pharmacy under the Heng Samrin regime and who recently fled Kampuchea for France, tells of vietnamisation at the administrative level.

On the Vietnamese side, Khmer troops forcibly conscripted by the puppet regime of Heng Samrin are continually deserting the army because they are only too aware that they are engaged, not in just war, but in fratricide. Vietnam has no alternative but to supply their own reinforcements and troops.

James Webb's attempts, through a condemnation of Vietnam's actions in Kampuchea, to whitewash the US genocide during the Indochina War is rather crude.

What are we expected to say? That the US was

right in killing and maiming thousands upon thousands of Vietnamese and Kampucheans, despoliating their land and resources just because Vietnam is today the villain?

William Shawcross (The London *Sunday Times* correspondent and author of *Sideshow*) recounts the length to which Dr Kissinger and Mr Nixon went and the level of corruption involved to ensure the continuation of the war in Indochina. It places responsibility for the destruction of Kampuchean neutrality and society firmly on the shoulders of the US Government.

It was the US that engineered the Lon Nol coup and reorganised the Kampuchean army along US lines, increasing dependence upon large injections of military aid, destroying any semblance of Kampuchean neutrality.

Dr Kissinger chose the most aggressive options open to US policy in Indochina. Nixon's "Madman Theory" — that it was possible to get the enemy to negotiate by letting them believe the US would go to any lengths to win and that the President's next move was unpredictable — was put into effect by Dr Kissinger.

It was during this time that the largest possible area of Kampuchea was bombed, paving the way for the destruction of the Kampuchean countryside. Even up to the present day, vast tracts of formerly rich agricultural land are still uncultivable, contributing to the famine of recent years. Therefore, the US must bear some of the responsibility for the decimation of Kampuchea's population even in the post-Vietnam War period.

[The Star, 4 June 1983]

The Case Against Capital Punishment

The recent overwhelming defeat in the British House of Commons of the move to bring back capital punishment — abolished for the last 20 years — was a resounding victory for the abolitionists' cause.

In our country, over 30 people have been hanged since 1980 — after a lapse of 11 years during which no executions were carried out — and about the same number again are awaiting execution under the Essential (Security Cases) Regulations (ESCAR).

We do not know how many more security cases are still pending in the courts and to be tried under ESCAR, for which the lone judge is compelled by the regulations to impose, upon conviction, the mandatory death sentence.

The judicial taking of life has been described as "the most pre-meditated and most diabolical of murders. The cry to bring back the noose is basically a relic of a primitive drive for revenge. Judicial killing merely passes the responsibility to the judge or jury, who are supposed to be acting on our behalf."

The recent suggestion to commute the sentences of prisoners to manual labour is a laudable and positive move. This approach recognises that the criminal is as much a product of our society, its contradictions and its violence; and that rehabilitation is possible. It is well-known in sociology that punishment is less to reform the criminal or protect society, rather, it is to demonstrate and enhance the power of the state.

Executions only serve to dehumanise the people further and demoralise both staff and prisoners alike at a time when reform of prisons is a persistent problem.

In the last few years, the ESCAR hangings have indeed cast our society in a dark light. We have predictably fallen into the western news media image of a Third World "where life is worth less than that of the west."

It must be borne in mind that in most of these ISA cases, those hanged had been found guilty only of *possession* of firearms. They had not used them to inflict any injury on anyone. It is indicative of our primitive psyche that we are not content that they be put safely away in prison, we demand their death!

What emerged in the recent British debate on hanging is that capital punishment, despite popular misconception, has little effect on criminal statistics.

It is appropriate to refer to the British statistics not only because they are broken down into various categories but also because there are points of comparison between the period when there was capital punishment (before August 1964) and the 20 years when it was abolished.

According to the British Home Office Research

Unit study, over the last decade, the increase in murders in the various categories has been insignificant. The evidence for the deterrence factor if hanging were to be restored is even less convincing. Despite the troubles in North Ireland, the number of acts of terrorism has not shown an appreciable increase even though the death penalty did not exist.

It is telling of the intention not to create more Irish martyrs that many in the right-wing Conservative Party voted against the restoration of hanging. Even those responsible for security in Ulster — the Northern Ireland Office, police and army chiefs — spoke adamantly against its reintroduction for that very reason.

The Attorney-General's Chamber has urged the mass media to "play up executions" as a deterrent (*Malay Mail*, Aug. 18). This is not only counter-productive, it also does not help our efforts as an up-and-coming civilised society trying to project ourselves upon the world arena.

If the law on capital punishment in Britain had not been changed in 1964, at least SIX men would have been hanged for offences they did not commit. No system is infallible. Moreover, miscarriages of justice usually take time to come to the surface as the cases in Britain showed. These ranged from five to 12 years. Repeated appeals failed to establish their innocence.

Now, if under "normal" legal procedures, such unfortunate cases of wrong conviction can come about, one can only baulk at the thought of the numerous cases being tried under the "special procedures" of ESCAR.

Under ESCAR, all the checks and safeguards of a fair and just trial are overridden: hearsay evidence

31

is admissible; evidence by prosecution witnesses is allowed to be given in camera in the absence of the accused and his counsel; and perhaps most uniquely, the judge in an ESCAR case sits alone and is compelled by the regulations to impose, upon conviction, the only sentence ... death by hanging.

The Government justifies ESCAR by saying that the country is in a state of emergency because of the underground activities of subversives and anti-national elements.

The International Commission of Jurists (of which our own Tun Suffian is a member), a Geneva-based human rights organisation has described ESCAR as "going beyond what is strictly required for protecting the 'life of a nation' as opposed to the life of the government in power".

Amnesty International has also recommended that the ISA and ESCAR be repealed. More recently, Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Khoon has lent his name to the review of the ISA, noting the many parts of that law which violate basic human rights of detainees.

The Malaysian Bar Council has also declared that "any person trained in any legal system which gives prominence to the rule of law will find the provisions of ISA and ESCAR abhorrent." It has recently endorsed the recommendation of the International Mission of Lawyers which came to study the situation late last year.

To conclude my humble appeal, for the abolition of capital punishment on the grounds of humanitarianism, justice, and the self-respect of all Malaysians, I leave you this sober poser by Lord Morris of Borth-y-Gest, a British high court judge in the sixties:

"Can we be sure that the utter and irrevocable

finality of the death penalty can always be matched by positive certainty of guilt? In no country, with the fairest system of law, with the most humane and conscientious judiciary do I feel that we can be satisfied of that."

Look East with Proper Lenses

What are the lessons of the Japanese experience for Malaysia? From the Government's and academics' statements and speeches, one can gather that, above all, the emphasis is on the motivational aspect. This is mainly intended for our workers.

Thus it is frequently pointed out that the "collectivist spirit" of the Japanese is lacking in the Malaysian individualists. The economic corollary to this psychological factor, it would appear from the Malaysian Government's industrial strategy, is the emphasis on heavy industries since this is manifested in Japan's current economic might.

The Japanese experience indeed has profound lessons for Third World countries like Malaysia but we do not seem to have learned the right ones. We have tried to leap to the top-most rung of the ladder instead of taking the obligatory steps. The consequences are only too clear, with not only economic but grave social effects.

The signs are already evident in our first-ever serious balance of payments and budget deficits. Malaysia is rapidly climbing the World Debt Tables with the doubling of its public debt to US$6.3

billion ($14.4 billion) between 1977 and 1981. The current recession has merely shown up the contradictions of the Government's economic strategy.

The issue involved in "Looking East", "Malaysia Inc.", etc. is basically that of development. It is regrettable therefore that instead of looking at the historical and structural causes of backwardness of Third World countries like ours, we are still posing the wrong question regarding "work ethic", etc.

For are not questions of this sort in the same order as the old explanations for backwardness, viz., the "laziness of the natives"; etc?

It is ironic that although any Third World person (government officials included) would instantly feel affronted by the latter racist explanation, the fact is that we are still trapped in the same ideological framework regarding the "correct psychological attitude".

It is not surprising that "Japanese work ethic" is but the latter-day equivalent of the "Protestant ethic", the old explanation for how the west was won.

The reality of the domination of the world by transnational corporations backed by their respective states has finally been "formally" recognised in the "North-South Dialogue". This itself should caution us against any lingering thoughts regarding the "correct work ethic".

In fact it is most disrespectful to imply that our peasantry and workers do not work hard enough. As most development experts know, the problem of poverty among Third World peasantry has to do primarily with unequal access to productive resources — land, credit and other institutional support — besides the domination of the world

commodity markets by the transnationals and "The North".

When we look at the statistics on the number of work-days lost, Malaysian workers rank among the lowest. Myths are propagated in the most amazing fashion: Would you believe that what with all the constant reference to the "British disease" of selfish, power-crazed unions, Britian's record of days lost due to strikes is one of the *lowest* in the western world?

The call to cultivate the work ethic and the collectivist spirit rings hollow unless sincerity is shown also by employers and the well-off.

The collectivist spirit can only be instilled if such a sign of sincerity was shown on the part of employers (state and private) and the well-off to improve general living standards through the provision of better social services, improved quality of life and greater democracy.

The Malaysian Government's current reliance on heavy industry to emulate the Japanese economic structure is premature. All the signs indicate that this strategy is misconceived.

The "Big Push" strategy of Hicom (Heavy Industries Corp. of Malaysia) into vehicles, basic metals, engineering, cement, refinery and petrochemical industries rests on the illusion that technological acquisitions are the only factor in industrial development. In reality, because of the low level of our exports to the developed countries, the import of equipment goods can signify no more than the "delivery of commodities".

The point is that the *social* preconditions for such a system of accumulation — as evident in the developed countries — have not yet been achieved. The nature of the labour process and the internal

demand must first be qualitatively created.

The type of industrialisation strategy seen in "export-substitution" in many Third World countries similarly falls short of such a matured system of accumulation.

The manufacturing industrial jobs in these countries are merely transferred operations, fragmented and repetitive, not linked to the other sectors of the local economy.

When we look at the stages in the development of Japanese industry, we will appreciate that the obligatory step of first consolidating the agrarian base (the dominant sector in almost all Third World economies) cannot be averted.

There is no doubt that Malaysia's basic industrial structure is still not ready for such a "heavy industries" strategy. At the moment, part of the reason for the grave balance of payments situation is that too large a proportion of industrial inputs is imported. It has further been pointed out by our local economists that these new industries will not be able to take advantage of economies of scale in order to thrive.

This strategy also places unduly strong dependence upon foreign technical, managerial and financial resources and personnel. In such a situation, "transfer of technology" is only a hollow slogan.

Japanophiles fail to distinguish the stages in the development of the Japanese economy. When that country embarked upon its heavy industrial investment after the Second World War, much of the economic foundation had already been laid.

Many academics, especially political scientists and sociologists, make the same mistake of not delineating these stages.

After the Meiji Restoration, Japan's economy grew on the basis of agriculture, especially rice. The transformation of productivity during this early period did not involve the adoption of capital-intensive methods of production on any large scale. Food self-sufficiency was a priority to minimise pressures of inflation and balance of payments problems.

As in many Third World countries today, during that early phase of the growth of the Japanese economy, the emergent industrial sector was too small to generate an adequate demand for its own products and had to be supported by the rising demand from the agricultural sector.

This was only possible as the result of increased agricultural productivity and rural incomes.

It is noteworthy that the first advances in productivity came about not by importing knowledge and capital from abroad, but by studying and propagating the methods of her own best farmers, i.e. based on traditional practices.

Then agricultural science was used to solve the felt problems of Japanese farmers, who relied mainly upon abundant labour and short-term working capital.

Japan did not have recourse to foreign borrowing nor did she receive foreign investments on any significant scale during that initial period of growth. This meant that she had to develop exports in order to obtain foreign exchange. In this, the exports of silk and tea played a similar role.

Japanese agriculture was thus not just a source of demand, a supplier of labour and an earner of foreign exchange. It was also a provider of savings essential for capital formation. This was made possible through the higher incomes created by

improvements in agricultural productivity.

Certain institutional innovations were indispensable in this process. Land tax and rents were fixed in absolute terms (as a percentage of the value of land) so as not to dampen incentive to increase production. In Malaysia, rents in the agricultural areas are as high as two-thirds of the crop!

Consequently, for the first half century of Japan's development, her domestic agriculture was able to meet nearly the whole of the growing demand for farm products, thus preventing serious inflation and obviating the need to spend scarce foreign exchange on food imports.

Last year, Malaysia's food bill ($2.3 billion) came to 9.5 per cent of the total import bill.

The development of the Japanese economy based on her agriculture is all the more remarkable for a country where the pressure on land is much greater than in Malaysia. The further essential institutional change that made this possible was land reform. This has parallels also in Taiwan and South Korea, to mention only the capitalist countries.

Social pressure and the political climate after the Second World War made land reform possible in Japan. It freed the Japanese peasantry from the grip of the big landowners and, as elsewhere, helped to pave the way towards higher agricultural productivity by making farmers' incomes more equitable.

In Malaysia, this vital institutional reform has proven to be very elusive due to the still prevalent political influence of the big landowners. Ever since the colonial period, the recommendations by British agronomists, World Bank economists and local academics for long-overdue land reforms have

fallen on deaf ears.

Padi land in particular is marked by high concentration. Here owner-operators with small uneconomic parcels of land are the majority, followed by tenant-operators.

It has been estimated that four acres (1.6 hectares) of double-cropped padi land is necessary to raise the farmer above poverty line, provided the land is owned and not rented.

The evidence is that half of all rubber holdings and four-fifths of all padi holdings fall short of this minimum size. Besides, 70 per cent of small padi farmers are tenants.

The 1977 Census of Agriculture revealed high income inequality, with the top 20 per cent of rural households earning 57 per cent of total agricultural incomes, and the bottom 40 per cent only earning 11 per cent.

The majority of Malaysia's poor (66 per cent) are rural folk, padi farmers, rubber smallholders, coconut smallholders, fishermen, agricultural labourers, estate workers, new villagers. In this most unprivileged sector, all the three major ethnic groups are represented.

The subsequent development of Japan's manufacturing industry was thus premised upon the growth of her agarian base. Even so, it was light consumer industries which first grew in tandem with her agricultural commodities, silk and cotton. Large numbers of small-scale industries, especially food processing, also developed during this period. Agricultural products provided the raw materials for the processing industries, as well as savings and export surplus to finance the industrial development.

The next stage of industrial expansion also

reflected the growth of agricultural production and the advance of agricultural techniques, viz. fertiliser, agricultural machinery and chemicals.

It was only after Japan had eventually established her own capital goods sector that she was able to finance imports of capital equipment through the export of her own manufactured goods.

Consequently, our foreign debts have to be paid with unfinished goods and the old "division of labour" is once again perpetuated.

It must be borne in mind that the above is merely an economistic account of the development of Japanese industry.

As in the other western countries the period of accumulation in Japan often meant grave hardship and exploitation of her workers and peasants. Thus a Japanese agronomist concluded:

"In any case, the historical conditions and social climate of the second half of the 20th century rule out some of the practices followed in 19th century Japan".

Under modern-day conditions, especially in view of Malaysia's New Economic Policy, the methods we adopt have to be consistent with the egalitarian principles of the NEP. Notwithstanding, the lessons of Japan's growth and its agarian base as the key link are unmistakable.

Malaysia's agricultural sector still provides one-third of our GDP but, growth of this sector has slowed down to a mere three per cent annually.

At the same time, 90 per cent of our local industrial establishments are small (employing less than 50 full-time workers) and more suitable for complementing the development of the agricultural sector.

41

Thus, only the all-round development of our national economy will ensure that it is truly independent and we all have a common stake in the country's destiny.

MCA's Era of the Young Turks

(Book Review of Loh Kok Wah's 'The Politics of Chinese Unity in Malaysia')

The French right used to be called "the most stupid right in the world." That political observation was intended to show how even the most doggedly conservative party needs to have enough political acumen to reform in order to survive.

This slim "occasional paper" documents the politics of such an attempt by the MCA to recoup its losses after the debacle at the 1969 General Elections.

Thus for a party traditionally identified with the established Chinese business interest, its rhetoric changed radically during the period to one of defending Chinese rights and "championing the cause of the have-nots".

The subject matter is still topical as even during the last general election, the question of Chinese unity was being mooted by the various sections of the community and yet another Barisan Nasional member, Gerakan, was chosen as the vehicle for achieving that aim.

The experience of the 1971 – 73 adventure by the reformists in MCA was a lesson in realpolitik, for they soon found out the hard reality of what

43

was politically possible within the ruling coalition but only after they had bumped their heads against it.

In 1971, MCA was desperately looking for a strategy to revive the flagging party.

The "Chinese Unity Movement" that was launched with the participation of the Chinese guilds and associations as well as Chinese rural masses was also courted by the MCA.

At the MCA's 20th general assembly, the party used the symbols of the movement thus leading to the demise of that separate and independent organisation.

The "MCA unity" manifesto called for the protection of Chinese rights and interests on education, language, citizenship, defence, internal security, and a change of image from a business-men's party to one of serving the poor.

The new central committee was made up of "young Turks" — Alex Lee, Datuk Lee Sip Hon, Dr Tan Tiong Hong, Datuk Choo Ching Hwa and Datuk Loh Fook Yen.

However, most of the Chinese in the unity movement stayed clear because the manifesto had dropped the demand for equal status for the Chinese. This difference over Article 152 of the Constitution led to the arrest of Sim Mow Yee and Koo Eng Kuang, members of the United Chinese School Teachers Association, on sedition charges.

The late Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak welcomed the "MCA unity" manifesto as a "new realism."

Labour seminars were organised and public service bureaus formed to help the illiterate apply for land, citizenship and passport. There was a

Hawkers' Committee, an Urban Development Committee and an Education Committee.

Nevertheless, fundamental reforms, like Datuk Dr Lim Keng Yaik's call for "collective leadership" and more democracy, were not implemented. Power rested firmly in the hands of the president and presidential council, who could hold the reform movement on a tight rein and decide its fate.

The MCA was eager to rebuild its strength in Perak, the state with the largest Chinese population, after suffering its worst defeat by the opposition there in 1969. The Perak Task Force (PTF) was conceived with Datuk Dr Lim as Perak MCA State Liaison Committee president.

Others in it included T.C. Choong, Paul Leong, Yong Su Hian and Ho Mok Heng, all young and educated middle class.

A work team was formed, also of lecturers and other professionals, to work at the grassroots level. The new villages were chosen as the most "fertile" areas to try out the reformist politics since they hold the most compact Chinese communities.

This was initially unsuccessful until the depressing conditions of the new villages were highlighted because of renewed anti-communist military operations in the area.

The issues of land and title grants, housing and licences provided the MCA with the opportunity they had been looking for since these were also opportunities for patronage.

But before long the old guard began to strike back. They had watched the new-comers take over important party positions and reforms which seemed to exceed their level of tolerance.

In 1972, this broke out in open conflict after Datuk Paul Leong and T.C. Choong were expelled for protesting against the coalition talks with PPP.

There were protests by task force members and calls for the expulsion of old and corrupt leaders instead.

MCA Youth began to reorganise under Datuk Lee San Choon, who was embittered when Datuk Dr Lim had jumped the ladder as a Federal Minister while he was a mere Deputy Minister.

Party rules were warped to boost MCA Youth membership — all MCA members regardless of age could now join the MCA Youth.

At the 21st general assembly, the young Turks became the target of criticism by party headquarters and the old guard. Tun Tan Siew Sin, then party president, soon removed Datuk Dr Lim and L.Y. Lee and assumed leadership of the Perak MCA.

The party also stopped the monthly $10,000 support for PTF activities and ordered its disbanding for its "increasingly divergent line" from headquarters policy. The task force had then 5,000 members.

Before long, the MCA reform movement took on nation-wide proportions. The young Turks managed to reach out to the Chinese guilds and associations amidst old guard opposition. There were charges and counter-charges in the newspapers and the Government intervened by imposing a news blackout on the reform movement.

As the 22nd general assembly gathered steam in 1973, the reform movement found itself outmanoeuvred as the party headquarters used "dirty tricks" such as delaying the processing of member-

ship applications of reformist supporters while raking in membership of their own supporters.

Consequently, Datuk Dr Lim, Alex Lee, Dr Tan, Datuk Paul Leong and others moved to the Gerakan.

The political course by these Chinese reformists during 1971-73 and again in 1982 typifies the politics of the "middle class," termed appropriately in French, *petite bourgeoisie*.

They form the intermediate class of qualified professionals and the intelligentsia among others who, in the last decade or so, have found their way into the Cabinet and other such corridors of power.

The MCA reformists, during the 1971-73 episode, were mainly from this class, and it is their class interests, political character and tendencies which need analysis.

It is also analytically significant that whereas in some other Third World countries such as Tanzania, political power was handed over to this class upon Independence by the colonial power, this was not the case in Malaya.

The writer's theoretical framework is thus the main drawback of the book. Loh Kok Wah is at pains to show that his framework is an improvement on Wang Gungwu's classification of the Chinese in Malaya into three political groups:

Group A – Chinese who tend to look to China;

Group B – Chinese who are more apolitical, concerned only with trade and community affairs; and

Group C – Chinese who are more Malayan in outlook and identity.

While Wang's model is seen as mainly concerned with the elite in the Chinese community, Loh

siders that his framework takes into account
te-mass differences. But fundamentally, he
mains within the confines of elite theory and
ng's "model."

The consequences, besides the lack of anay-
l depth, is that the masses are portrayed as
te-following, never the initiators of action:

> "... the masses may be mobilised into
> politics along A, B or C lines depending on
> whether and which elites they are in
> contact with, and whether such elites are
> viewed to be legitimate or not."

In elite theory, the masses are seen as "class
onscious" only when they are all set and organised
r revolution. Their position in the social relations
production seem less important. Thus Loh
rites:

> "... different ideological orientations
> between the elites and the masses ... do not
> mean that the masses are class conscious
> but simply that they are more concerned
> with lower-class than elite political issues".

But what are these "lower-class" political issues
illegal farming, land hunger, lack of titles to
ousing, squalid living conditions, taxi licences,
gricultural plots, dulang washing passes, secure
itizenship rights, study of the Chinese language,
qual employment rights, etc. – if not class issues?

Classifying the Chinese in Malaysia according
o the Wang Gungwu model, based on their sub-
ective outlook, has little analytical force.

Since there is agreement that the numbers in
Group A are dwindling, the classification would
egenerate into one of "those who are Malaysian in
utlook" and "those who are merely interested in
rade and community affairs."

Within each of these categories, there are important class differences. For example, within Group C, there are not only the established big business tycoons with connections with foreign capital, there are those professionals and intelligentsia who may be ideologically similar to these tycoons and want a share of power. And again there are these other "middle class" who are disgruntled with government policies and choose to vote for the opposition.

There is also the important class of small local businessman who presumably fall into Group B of the classification. Even within this group, there is an important distinction between those involved in manufacturing and those in small trading and retailing concerns, for their class interests are different.

But simply because they are vernacular-educated and take an interest in guild and association affairs, who is to say they do not have a Malaysian outlook? Hence, the criterion used for this mode of classification is highly questionable.

In fact, it is a good example of how an apparently "value-free" academic "theory" is really politically loaded. For can anyone deny that this group of Malaysian Chinese who are concerned to preserve their mother tongue culture has always been portrayed as "unpatriotic"?

Yet there is nothing in international opinion to suggest that they are any less patriotic.

On the other hand, one could argue their investments are more "national" than the other Malaysian tycoons whose economic exploits only lead to the draining of the national resources by foreign interests.

The theoretical question and analysis aside,

Loh has written a very useful and well-documented account of the reform movement in the MCA during 1971 – 73.

It is a book that will be of interest to any person who wants to know about Malaysian politics, especially that of the Malaysian Chinese. It covers a period which threw up "young Turks" who are today familiar faces of the Government.

It cannot be doubted that the last decade has been one in which the reformists have helped to strengthen the MCA. The net effect has been to give the party and thus the Government an overdue face-lift.

[The Star, 9 October 1983]

Democracy and Moral Principles

May I commend David Boler *(Education Times,* Feb. 9) for opening the discussion on Moral Education (ME). It would seem this debate is not only of relevance to the inclusion of Moral Education in the school curriculum, it is also pertinent to the proposal for "common values" to be part of our National Culture. In either case, there is the vital question of whether our choice should be one based on secular principles or on religion.

From the discussion so far, there seems to be at least a general agreement that didactic moralising just isn't good enough and that unless we manage to instil in our children a sense of clear-thinking moral responsibility, ME would simply degenerate into just another subject in the school curriculum, to be swotted over for the examination.

Prof. Madya Vance Hall *(Education Times,* Feb. 23) has raised some important points. Moral Philosophy, to him, is the concern not only of lecturers in the subject in the university, but also of educationists, political thinkers, in fact each and every thinking person in society.

He put forward the liberal's view that we

should instead have an "Ethics" course that is problem-oriented and exploratory, and in which pupils will be encouraged to be critical and analytical. Another important point he made (and which we shall pursue further) was that we should use real problems when talking about moral choices.

Hena Mukherjee seems more sure of her ME course and curriculum and sanguine about the implementation of the planned syllabus. Impatient with the liberal view, she chides:

"It would, in fact, be hypocritical to say that the teacher should stand aside and only teach procedures and not the content of judgments".

Rejecting the subjectivist stand ("moral relativism"), she takes too much for granted when she "gets on with the job" of laying out the basis of "objective" decision-making.

In the debate on ME, as on the "common values of our National Culture", it is sometimes lost on many people that most philosophers are secular (that is, non-religious). This is because philosophy — as opposed to theology — relies exclusively on reason and observation, in contrast to theologians whose starting point is the doctrines of God. Thus, it is more a question of religious teachings being accommodated within the corpus of morality rather than the reverse.

It is interesting that this point is also argued by a religious elder, Rev. Dr. William Kay, in his book on "Moral Education". He uses this justification to demonstrate the more enduring value of ME based on secular principles: "... If a child's morality is married to religious notions, it will collapse if religion is rejected at puberty or at a later stage in life".

This, of course, does not rule out the possibi-

lity that the two can come to an understanding of the moral society, but the secular basis is unmistakeable:

"Both the religious and the moral atheist can describe the ideal moral society as not only fraternal and familial but also based on political and economic justice. They only diverge in their description of such a society".

Once we are clear on the secular basis for morality, there is little cause for the problem of searching for a consensus, given the different religious mixes in our country. It is not necessarily so (as David Boler maintains) that the secularist view will only lead to moral relativism.

This may be implied only if the secularist presents no answers to the problems. Thus, Prof. Madya Vance Hall should not have skipped the question, which led to Hena Mukherjee's impatience.

History has shown that those who may be the elders of ethical or religious orders have sometimes been the worst examples of "moral" behaviour. The worst atrocities and wars have been committed in the name of religion.

On the other hand, it has been found in sociological studies that the humanist and democratic approach to the problem of morals in students is more likely to nurture self-discipline. This does not mean a permissive system in which children are left to themselves, for children also need frequent reassurance and emotional stability.

The aims of a moral education would then be to teach our children moral autonomy, rationality, moral responsibility and (something not touched on by the contributors) a social conscience which

needs an awareness of social issues. It will be argued below that a social conscience and moral responsibility are indispensable if as agreed by the previous contributors, we are to use real problems in the enquiry.

The democratic milieu is the most conducive for promoting moral strength. An authoritarian climate will only stifle moral judgment. It is the application of the secularist case that must be considered. It is based on the premise that by making judgments on the basis of equality, we are applying moral principles.

At the school level, pupil participation in aspects of school life is essential for promoting the democratic spirit. Teachers then become a wholesome part of moral education since there is the necessity on their part to demonstrate the same democracy. The mutual respect of teacher and student is the basis of moral education.

This is an elaboration of what is entailed when we base moral education on real problems. For when we apply moral principles to the concrete situation in our society — student/teacher/headmaster/Ministry; masses and elites; the plight of peasants, workers, squatters, communities, etc. — it all boils down to the safeguarding of democracy and human rights.

Human rights are essentially moral rights which have been internationally recognised as sacred and inviolable.

The area of human rights and democracy is a huge one, within which we can teach moral values as well as help our children solve real-life problems such as the rights and wrongs of international conflicts, industrial disputes, domestic problems as

well as a whole series of contradictions within our national politics.

For example, the understanding of the position of women in society can lead to an awareness which will govern self-discipline, besides an appreciation of universal rights. Likewise, appreciating the rights of minorities and their plight can lead to a profound change in the attitude of people towards other cultures.

The democratic spirit will invariably instil a humanism which incorporates a social conscience and moral responsibility for the dispossessed and exploited.

The question of "moral relativism" then arises not because of the secularist view as discussed by the previous contributors but because of the different interests of the different classes. The question of rights and democracy will invitably lead to the challenge of moral responsibility and social conscience. Rev. Dr. William Kay puts it poignantly:

"Morality is a flower which can barely survive in the arid wastes of elitism and privilege for all privileges imply the existence of the under-privileged; and every elite is detached from the masses ... When the middle class seek to purchase this for their children they must either ensure that privilege is always accompanied by responsibility, or be condemned as saboteurs of national morality."

The question of human rights further opens up a whole new vista pertaining to ME for it implies that the search for solutions to real problems must sometimes be found collectively and not only by the individual. Take the example of the black South African who, with thousands of other countrymen and women, is forced off the

land by the apartheid policies of the regime.

In this case, it is not so much a question of the infringement of an individual's human right as that of the whole black community's in South Africa. This "moral" question that affects collectivities is faced daily in every society in the world.

Above all, respecting democracy and democratic institutions in our society demands a supreme moral uprightness for it often challenges one's basic interests, for example, when a man respects women's rights and dignity; when the rich respect the rights of the poor, the peasant and the worker; when the White person recognises the rights of the black immigrant.

The solutions to most of life's and society's problems are often not as elusive as is sometimes made out to be ... .

[New Straits Times, 22 March 1984;
China Press, 16 March 1985]

Emergency Secrets

It is a national tragedy that we had to wait until the lifting of the 30-year secrecy rule in Britain before we realised the scandal that our country was the first on this earth to fall victim to chemical warfare.

Even so, it seems to have created only a ripple of concern, considering the gravity of this horrendous crime against humanity.

First of all, it must be pointed out that although the story of the British army using a herbicide identical to "Agent Orange" (used by the Americans in Vietnam in the '60s) during the Emergency in Malaya was first revealed in the British magazine *New Scientist* in January, it was not really an "exclusive".

At least four years before that, when the Soviet Union was being accused of using chemical warfare against the Afghan people, the French *Le Monde Diplomatique* had revealed that the British army had also done the same in Malaya during the Emergency.

Even so, it is criminal that up to now, British officials and personnel, ICI and Malaysian officials

(it is hard to believe that not one Malaysian knew about this) have kept all this from the public.

The full extent of the spraying is still not known since only those relating to events up to 1952 have been revealed so far. These show that at least 20 sites in west Pahang and tracts of jungle were sprayed.

The Government must press with the greatest urgency for all details of the operation throughout the campaign from 1948 to 1960.

But ever since the revelation in January, the complacency shown by the various official quarters is positively shocking, to say the least. On this occasion, when real patriotism — the love of our people and our land — is warranted, it is found wanting.

We have been given no firm assurance that a study will be carried out by the Ministries concerned.

The Star (Jan. 29) quoted these government officials as saying that it was not their responsibility to conduct studies since the spraying happened before Independence.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Amar Stephen Yong even said that "the effects of the spraying should have worn off by now, if there were any in the first place," and that "we have received no report of any ill-effects" (*The Star*, Jan. 21).

The Pesticides Board and the Defence Ministry's responses were as good as shrugs of the shoulder.

Allow me to draw your attention to an article by Jorn Ruby in the London *Guardian* recently, quoting the attempt by a Vietnamese, Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Phuong, who has been doing a scrupulous

58

study of the long-term effects of the spraying of Agent Orange over those areas of south Vietnam's forest and farmland.

Her contribution to uncovering the effects of Agent Orange is a collection of comparative data of people who lived in the heavily-sprayed areas and those who did not.

The tentative conclusion based on this extensive research must banish the shameful complacency that has been shown so far in this country: The victims of "Agent Orange" are generations yet unborn.

At a medical conference in France in 1970, attention was also drawn to the possible cancer-producing effects of dioxin, the deadly component of these poisonous herbicides.

Since the spraying began, the frequency of cancer of the liver had increased in multiples in some areas. Questions were also raised of aberrations in the chromosomes which may affect reproductive ability.

Of course, we in Malaysia will never know for certain as long as our medical records are inadequate. Still, those of us whose kin and friends have died or suffered from illnesses will now know that another factor could have been responsible.

This also brings into focus the importance of scrupulous keeping of medical records and careful monitoring of infringement of the people's rights.

These findings of the long-term effects of Agent Orange were presented at an international symposium of 140 scientists from East and West in January last year.

Their conclusion was that: "There is good reason to think that the defoliants not only have noxious effects on the present generation but also

present dangerous consequences for future generations".

Dr Phoung has found that the occurrence of an abnormal pregnancy known as "Hydatiform Mole" is over a hundred times more frequent in sprayed areas than in non-sprayed areas.

In Vietnam today, there is living evidence of the horrific consequences of modern chemical warfare — children with deformed limbs and organs.

The irony of it all, according to Jorn Ruby, is that in the United States today, thousands of those who rained the poisonous chemicals over these presently deformed children have not escaped the consequences.

They are now fighting legal battles for compensation for disability from handling the toxic Agent Orange. So far, the US Government has not paid a cent.

Meantime, while the US Environment Protection Authority has finally succeeded in banning 2, 4, 5-T (the herbicide that is contaminated with the same deadly dioxin) after a five-year legal battle with the multi-national "Dow Chemicals," our own Pesticides Board still sees fit to allow its use here.

It continues to be widely used in our rubber and oil palm estates, smallholdings, padi fields and forests by agricultural workers and farmers. It could also be contaminating our water supplies and food ... Hidup Malaysia!

—*[The Star, 30 March 1984]*

Media Violence Against Women

At a time when the Government is putting the final touches to what will constitute our "National Culture" and our moralists are more vocal than ever, the cinema page of almost all our newspapers must be an embarrassment. Each day yet another film advertisement appears with its suggestive title and accompanying illustration of a woman or women in various postures of degradation.

Apart from the bad taste and abysmal cultural level it reflects of Malaysian culture, such media portrayal of women must bear much of the responsibility for the almost daily reports of rape in the country. The evidence of the correlation between the two has been quite conclusively corroborated in studies done in several countries (reported in a local newspaper on Jan. 13).

Videos are now an increasingly popular form of home entertainment and every town in Malaysia has at least a few video rental shops. The most popular videos (if not already) will soon be films showing the most brutal orgies of violence — mutilations, rapes, sadistic murders, collectively known

as "video nasties" – churned out by the "entertainment centres" of the Metropolis.

In Britain, a public campaign to urge the Government to take action to control the availability of such videos has been mounted by, among others, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, teachers, unions and parents, all concerned with violent videos are becoming very popular with young children.

In November last year, a Parliamentary Report was published called "Video Violence and Children". It found that an average of 70 per cent of children from the age of five have access to videos, and over 40 per cent of children from the age of five have seen one or more video nasties. Violent films are much more popular with boys.

Violence against women as portrayed in these video nasties contributes towards acceptance of certain "normalities":

● That it is "normal" and acceptable for men to rape, mutilate and murder women.

● That it is "normal" and accepted that women are the natural victims of this violence.

● It is showing boys that this is what "adult men" do and they are being trained to treat women with contempt.

But legislation can do little if it does not challenge those who have the power and do nothing about changing prevalent attitudes. The Censorship Board should be more rigorous with those films or advertisements which exploit the degradation of women rather than apply mechanical snips to mere scenes of nudity which may be indispensable to a good film. And as far as the development of our National Culture goes, there are so many foreign films of artistic excellence that

never get aired in this country that can contribute to our general cultural wealth. Films which exploit the degradation of women we can do without.

The fact that the alarming increase in rape cases has not taken on the urgency it deserves is a sad reflection on our national priorities. Rape statistics are notoriously understated in general, but the daily reports are enough to suggest that immediate attention be directed to safeguard the rights and dignity of women.

"Rape", in the words of feminists, "... is a crime against women and children. It is the ultimate expression of contempt for women of all ages."

Quite often, court rulings reveal a similar line of thought. The hypocrisy is evident in the necessity for the rape victim to prove her "moral" uprightness in the courts.

For most men, rape is only considered rape when it is committed by a stranger or when there are bruises to show, not when it is committed on the matrimonial bed or by an acquaintance or friend or when there are no obvious physical injuries to show.

The truth is that women who are victims of the latter kind know that both are equally contemptible. In countries where statistics on rape are more judiciously kept, it is found that most rapes are committed by men who are known to be the victim's "friends" and relatives.

The violation of the human right that belongs to women must be one of the least "popular" of democratic rights. This obviously has an origin in the long history of the subordination of women in most cultures which are dominated by men.

Thus men who would demand democratic

rights of their culture or even of their class may still not accord the same weight or significance to the democratic right of women to be respected with equal human dignity.

The year 1984 is the last year of the Decade of Women which was declared by the United Nations in 1975. Women are demanding the recognition of their right to be treated with dignity and not to be violated in their daily life or degraded in media images.

In the true spirit of the United Nations' Decade of Women, let's place the issue of Violence Against Women on the agenda and its eradication on the order of the day.

Two Cheers for Democracy

The current crisis in the MCA has once again seen the principle of "democracy" being hurled like firebricks across the political stage.

The tragedy of it is that "democracy" has been bandied around so much these days by villains and knights alike that this most precious of principles shared by our common weal is in danger of meeting the fate of Orwell's "Doublespeak."

For the sake of the rakyat, it is vital that as a democratic country, we are clear about the principles and the spirit of democracy.

The controversy in the MCA has centred around the constitutionality of the sacking of 14 members by the incumbent faction in the central committee brought about by the issue of "phantom" members.

The latter issue involving the supernatural need not detain us since plain deceit is not acceptable in any democracy and is indefensible.

The question of the rules of any democratic organisation, the obligations and limits to powers

of the people's deputies is what we should justly concern ourselves.

Democratic practice is basically the procedure by which a collective decision is taken. A decision is deemed to be "democratic" if it has been reached by discussion, criticism and compromise or a vote. But this presupposes two essential requirements:

• The procedure must be seen to have elicited the opinion of as many people as possible on who shall be their representatives and on how the organisation/party/government should be run.

Hence, the advent of universal suffrage was a historic but only a minimum condition for the existence of democracy, which was non-existent under feudal tyranny; and

• The democratic system must provide ways of ensuring that those chosen by the people do in fact do what the electorate wants them to do and that they can be replaced if they do not — even between elections.

This guarantees the sovereignty of the people and is a check against the institution of "elective oligarchies" such as is evident in many so-called democratic countries today.

The principle of accountability and the possibility of recalling previously elected officers are therefore fundamental to the practice of democracy.

All too often autocratic regimes in many Third World countries are loath to observe these democratic principles because of vested interests.

But instead of pinning the fault on backward feudal practices, they claim that the "culture of democracy" cannot be like those practised in the West.

The truth is that these principles — safeguarded in the world community — do not "belong" to the West. They are universal.

They exist to ensure that the wishes and aspirations of the rakyat are carried out. What seems to be forgotten frequently is that the elected are the servants of the rakyat and not the reverse, as under feudalism.

The phenomenon of Hitler has shown us the possibility for dictators to achieve power by using the regular electoral machinery and then maintaining themselves in power either by manipulating public opinion or repressing free expression.

Democracy cannot thrive in a climate of fear and repression.

John Stuart Mill, that reputed democratic theorist wrote in his *Representative Government* in 1861:

"The only Government which can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the social state is one in which the whole people participate, that any participation, even in the smallest public function, is useful; that the participation should everywhere be as great as the general degree of improvement of the community will allow, and that nothing less can be ultimately desirable than the admission of all to a share in the sovereign power of the state."

The proper procedure for ensuring this principle was insisted by the even more ancient political philosopher, Socrates.

The battle cry of the American Republic similarly shows obeisance to the people's will:

"... Government ... of the people, by the people, for the people ..."

This brings us to the respective parties' constitutions, which are in essence, the rules and regula-

tions for ensuring that these afore-discussed principles are embodied in them.

If political parties are truly democratic, their constitutions should include rules for ensuring that those principles of accountability, the possibility of recalling officers even in mid-term, etc, are present.

In some of our parties' constitutions – and MCA is certainly not the only one – the president/secretary-general/central committee has either de facto or through gradual institutionalisation, agglomerated so much power that it is not easy to recall them.

It must be clear by now that democracy cannot be confined only to the rules of party organisation. It is common knowledge that this is usually used by competitors for office.

Democracy must be seen to exist not only in relation to who decides ultimately – the majority of the people or the "elective oligarchy" – but how the decisions are taken.

Consequently, it can only be democratic if the decision is taken after there has been full and fair discussion by everyone who has anything to contribute.

Democracy is also premised upon freedom and justice, for unless there is freedom of the Press, freedom of expression, etc., full discussion on any topic cannot take place.

Those in the MCA who are crying out for democracy must be aware of these other aspects of democracy and must be prepared to champion these as well.

If we value political liberty at all, we must devise ways by which the people are encouraged to make initiatives and are not ignored.

The spirit in which decisions are taken must be fully participatory. Decisions must be reached openly and not secretly by civil servants or autocratically by Ministers without ample opportunity for public discussion.

In the current MCA crisis, there has been accusations of factions using money to buy votes and delegates.

This is by no means new to Malaysian politics nor for that matter, politics in other liberal democracies.

All the same, it has always posed one of the greatest threats to true democracy and the subversion of the people's wishes.

To conclude, if we value justice and democracy, we must go beyond merely combatting elective autocracy but take up every issue which involves the democratic rights of the people.

[The Star, 3 May 1984]

Population Policy and
Women's Right of Choice

At first glance, Singapore's recent outrageous population policy to discriminate in favour of well-educated Singapore women seems the reverse of our own Government's bombshell announcement that it is aiming for a 70-million target within 115 years.

Except for the eugenics lobby, the Singapore policy has been roundly condemned especially by Singaporean women themselves.

While our Government's policy may on the surface appear not to discriminate against rich or poor, it has been shown to ultimately condemn the poor to a worse plight than now, and also has grave consequences for our country's population-resource balance.

There is, however, the most important consideration which seems to have been overlooked in the controversy – the question of women's right of choice in the control of their own fertility.

This is the thread that runs through the population policies both north and south of the causeway as well as in the population policies in many other countries. They have been implemented without

giving priority consideration to this fundamental right of women.

This is the crucial principle that the women's movement throughout the world has stressed both in relation to the abortion question as well as to the "population control" policies in many countries.

"Because the inferior are always numerically superior to the better, the former would multiply so much faster — if they have the same possibilities to survive and reproduce — that the better necessarily would be placed in the background.

"Therefore a correction has to be made to the advantage of the better.

"Nature offers such a correction by exposing the inferior to difficult living conditions which reduce their number.

"Concerning the rest, nature does not allow them to reproduce indiscriminately, but makes a relentless selection according to their strength and health conditions."

Written in 1934 by Adolf Hitler, the same line of thinking was echoed recently by Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

After providing statistics to show that well-educated Singaporean women were having fewer children than poorly-educated ones, Mr. Lee concluded:

"If we continue to reproduce ourselves in this lopsided manner, we will be unable to maintain our present standards ... There is more and more evidence that nature is the more important influence on a person's performance ... Studies have shown that 80 per cent of how well you do depends on nature and only 20 per cent on nurture."

In characteristic Singapore style, this seemingly private thought of Mr Lee was promptly translated into policy by First Deputy Prime Minister Goh Keng Swee.

The latter's partiality towards the "hard, objective, scientific" geneticist lobby is well-known.

Henceforth, graduate mothers will have first preference for places at the best primary schools for their third and subsequent children. Other fiscal incentives are also being considered for these "superior" beings.

Next in line for special consideration are mothers who have attained the "A level" standard. For the rest who have not made it up the "intelligence" ladder, they would still have to bear the penalties for not stopping at two, Singapore's well-known birth-control slogan.

So we are back to Nature versus Nurture. You would almost see the "Nature" lobbyist's pain as he watched all the "superior" genes of the women graduates going to waste.

But are genes really inheritable? Are we asking the right questions regarding the development of societies? Are there not fundamental questions of human rights at stake?

It is often made out that the issue is between the concrete evidence of geneticists and the flabby moralising of those who point to the social issues.

During the recent furore over Mr Lee Kuan Yew's pronouncements, some have asked for more genetic research before such a policy is implemented.

It is also interesting that Hans Eysenck — who, with Jensen, came out with their geneticist thesis of the determination of low negro IQ during the

72

sixties — criticised Mr Lee's policy, but for the wrong reasons, namely, that Lee's conclusion from the evidence is questionable.

IQ tests and other instruments for measuring "intelligence" have been criticised by many for their culture and class-bias.

Others like Professor Steven Rose question the very underpinnings of findings like those of Hans Eysenck and their social function:

"It is a fallacy that academic achievement or 'IQ' measures intelligence and that intelligence is a fixed quantity that can be located in a person's brain and it is then possible to rank people in this fashion.

"Using the refined techniques of the statistician to quantify lumps of 'intelligence' out of physiological correlation does not tell us any more than that "intelligence is what IQ tests test."

The irrelevance of genetics to IQ differences is demonstrated, he adds, by the considerable intergenerational differences in IQ levels between social and ethnic groups.

For example, in the 1920s, IQ tests in the United States showed Jews as "inferior" to the local WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) population; today, the reverse is the case. This cannot be attributed to genetic transmutation.

The reasons for the differences must then be sought in the whole contextual framework of historical and developmental processes, not just the person's biology, biography and social situation.

Modern population biology is more and more inclined to discard the concept of "race" as having no biological, as opposed to social meaning. This is similarly endorsed by various international conven-

tions and conferences of the United Nations.

Thus the question of the hereditability of intelligence is not that more research needs to be done. It is irrelevant to the solution of the problems in society. Biology cannot contribute to this and yet these concepts like "intelligence," "race" and genetic inheritance continue to be in currency precisely because they serve the social function of justifying the status quo.

Education, once rationed by the ability to pay, is today rationed by "intelligence." By and large, class determination still correlates with IQ and education opportunity.

Besides the racist down-grading of "coloured" people, it is generally "known" that middle class pupils are more intelligent than working class ones, and even that men are "by and large" more intelligent than women.

It is not surprising that societies in which such beliefs are held are those where blacks, women and labouring classes hold lower social positions.

Similarly, it was no coincidence that the first statement on the inferiority of the coloured races came from one Gobineau during the 1870s, a time when the African continent was being carved up by the European powers.

Jensen and Eysenck came out with their geneticist thesis of the determination of low negro IQ at a time when the blacks were pressing for political and economic equality in the West.

Elites need these pseudoscientific justification and therefore the obsession with genetic engineering. They do not have the priority of educating all our children to their full creative potential so that they can be put to social use for the benefit of all.

When Goh Keng Swee unraveled Singapore's

74

New Education System in 1979, he did not mince his words when he justified the drastically early streaming and elitist policy:

"... to correct the high attrition rate caused by a previous policy that suffered from a hang-up derived from an egalitarian philosophy fashionable in the Western world after the war."

This ideological function is served also by another mythology usually linked to its racist connotations, namely, that poverty and under-development in the Third World is caused by over-population. The implicit assumption is that the poor and less-educated are the culprits and have only themselves to blame.

Malthus first put forward the thesis that population tends to increase at a faster rate than its means of subsistence and that unless it is checked by moral restraints, disease, famine, etc., wide-spread poverty may result.

This Malthusian ideology has seen various interpretations but all see "nature" as the central factor. But while during the earlier days, Malthusians counted on nature to take care of the interior, in societies today where mortality among the lower classes is also declining, neo-Malthusians favour man-made checks on their numbers.

The ideological explanations for why there must be population control runs somewhat along these lines:

• The resources in this world are limited;

• Population grows faster than jobs, thus causing unemployment; and

• The poor reproduce faster than the others. Consequently, the intelligent will constitute a correspondingly smaller and smaller proportion of

the population and society will degenerate.

None of these assumptions take into account the political structure and traditional values of the various societies.

Nor do they take into account the control of the world market of Third World products by the rich countries, which if not rectified, makes it difficult for the developing country to get out of the poverty trap.

The fallacy in the Malthusian assumptions was revealed during the Great Depression of the 1930s when food worth billions of dollars was thrown into the sea while millions of Americans starved.

Furthermore, it is estimated that the western countries and their animals consume over one-half of the available world supply of food grain. This explodes the popular myth that the large population of the underdeveloped Third World eat up the world's resources.

UN experts on development have repeatedly pointed out that the problem is not found in population increase per se, but in increasingly unequal access to resources, land, credit, institutional support and political power.

The Government's recent announcement of the 70 million population target is certainly a novel one.

The main justification for this policy, it would seem, is that at the moment we have too small a home market to create the demand to fire our industries.

The policy has been criticised by various sections of the public who have pointed out that our present social amenities can hardly cater to the

needs of our 14 million Malaysians, never mind five times that number.

But even on these economistic arguments, one needs merely to point to Adam Smith's well-known juxtaposition of the populousness of China in relation to Europe but the former's relative stagnation during his time.

This truism is intended to show that for development to "happen," certain preconditions relating to both the industrial and the agricultural sectors must have been achieved.

The Government's argument that a large home market is necessary to create demand is premised upon a capital-intensive "heavy" industrial strategy that the Government itself has embarked upon against the advice of many.

Pursuing the 70 million target and the five-children norm is rather irresponsible since it limits the choices that women have unless we can boast of the best provisions for working mothers — quality creches, ample maternity leave and other aspects of health care for women.

In the first place, it is even questionable whether our middle class women would want to have such a large family.

When we ponder the plight of women estate workers, other labourers and women farm hands, the question of ample maternity leave, child-care, good nutrition for our healthy 70 million, etc. ... all this must sound like a bad joke to them.

The vital question must therefore be the availability of informed choices for women. In the new Malaysian context, family planning, contraception must be freely available and not

redefined into an opposite role pushing the five-children policy.

In countries such as Ireland, it is instructive that where contraception and abortion are illegal, the result is that these important questions are swept under the carpet and thousands of Irish women have to go over to Britain secretly for abortions.

Family planning concerns people controlling their own fertility. The population policies, whether the Singapore or present Malaysian variety, involves people being coerced — whether directly or indirectly — by others.

The world community stands committed to the recognition of certain basic human rights, including the rights of women to determine the number of children they want.

The next World Population Conference is scheduled this year. No doubt both Singapore's and Malaysia's population policies will be brought up for scrutiny and it is left to be seen whether we are bound for glory or notoriety ...

[The Star, 23 May 1984]

Is The Soviet Threat A Myth?

Is the Soviet threat a myth? This was the theme of a seminar recently organised by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies.

Although the views of the participants were not exactly unanimous, the headlines of the day were along the lines that Soviet aggression in South-East Asia is largely a myth.

In looking at this superpower, we need to put into perspective the emergence of the Soviet Union as a major military power in South-East Asia within the last five years.

Understanding this development is instructive for reading Soviet intentions and assessing any future threat to the region.

The methods whereby the Soviet Union exerts its influence not only in Vietnam but also elsewhere in the world are lessons for countries like ours to learn.

We would do better to take full cognizance of the Soviet threat and unequivocally defend our non-aligned policy.

What we see today as the Moscow-Hanoi-Peking triangle is in fact a development of the post-

Vietnam war era. In the 50s, the Soviet Union's foreign policy was defensive and focused on Europe.

China was its main ally in the region and it was China which was the main source of military and economic aid to North Vietnam.

With the defeat of the US at the turn of the 70s, Soviet priorities had changed. Until 1969, Moscow's prime concern was to see its superpower rival in the region (the US) weakened and forced out of Vietnam.

But part and parcel of the "logic" of superpower rivalry was/is detente, which the Soviet Union had to maintain despite its support for Vietnam.

From 1969, when the border clashes between China and the Soviet Union started, it was clear that the Soviet objective had changed to one of eclipsing China in the region.

When the Vietnam War ended, Hanoi signed an agreement with the Soviet Union in 1975 to co-ordinate their economic plans. In 1978, it entered the Soviet fold by joining Comecon and signed a military pact with Moscow.

This was the preview to the invasion and occupation of Kampuchea, which, besides over-throwing an ally of Chinese, replaced it with a pro-Hanoi regime, providing the opportunity for the Soviet Union to increase its influence in Indochina and South-East Asia as a whole.

In the early 60s the Soviet Union still lacked an ocean-going navy and sea-based air-power necessary to maintain a fleet at sea. She had few friendly ports of call.

By the end of the 70s, all these disadvantages had been remedied except the lack of sea-based air-

power. But this state of affairs has been transformed at an unprecedented short span of time in the waterways of South-East Asia.

Today, the Soviet Pacific Fleet is the largest of the Soviet Union's four fleets. It no longer lacks sea-based air-power. Although it is marginally inferior to the United States Pacific Fleet in terms of combat effectiveness and network of bases in the area, the Soviet military might in the region is steadily increasing.

Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea is also deepening its dependence on the Soviet Union for arms on extended credit and other economic aid.

Through Vietnam, the Soviet Union has acquired the use of three of the largest military bases in the region and the third largest army in the world. Together, they are now capable of exerting influence over the entire region.

Since 1979, the Soviet navy and air force have regularly operated from Cam Ranh and Danang and Kompong Sam in Kampuchea. Soviet personnel and equipment have been installed at these bases.

Soviet submarines as well as surface warships are now based at Cam Ranh Bay. Initially, only reconnaissance aircraft used the airfield. But late last year, six Soviet medium bombers were sighted there.

It can be seen that this Soviet military build-up in the region has given it much strategic advantage over China as well as the US and Japan. Soviet troops have already staged their first naval landing manoeuvres on the Vietnamese coast.

But the cost of this dependence on the Soviet Union has been Vietnam's own political independence, for which her people had fought for over 30

81

years. Through Hanoi's own ambitions, it has become embroiled in a regional strategy of which it is not the master.

Besides the immediate effect this has on the beneficiary of these arms, this is partly explained by the fact that Soviet technology and production of consumer goods still lags behind her Western rivals.

Direct military aid therefore makes up for the lack of economic influence within the Third World. The influx of sophisticated weaponry creates the complementary need for spare parts, Soviet military and technical advisers.

"Clearly, arms transfer", in the words of a Sovietologist, "has become an important instrument of Soviet diplomacy".

However, the extent of Soviet influence is dependent also upon the economic ties with the recipient of the aid. Purely military aid can be terminated at a stroke as was seen in the case of Egypt and Somalia.

Unfortunately, Vietnam is now up to her teeth in terms of economic and military dependence on the Soviet Union.

Today, the Soviet Union's trade pattern with Third World countries is not unlike that of the Western industrialised nations.

Foodstuffs and raw materials make up the majority of the Soviet Union's imports from the Third World, while manufactured goods like machinery and equipment make up the main exports to the less developed countries.

This is amply shown by the economic dependence of the Comecon member states vis-a-vis the Soviet Union.

Thus, while Soviet strategy has, as many of the

recent examples show, depended on the political and military objectives, there is also the important economic dimension.

These instances of Soviet involvement further show that the Soviet Union is not that much concerned with the "socialist" credentials of the regimes they back.

Other than her most recent ally, Vietnam, Moscow has tried to gain a foothold in many other capitalist countries at some point in their development when they had faced economic difficulties — India, Indonesia, Egypt, Somalia, etc.

The instances of Soviet toleration of the Lon Nol and Marcos regimes further show that her superpower calculations take precedence over her "socialist" pretentions.

These methods of Soviet strategy should therefore teach us to be less complacent.

When the US was forced to pull out of Kampuchea and South Vietnam in 1975, the best prospect for a truly non-aligned zone were in the air.

SEATO, the military alliance initiated by the US decided to dissolve itself. In March 1976, the Thai Government asked the US to withdraw its troops from the country.

Subsequently, the US naval presence in the region declined overall. Even President Marcos had to distance the Philippines a little from adherence to the US. He visited China in 1975, Moscow in 1976 and asked for admission to the non-aligned conference of 1976.

With the increasing economic presence of Japan, Asean became less dependent on the US. On the political level, there were definite moves on the

83

PAPAN:
The Myth of The Neutral Scientist

In the quarrel over the proposed nuclear dumps in Papan, both sides are invoking the name of "experts" to back their respective cases.

The Minister for Science, Technology and the Environment has said that the people of Papan and their sympathisers should produce the experts who can show that the radioactive waste dump is unsafe.

The Papan people have said it is incumbent upon the Minister to prove to them that the waste dumps are safe and that they should not have been located at Papan in the first place.

They also want the Minister to visit the site himself and have asked that the reports and studies of the project — especially the safety measures — be made public.

It would appear there are three levels of "experts" whose evidence can be called on.

First, it can be easily verified whether the dumps (or "depositories") have been constructed to specifications by the International Atomic Energy Agency. The call by the Papan people for

the Minister to see the site for himself is, therefore, not improper.

My own investigation confirms the reports by the committee from the Environment Protection Society of Malaysia and the reasonable fears of the residents of Papan.

The "depository" is only a mile or so from this township and within staring distance of a fish pond, river, vegetable farms and fruit groves.

The three concrete dumps that have already been built are not uniformly four-inch thick as specified. Cracks and recently supplemented concrete are discernible. At some places, the concrete is only an inch thick.

The hill on which the dumps have been dug do not have reinforced slopes. At this level, therefore, the only experts we need are average human beings who can put two and two together.

At another level, certain facts and figures would be adequate to ascertain the radioactive character of these "tailings" which are potential nuclear energy resources to be stored at the dumps.

Here again, we do not need to invite scientific experts because the composition of these "raw-materials" is finite and the characteristics of each component can be easily verified by any student.

From this information regarding the radio-active rate of the components and their dangers to humans we can once again measure this with the adequacy of the dumps that have been constructed.

However, when we move to a higher level — whether radioactive wastes can be "safely" dumped so near to human habitation, it becomes more problematic.

This is because we have to face the question

of whether there is such a thing as a "neutral" expert on this opinion.

It is on this question that, in my humble opinion, the ordinary people of Papan are demonstrating a very profound point on our development programme: science and technology (and development) are NOT neutral.

The neutrality of science is a myth precisely, because you can no sooner find a scientific expert who will testify that there can be a safe way to dispose of, or store, radioactive waste than you can find another scientist who will tell you the dangers of proximity of such radioactive waste to human habitation.

This question cannot only be viewed from the point of view of "uses and/or abuses of science." For just like the idea that science is neutral, this only mystifies the nature of the scientist's work.

Today, it is evident that — whether the issue is environmental pollution, genetic engineering, psychological control technologies, computer invasion of privacy and civil liberties, biological/chemical warfare, secret research by defence departments — scientific abuses are not independent and unrelated to scientists' activity.

Science is today carried out in a manner which reflects the norms and ideology of the social order.

The fast-developing knowledge of the history/philosophy of science has superseded the commonly-held view that scientific discoveries are isolated products of scientific genius generated by some internal logic of science itself.

Closer examination of this history has revealed that these discoveries emerged as a consequence of specific technological requirements of a particular social order; for example, Newtonian mechanics in

the development of industrial society.

The Second World War saw the trend of the erosion of this so-called autonomy of scientific activity go even further.

In the West, there was a register of scientific manpower compiled and scientists permeated every branch of government, advising and devising the most effective types of chemical and biological weapons of war.

The atomic devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki exploded the myth of the autonomy of science. And by the mid-60s, the Vietnam War saw the greatest proportion of university science in the United States done on federal contract, especially for the Department of Defence.

Hopefully, there have been responses to this development among scientists. Thus, for example, during the Vietnam War, the Bertrand Russell Tribunal sent scientists and doctors to collect evidence of the experimental nature of the war and the use of new technologies.

Consequently, more and more scientists began to speak out. The moral and political issues were then brought to the fore and it was no longer adequate to pose the problem in terms of merely the "uses/abuses of science."

The response has produced such movements and associations of scientists like the Union of Concerned Scientists, Society for Social Responsibility in Science and Science for People.

This little diversion is necessary because the experts we call to determine whether the radioactive waste can be dumped so close to human habitation can conclude quite differently depending on whether their prime concern is people or profits.

It would be naive to ignore the consideration of cost-cutting that is at the core of the controversy. Has not one of our local scientists in the letters column of the *Star* recommended the use of welded steel drums for storing and transporting the stuff as eminently preferable to using plastic bags?

The question of cost is no doubt the reason why the site is so close to human habitation and not in an island or some forsaken wilderness.

The people of Papan are justly angry that their lives are being reckoned on weighted scales. Are their demands, therefore, unreasonable?

[The Star, 22 July 1984;
China Press, 24 October 1984]

Bukit Cina Must Be Preserved in Its Entirety

The Bukit China issue seems now to revolve around the question of how much of the hill will be developed.

There are at least three very crucial reasons why we must preserve Bukit China in its entirety: its significance as a unique monument of our heritage; its reminder to urban planners that parks and hills like Bukit China are indispensable to the soul of a city; the rights and prerogative of Cheng Hoon Teng Temple and the Chinese community must be respected.

Historical relics and monuments like Bukit China embody the cultural heritage of our people. The universal task of preserving such historical remains has been implemented through the World Heritage Convention and adopted by numerous conferences of Unesco.

The historical, religious and cultural worth of Bukit China has already been amply highlighted by historians and writers.

It is the oldest Chinese burial ground in the country and is steeped in history and legend of the Malacca Sultanate.

This history which Bukit China embodies is therefore an inviolable sacrament of the stake that the Chinese community has in this country when their ancestors first settled here.

It is also a reminder of the bond of Sino-Malay friendship that already existed in those bygone days.

Development cannot be pursued in isolation from cultural policy. We must prove ourselves capable of salvaging the profound and human aspect of the development process.

From another point of view, even if Bukit China did not contain its precious historical value, it would still be a monumental disaster in terms of urban planning.

It is time Malaysians and especially city dwellers became more conscious of the fast deteriorating quality of urban life.

The city has, in history, been the most elevated form in which the people's culture has expressed itself artistically and historically.

It is an environment in which our capacity for collective creativity finds its most varied and complex expression.

Urban planning has generally been reduced to such abstractions as zoning, construction rates and density ratios — an obsession with quantitative, and technological aspects of the problem.

The historic city was actually the product of the gradual harmonisation of people and the urban environment. This human dimension has sadly been poured into the concrete moulds of the city planner.

The city must be reclaimed for the pedestrian, the real actor on the urban scene. Our excessive dependence on the motorcar and the blind worship

of the Gods Nissan, Ford, Mercedes, etc. also needs a radical rethink.

The last and perhaps the most important reason why Bukit China must be preserved in its entirety and not used for commercial development of any sort concerns the trustee rights and prerogative of the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple as well as the common wishes of the Chinese community in this country.

The Temple trustees and the Chinese community wish to preserve the hill for its religious, historical and symbolic value, untainted by commercial concerns.

In this respect, it is ironical that the Chinese community (often maligned for being materialistic) is uninterested in the commercial worth of this prime land while the Malacca State Government seems to have neglected the spiritual values that are supposed to be injected into government administration.

The imposition of the unreasonable quit rent and the unilateral announcement by the Malacca State Government of the three proposals for developing Bukit China are therefore to be regretted.

The justice of the case is best presented in this poser by Tan Sri Datuk Mubin Sheppard, secretary of the Heritage of Malaysia Trust (The Star, July 18):

"Is it proper for property which has been in the possession of a community (for 330 years at least) to be subjected to land acquisition – against the wishes of the vast majority of the community – according to an Act drawn up only recently?"

[The Star, 7 August 1984]

Coming to Terms with Secularism

The Government's Islamisation policy, like the other components of the National Culture Policy, has led to great concern and unease among the non-Muslim communities.

This was the almost unanimous feeling of the participants at the seminar on "Common Religious Values for Nation-Building" organised by the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism on April 7.

Although there has as yet been no blueprint for the implementation of the assimilation of Islamic elements in national development and administration, various instances of injury to the sensitivities of the other religious groups in this country were poured out at the seminar.

There is certainly cause for concern that a fundamental issue of this nature, sanctified in our Constitution, should be so shrouded in uncertainty that it had to depend on the Tunku to spell out the secular nature of our State.

Even Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Khoon expressed surprise in *The Star* on April 27, 1983:

"The Tunku said we should not become an

Islamic State ... He is the first person of importance who has clearly stated that. I didn't know that this country is a secular State. I knew it was not an Islamic State but I didn't know it was specifically written as a secular State."

The central question revolves around whether Islam is the "official religion" as stated in our Constitution, or whether it is more than that. Our country is not an Islamic State in the sense that Islamic laws cannot be imposed on non-Muslims.

The area of controversy therefore concerns the imposition of policies which either erode or impede the free practice and development of the other religions of Malaysia.

The full meaning and implication of the assimilation of Islamic values are still not clear but we have been assured that these values are "universal" and will not conflict with the other religions in the country.

The question then arises as to why call them "Islamic values" instead of "common universal values" since it is clearly the latter which will forge national unity.

There is an urgent need for the country to appreciate the importance of the principle of secularism for the realisation of national unity. At the seminar, most of the speakers failed to come to terms with this principle. This is understandable because of their religious affiliations, which have been traditionally averse to secularism.

In the absence of the principle of the secular State, tolerance can only be on faith, appeals to "spiritual values", the like. That is why many religious leaders in the West are now among the confirmed believers in the separation of religion and State.

To come to terms with secularism is to appreciate that democracy and rights are the real guarantees of the freedom of religious worship, nothing more, nothing less.

Some argue against "excessive secularism" on the grounds that it is this lack of "spiritual values" which has led to the "problems" in the West today.

In my humble opinion, such a view confuses the issue of secularism of the State. It is a delusion which stands in the way of valid solution and can only mislead.

Imputing exclusive origins of morals in social affairs to "belief in God" stands in the way of the ample evidence of abominations committed in the name of God. It is also to exclude many whose social actions and beliefs have been based on the simple virtue of truthfulness and intellectual integrity, including Bertrand Russel, the Nobel Laureate for Peace.

In the first place, the image of the "decadent West" is partly a creation of the media. Our own media is partly to blame for importing mainly the plastic culture from the Metropolis.

It is well-known that the leaders of the American Republican Party, the British Conservative Party, the Italian Christian Democrats and the other ruling parties in most of Europe are among the most religious in their societies.

And yet, their countries' constitutions enshrine this secular principle. Is this a paradox? Certainly not. The western countries are secular States not because of their "permissiveness."

It is often overlooked that the struggle for democracy in the West began in the area of religion. This was not surprising considering the Church had imposed its domination upon western

civilisation from feudal times. The assertion of freedom, including religious freedom, was a long and protracted process which began with the Reformation in the 16th century and continued into the next three centuries and more.

The struggle for freedom of conscience was also unrelenting, championed by people like Voltaire and Rousseau.

But it was not until the 18th century that the Americans showed the practical way in which religious tolerance and freedom could be institutionalised by their constitutional separation of Church and State; the principle of secularism.

This has served as a model in the development of democracy and the growth of freedom. The separation of Church and State was formally established by the First Amendment to the United States Federal Constitution which went into effect in 1791:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Thomas Jefferson opined in 1818:

"Our laws have applied the only antidote to this vice (that is, religious intolerance), protecting our religions, as do our civil rights, by putting all on an equal footing. But more remains to be done, for although we are free by the law, we are not so in practice..."

True religious tolerance can only be guaranteed if all the religious groups come to terms with the democratic principle of secularism.

Tolerance involves not only the respect of the historically "dominant" monotheistic religions (Christianity, Islam) for the other pantheistic religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism), but also.

for all these "great religions" to respect the beliefs
and practices of animists (Orang Asli, Dayak, etc.)
as well as agnostics like Bertrand Russell.

Break dance: Hollowness Behind the Establishment's Outcry

Like all the other new waves — or "fads" to the overaged teenager — in the history of pop, break-dancing seems to be going through the familiar motions of the Establishment's ali-i-mentary channels.

The moral moghuls instinctively reach for the leash while reports are released concerning the dire consequences for youthful breakdancers.

At the Metropolitan centre, where pop culture invariably originates, every new wave has experienced its initial outlaw status, only to be subsequently co-opted by the "entertainment" pop barons into the Establishment. One could trace the dusty trails of jazz, the blues or folk music to discover the loss of their soul in the glittery plastic of the pop industry.

At the outset, the raw realism of black music was ignored by the media in the West. The musical expression of the trials of the blacks as well as the uninhibited spirit, soul and rhythm of black people seemed to threaten the hypocrisy of much of middle-class Western society. This was no less true of rock 'n' roll in the 50s, as it was of reggae in the

70s. The sad irony is that all the anger, spirit and blues of black music were soon scrubbed down, spruced up, deodorised, amplified, synthesised, sha-na-naed, doo-wit-do-wahed and packaged like any other commodity in the transnational corporate world.

Rock 'n' roll, the Twist, the Frug, the Go-Go, what-have-you ... all these were rehabilitated into respectability replacing Waltzes and Fox Trotters in Embassy balls. They became trendy accessories of the with-it high-society crowd. Breakdance, perhaps, defies this observer-participation because of its pyrotechnic demands on the human body.

It is hard to find fault with breakdance, especially when it seems to avoid the usual steamy sexual innuendoes — just good clean pop, snazzle, fizz (when the breakdancer has had too many beans) and occasionally ... snap (!) if adventurism or exhibitionism has had the better of the feckless youth.

All the ingredients for emulating Bruised Lee are demanded — conscientious training, suppleness, timing and spacing, now and Zen.

This seems to be all this latest phenomenon is about — not a bit like the "subversive" youth revolt in the 60s in the West which threatened the Establishment. This is not to say the 60s phenomenon did not expose middle-class hypocrisy. All the same, the majority of those rebellious youth seem to have been similarly "rehabilitated" into the chrome-reflective surfaces of the corporate world or the glittering veneer of showbiz.

Hasn't breakdancing also been sanitised at the LA Olympics? Like the jugglers and the clowns doing tricks for Uncle Sam?

While it is still possible to trace the roots of

folk music, the blues, jazz and reggae in various enclaves in the West, the lineage is lost in the canned product in countries like ours.

It is manifested as cultural imperialism. And like the music in the West, our own folk and traditional music and culture are going through their slow but sure eclipse, or else allowed to see another night of "Instant Asia."

This is ultimately the hollowness behind the whole outcry about breakdancing. The powers-that-be have to make up their minds regarding their priorities. They cannot give the public a daily diet of 'pop-and-titillate' under the justification that it sells and then proceed to clamp down on the youth for aping what they see in the media.

The authoritarian tonic never works. It is even doubtful whether imposed moralising will have long-lasting effects.

We must give credence to our youth and create the environment in the home, schools and other social institutions whereby they can feel that they are participating as people who count in society, not as afterthoughts when they start to rebel.

At school, for example, the exam-oriented curriculum stifles initiative and creativity, and promotes values which are the opposite of the professed aims of modern education. Musical appreciation is hardly ever seriously encouraged as a composite part of the school curriculum. The humanistic soul of the arts is stifled by the pedantic attitude necessitated by exams.

In these aspects of the intellectual development of our youth, the questioning attitude and research inclination to solve social problems are not encouraged. Civics and moral education should be the starting point which can help unlock the many

doors in the long journey through life. Giving the keys to these doors in their minds will ensure a more secure moral foundation and a better society – not pouring moral tonic down their throats and applying hot rotans on their bots.

Initiative, responsibility and the democratic spirit can be instilled in the classroom. Outside the classroom, students can be encouraged to develop their independence, self-reliance and organisation.

The sound and fury of school debating societies are meaningless if students are not allowed to partake in society's social and political affairs, for example.

Our Health Service: Privatise or Nationalise?

The Government's decision to extend its privatisation policy to the health and medical services will conflict with its avowed aim of alleviating the plight of the poor in this country.

Health — that basic human right provided for in the United Nations Universal Declaration — cannot be relegated to market place morality like any other commodity. The medical hierarchy also frequently uses this outmoded argument about the "free market" to defend its professional elitism:

"We're living in a free enterprise system. Doctors' charges are commensurate with their qualifications and experience ... patients can always 'shop around' if they think a doctor is too expensive ... or go to a government clinic or hospital where treatment charges are subsidised."

That 19th century morality as an ideology has, for quite some time now, had to be adapted through sheer force of social, political and economic realities. That is why such basic human rights as the right to health, education and housing, are emblazoned in the UN Declaration.

Right up to World War Two, the untrammeled 'hidden force'' of the free market was leading to gross inequalities and explosive situations in many countries.

Consequently, it became the normal function of modern states to intervene in the 'free market" system with public expenditure on free services, amenities, etc. — the 'New Deal'' in the United States and Britain's National Health Service.

Malaysia is no exception as public development expenditure on these essential "social goods" have become the norm. But it remains a contentious issue as the wealthy and privileged in the private sector fight tooth-and-nail to ensure that not too much public expenditure is deflected into this function, while the poorer classes demand it as a right.

There is an element of double standards by the private sector on this issue which needs to be pointed out. The fact is that the State has stepped in not only to provide these basic social functions but has also subsidised the private sector in the economic sphere.

Thus the crisis of the 1930s saw state intervention in various enterprises in the so-called "free enterprise" economies. In Britain, "nationalisation" of the energy, transport and steel industries was a form of subsidy and a ready market for the private companies, which can sell their products to the State at monopoly prices especially when they are multinational corporations.

The more lateral thinkers can also see the hidden savings for the private sector if their labour force do not have to spend too much on social necessities out of their wages. Today, "Japan Inc," "Singapore Inc," and "Malaysia Inc.' all

suggest the State giving "private enterprise" a helping hand.

In spite of all this, the ideology of the "free market" dies hard, and as we have seen in the medical hierarchy, it serves a function of propping up the old familiar elitism, of justifying wealth and privilege.

There are other realities which debunk the "free market" myth. For example, the market for the doctor's "product" – drugs – does not operate in a free market as such because all multinational companies, not just drug companies, operate as monopolies or oligopolies.

It is their control over medical technology that has enabled them to eliminate many potential competitors, accounted for the high cost of drugs and prevented the development of indigenous pharmaceutical industries. Similarly in other fields, if the so-called "free market" was allowed to operate untempered, raw material producers in the Third World would face grave terms of trade against manufacturers from the advanced countries.

It is typical of elites to ignore the social capital that has gone into training many potential doctor or any professional, social capital that has been contributed by all who work to produce society's wealth. Except for the completely naive, it is not simply "qualifications and experience" that determines income, but institutional factors and power relations.

Even then, it is dishonest to pretend that the private sector does not owe anything to society at large. General practitioners, for example, owe their relatively easy and lucrative existence to the public sector itself since any ailment more serious than

the common cold is invariably referred to the local hospital.

It is also self-evident that the quality of our public health service will barely improve while doctors are continually seduced by the largesse in the private sector. The vicious circle sets in since patients prefer not to suffer the poor service in government clinics and hospitals but patronise the high street GPs.

The stark reality of the nation's health is that while GPs clinics clutter the main roads of West Coast towns, the shortage of medical staff in the government service is said to be as high as 40 per cent.

When we bear in mind that two thirds of all Malaysians live in the rural areas, we have an idea of the twisted priorities in our society. For all the back-slapping regarding our country's economic growth, one-third of all our children are still undernourished; the infant mortality rate in Kelantan is still as high as 23.8 per 1,000 births.

With the cuts in public expenditure in the last few years, the allocation for health and general social services has dropped seriously.

Social services, which took up 28 per cent of the Federal Government development expenditure in 1982, has only been allocated 17 per cent for 1984. Of the $2,214 million expected to be spent for the social services sector in 1983, only $145 million was for health.

Like many of society's problems, the solution requires more than piece-meal palliatives. Our social commitment must entail a holistic approach that also touches our education system. The health system cannot be evaluated in commercial terms. Its "efficiency" can only be measured by its acces-

sibility, low cost and good "human" service.

The arguments that have been put forward in favour of greater privatisation of the health service and allowing government doctors to work after hours in private practice point exactly in the wrong direction.

The immediate short-term solution — as opposed to allowing government doctors to work after hours — is to increase the pay and improve the working conditions of government doctors.

Some form of a National Health Service that will provide not just cheap but good quality health service for all, and which all doctors are obliged to join, must be introduced.

It must not be a second-class service for those who cannot afford to pay for private medicine as it has tended to be in Britain. Nor should it be like that of Singapore's "Medisave", which only insures the poorer classes up to a certain level than they have contributed. In this scheme, it has been calculated that the average worker will only be able to afford a maximum of 18 days if they have to go into hospital in a year.

A national health insurance scheme must offer a flat, undifferentiated service for all and sundry.

It is instructive that when the National Health Service was first set up in Britain, if expectedly met with fierce resistance from the medical hierarchy there.

Gradually, when the vast majority of the British people opted for NHS treatment, more doctors joined the scheme. However, obstacles to the change ensured a built-in inequality which persists to the present day — poorer areas are still not as well-served as middle-class areas.

The availability of private patients in the richer

areas mean an opening for lucre for the more mercenary doctors, while the relative poverty, bad housing and other social conditions of the poorer areas put them at greater risk, and in turn, give more work to doctors in those areas.

In the longer term, we need to "deprofessionalise" medical care, to close the gap between the "qualified" doctor and the unqualified lay. This gap, which exists for "knowledge" and education in general, only mystifies and encourages elitism and increases the polarisation of rich and poor.

We need to eradicate the unhealthy power relation that the "doctor" wields over the "patient" if we are to come to grips with the question of community-level primary health care, universally recognised as the solution to much of the Third World's health problems.

Health knowledge needs to be "liberated" by, for example, training more intermediate health workers, paramedics, and bringing proper health care to the remotest parts of the country.

Emphasis must also be drawn away from the "curative" approach of the mechanistic medicine we have been accustomed to up to now. Most doctors tend to assume that diseases just "happen" to people, rather than that social, economic and environmental factors cause people to be ill.

In fact, a person's social class is a good predictor of the type of illnesses he or she will suffer. The question of health and safety at work must be elevated to the urgency of a national campaign, with adequate enforcement and not just pious declarations.

Similarly, it is assumed that medical treatment

consists merely of using physical, chemical and even electrical intervention to "mend" the sick person and restoring them to working order.

Among other things, it is the expansion of high-technology curative medicine of this kind that provides the basis for the extremely profitable health care industry, of which the drug companies are a vested interest. Private doctors are a vital part of this syndrome.

Thus the manner by which the expenditure for health programmes is dispensed needs to be carefully considered — constructing more prestigious hospitals is not necessarily the best solution to the urgent needs in the rural areas.

[The Star, 6 October 1984;
China Press, 18 March 1985]

Poor Visibility Over Bukit China

Permit us to correct some of the misconceptions of your report on 'Bukit China: So Much Misunderstanding' (New Straits Times, 29 September 1984), which we found grossly misleading and lacking in objectivity.

At the outset, the inference that the Bukit China issue became politicised because the DAP started its "Save Bukit China" campaign is unfortunate since a glimpse at the facts chronicled below will quickly show that this is untrue:

5 October 1983   — The State Government sent a letter to the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple trustees disclosing its intention to develop Bukit China.

10 April 1984   — The Malacca Chief Minister announced this publicly in the State Legislative Assembly.

24 April 1984	—	Cheng Hoon Teng trustees issued a statement stating that it could not agree to Bukit China being used for any purpose other than that of a burial ground.
		The temple trustees received immediate support from the Malacca Chinese community headed by the Malacca Chinese Chamber of Commerce as well as the National Buddhist Association, who all opposed the development plans for Bukit China.
26 April 1984	—	An opinion poll by the Chinese press (Nanyang Siang Pau and Sin Chew Jit Poh) among Chinese leaders in Malacca showed unanimous opposition to the State Government's plans.
29 April 1984	—	DAP leader Lim Kit Siang voiced his opposition to the plans. By this time, the issue had already been taken up by the national Chinese-language press.

The particularly regrettable fact is that, like many other legitimate issues close to the heart of the Chinese community in this country, their just demands are tarred with the convenient brush that it is a "chauvinist" or "communalist" issue and "used" by opposition parties like the DAP. Is the justice of the case somehow diminished simply

because it has been taken up by the DAP? As a major newspaper in our country with a responsibility for the pursuit of truth, the NST should try to look at the objective justice or injustice of a case by rigorous investigation.' We would be only too happy if our stand on Bukit China is similarly supported by UMNO, PAS or any other section of the country for that matter.

Your report also mentioned the Malaysian National United Youth Movement as one of the organisations "which had initially pledged support for the (Malacca State Government's) plans" but who "subsequently made an about-turn when the issue was publicised." It would seem that your reporter failed to put in just a little bit of investigation before he added that this organisation in question had submitted a Memorandum of support for the Chief Minister containing 20,000 signatures but "when the plan ... became a source of dispute between the DAP, Chinese community and the Government, the movement sent another Memorandum stating a change of its stand".

Allow us to give you the real facts:

29 April 1984	—	The Malaysian United Youth Movement released a full-page advertisement in the Chinese press under big banner headlines: "MUYM opposes the Malacca State Government's proposal to level Bukit China: MUYM launches its signature campaign to submit Memorandum".
14 May 1984	—	When the 20,000 signatures

were eventually collected on the basis of their newspaper advertisement, the Memorandum was submitted. However, contrary to its stand expressed in the advertisement, their Memorandum did not raise any objection to the development of Bukit China but instead put forward proposals for developing the hill!

- The May issue of 'Suara Melaka' then reported that 20,000 Chinese youths supported the State Government's plan to develop Bukit China. This report was published by the NST and Utusan Malaysia.

24 May 1984 — Former MCA central committee member Chan Teck Chang issued a statement condemning Teh An Chuan who was responsible for the infamous Memorandum and demanded that the organisation withdrew it.

25 May 1984 — The Melaka State United Youth Movement issued an apology to the Chinese community over the whole sordid affair. Meanwhile, its National President, Teh An Chuan wrote a letter to the

113

	Malacca Chief Minister urging the latter to let the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple and the Chinese community themselves decide the fate of Bukit China.
27 May 1984	The Klebang Besar (Melaka) branch of the United Youth Movement held an EGM and resolved that the Memorandum contradicted its aims stated on the advertisement and moved to withdraw its 500 signatures it had collected for the Memorandum.
30 May 1984	The Malaysian United Youth Movement announced that it had sent a letter to the Malacca Chief Minister on May 29 to clarify its position as well as to amend the Memorandum.

We hope the above clarification regarding the Malaysian United Youth Movement will enlighten your readers of the facts of the case, which did not require very difficult investigation.

The next few paragraphs of your report again takes the Malacca Chief Minister's statements for granted without also asking the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple trustees whether they had met the Chief Minister and agreed to the commercial development of Bukit China. As it has turned out, the trustees have since in a statement on October 2 categorically denied ever agreeing to such an under-

taking with the Chief Minister.

On the point about whether the hill will be leveled, you went on to say: "Levelling will only be done where necessary and takes into consideration landscaping needs. As it is, only 40 per cent of Bukit China, which is actually made up of three hills — Bukit Tempurong, Bukit Gedung and Bukit China — will be set aside for commercial development, while the rest will be preserved, together with historical sites and monuments".

In the Joint Memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister of Malacca by the major Chinese organisations in Malaysia, the Chinese community and the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple have declared their wish to preserve Bukit China *in entirety* for the following reasons:

- The historical, cultural heritage and symbolic significance of Bukit China must be left intact. This is in line with international concern for the protection of all historical and cultural heritage.

- It is fully within the trustee rights and pre-rogative of the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple to preserve the graves on the hill as a religious obligation and a public trust.

- The rare endowment of a public parkland in the city centre of Malacca is also a major consideration.

It is regretted that your extensive report on Bukit China makes no mention of our Joint Memorandum which represents the view of the Chinese community in this country.

The point about there being three hills and not one Bukit China is an unfortunate obfuscation. Bukit China, as it is, is designated in Cheng Hoon

115

Teng's land title, covers the entire area including Bukit Tempurong and Bukit Gedung. These two are merely peaks on the whole area collectively designated as "Bukit China" and intended for its specified burial purpose.

Your reporter further posed the question: "Why was nothing done to make it more pleasant", adding that "the hill sticks out like a sore thumb".

In the first place, it is part of the myth that money grows on trees in the Chinese community. It is in fact a very pertinent question to ask for government financial allocation to beautify the hill since it is widely held to be of tourist appeal.

However, it is not true that the hill has only tourist appeal. If your reporter had bothered to talk to the people who stroll or jog on Bukit China in the mornings and evenings, he would find that they are not all DAP supporters but Malaysians from all walks of life and communities.

Your reporter quotes the Malacca Chief Minister unquestioningly: "Why ask for the signatures of people who have nothing to do with the future of Malacca?" Shouldn't you be applauding the rare occasion when Malaysians have exhibited such a sense of national consciousness, of spiritual rather than commercial interests, of history and culture rather than philistinism?

His next question, quoting Datuk Abdul Aziz Tapa, is perhaps the most unfortunate of all: "There are other interests on Bukit China other than Chinese interests. Why are the opinions of others not sought ... If Bukit China is the symbol of Malay-Chinese interaction, then why champion the Chinese interests alone?"

Foremost of all, Bukit China, as its title stipulates, belongs to the Cheng Hoon Teng

Temple in public trust for the Chinese community. This is indisputable.

The fact that various sections of the Chinese community simultaneously point to it as a symbol of Sino-Malay friendship in this country is evidence of their good faith in this respect, pointing to the Sultan Mansur Shah-Hang Li Poh connection in history. It is therefore uncalled-for to twist this fact around by insinuating that this "could lead to racial tension".

A responsible newspaper like the New Straits Times should really be educating the public regarding the fact that the preservation of Bukit China in entirety is not "championing Chinese interests" but of national priority.

The crux of the matter is ultimately, whether or not the historical, cultural and symbolic significance of Bukit China is being given due recognition; whether or not the inviolable rights of Cheng Hoon Teng Temple are being protected; and whether or not the wishes and dignity of the Chinese community in Malaysia are being duly respected.

We hope the New Straits Times will strive for objectivity and impartiality in the future.

[October 1984. This did not appear in the NST]

Our China Policy: Need for Realism

What is the main object of any country's foreign policy? For a long time during the frenzied paranoia of the Cold War, it was one of alliance with the "Capitalist West" or the "Communist East" blocs. It was the Non-Aligned Movement which restored sanity to a dangerous world.

The Non-Aligned Movement was founded at Bandung in 1955 upon the following principles:

- Respect for the right of peoples and nations to self-determination;
- Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States;
- Non-interference and non-intervention in the internal affairs of States; and
- Peaceful co-existence among States.

The movement spelled out in very clear terms — especially for the smaller nations of the world — what the guarantees for world peace had to be founded upon. In so doing, it has helped to shape each country's foreign policy, based upon what are seen as compliance with international standards of conduct and maintenance of world peace. In-

118

fringement of these principles is likewise condemned by the world community at the United Nations.

A country's foreign policy should therefore be consistent with internationally recognised real threats to any country, region or world peace in general.

It should not be clouded by quirks of ideological preferences and prejudice. If we can draw the example of the last war, when the Allies could recognise the threat of Germany and Japan, the different ideologies of the West and the Soviet Union were not held out as the greatest obstacle to the Alliance. It was not as if the Soviet Union or the United States had any illusions about each other's political colour.

The post-War World has shattered the myth of a solitary "Communist Bloc." The Soviet Union, Vietnam, China, and the rest must be judged on their record and not by old prejudices. Need it be stressed that if we identify the wrong threat, we lay ourselves wide open for trouble?

More importantly, it is the people who will have to bear the consequences of such an error since — as in the case of Kampuchea, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, to name but a few — the leaders of those puppet regimes have little to lose but much to gain.

While our foreign policy vis-a-vis Kampuchea, Palestine, Afghanistan, South Africa is beyond reproach, we have been inconsistent over issues like East Timor and foreign intervention in the Latin American States. But our China policy is perhaps the most puzzling.

Our Government has reiterated the view that China poses the biggest threat to the region.

Recently, at a seminar organised by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Tun Hussein Onn repeated this view and added that the Soviet threat is largely a myth.

I have already argued *(The Star,* July 27) why the Soviet Union and its surrogate Vietnam are the main threat to the region. On the other hand, evidence of this supposed China threat has never been elucidated convincingly by the Government. On this point, someone who should know, Prince Sihanouk, has pointed out at the United Nations General Assembly on Oct. 4, 1983:

"Vietnam has never stopped saying that it will withdraw all its troops from Kampuchea when the so-called Chinese threat has disappeared. All honest observers can testify that there is no 'Chinese threat' either in my country or near it. The only threat in our region, South-East Asia, comes from Vietnam and the Soviet Union."

In our own country, it is plainly ridiculous for us to harp on the Chinese threat when Vietnam has not only occupied Pulau Kechil Amboyna (Amboyna Cay) in our own backyard, it has declared its determination to defend its sovereignty and other rights over the whole of the Spratly Archipelago.

Interestingly, at the more recent seminar organised by ISIS, Prof. Michael B. Yahuda of Adelaide University debunked this so-called Chinese threat to South-East Asia:

"For the present, there is no incontrovertible evidence to show that China is already a real threat to the region ... China's policy has consistently been characterised less by the urge to acquire

control of adjacent countries than by the concern to deny control of the area by its major superpower adversary."

The most significant development to date was a local newspaper editorial in September which called for common sense:

"It is high time this vision of seeing, 'the long arm of Peking' behind the nuisance of communist insurgency in this country, is devalued in the light of present-day realities ... To cite the 'moral sympathy' of Peking towards the MCP as a stumbling-block to bilateral relations is to elevate the validity of the MCP beyond reason."

It would appear, however, that the editorial was motivated more by pragmatism than through recognition of the political principles involved:

"Bilateral trade now exceeds $1 billion. China continues to be a major importer of our primary resources ... Malaysia now holds letters of intent for constructing projects in Peking and Xiamen worth $1.84 billion ... Today, we are in a position to profit from China's new dynamism toward its position in the economy of Asia and the world."

Without doubt, improved bilateral relations between China and Malaysia will lead to economic conditions which can benefit our people but let us not pass over the political education of it all.

Foreign policy must be based on reality and unswerving adherence to the principles that have been laid down to ensure a peaceful world, not on double standards or prejudice.

These principles are not without significance for democracy and well-being in each society of the world community. On this point, the observed dearth of letters and public statements by our political parties and groups on the many inter-

national issues is very much regretted since the link between the principles involved in international relations and democracy in our own country seems to be insufficiently appreciated.

[The Star, 12 October 1984;
Nanyang Siang Pau, 15 August 1985]

Superpowers and Apologists

While I would admit that "On-looker" (Nov. 5) got a bit carried away with his/her crusade against United States President Ronald Reagan, methinks G. Connor (Nov. 13) doth protest too much.

When I browse through the load of trivia, not-too-subtle or otherwise predictable "official views" in much of the mass media, *The Star's* Opinion Page provides a refreshing relief, whether good or bad.

Anyhow, H. Connor's self-righteous protestations about *The Star's* editorial ethics in publishing the letter by "On-looker" do not sound convincing.

Connor seems to justify the US' invasion of Grenada on the grounds that those who overthrew Bishop were "far from progressive, popular, democratic ..."

The character of Bishop's successors aside, if such obvious disregard for the principle of self-determination of nations is allowed, does Connor also justify Vietnam's invasion and occupation of Kampuchea on the grounds of "liberating the Kampuchean people from the murderous Pol Pot"?

This is a crucial issue which, unfortunately,

many apologists for Vietnam similarly obfuscate.

While we are on the subject of Grenada, I would like to ask our Government why — if we are supposed to be in the non-aligned movement — it did not condemn the US' invasion of Grenada?

It is similarly pathetic to use the arguments that Connor uses: the fighting ceased after the US invaded Grenada and that showed the benevolent role of the US.

In international politics, war and peace are relative. This justification of a "peace-keeping force" is similarly employed by the British in the North of Ireland and not long ago, in Zimbabwe.

While this still has currency in the former, Zimbabwe has demonstrated the lie that the withdrawal of the "peace-keeping troops" will lead to internecine bloodbath. The point is, even if there is strife in the country concerned, it is not the business of the US or Britain or the Soviet Union to intervene in any country under any pretext.

Connor seems to prove "On-looker" right on one point — he/she (and most US propagandists) cannot conceive of the universe other than that the alternative to Uncle Sam is the Soviet Bear. We are asked to compare Grenada with Afghanistan and Kampuchea. What a choice! We would rather stay poor but free and curse a plague on both your houses!

Nor was Connor very successful in whitewashing US intervention in the long list of countries simply by rhetorically asking if these interventions were to suppress democratic rule. Yes, G. Connor. Don't you remember Chile under Allende? Greece 1946? Need we go on?

Chile was only a blatant example of crass and crude US intervention. In many of the other cases

elsewhere, the democratic process never got a chance to work its way before it was sabotaged by the CIA. Such exposes of CIA operations in Asia, Africa and Latin America are well-known.

Connor seems to imply that the US did not have any business interests in Vietnam, Korea or Greece and therefore there could not possibly be any reason other than benevolence for US intervention.

First, I would question this presumption itself. It is also naive from the point of view of international politics and strategic studies. For could one not also argue that the Soviet Union does not have any business interests in Afghanistan?

Aside from strategic considerations, there is the possibility that these satellites of the superpower are a prospective area for exploitation even if no economic interests as yet can be identified. None of the big powers feel easy about any Third World country that is truly non-aligned and fiercely self-reliant. Cold War rhetoric simply does not hold water any longer in the present world.

Connor's fairy-tale understanding of the nature of foreign loans would not get past the average school of political economy. While in Malaysia, he/she could learn a thing or two about how and why our current serious foreign loans problem has come about. It has definitely not come about through the supposed "selfless" lending by the US and the other lending agencies.

It is true that all these metropolitan interests would prefer not to have totally inept rulers in charge of these developing countries where they have their investments, but rather, to have efficient "budget-balancers" and public-expenditure slashers.

125

The ridiculous situation in many Third World countries today with the possibility of default by debtor countries is merely a contradiction created by these foreign loans.

It is a problem which the metropolitan interests will try their hardest to solve in order to maintain the status quo. Connor might note that in the past, those Third World leaders who tried to opt out of this supposedly magnanimous system — Sukarno in Indonesia, Nasser in Egypt, to name but two examples — met with foreign-aided coups and outright intervention respectively. Say no more.

My concluding words are therefore: "The fault (dear Connor) does not lie in *The Star*, but in yourself ... among other things."

[The Star, 23 November 1984]

Bukit Cina Belongs to the People

From the national standpoint, visibility still seems pretty poor over Bukit China even though the Chinese community has demonstrated its unanimity over the preservation of the hill in its entirety.

One still hears the same old overused insinuations regarding the chauvinism of the Malaysian Chinese community. Other sections of the nation are keeping a discreet silence over the fate of one of our oldest and most precious historical and cultural heritage.

It would seem that there can never be an objective scale of justice when it concerns the demands of the Chinese community. Whether it be for their mother tongue education, Bukit China or whatever, they are met with the double-edged sword of unreason and scare tactics.

The most uncalled — for example of the use of scare tactics was the recent charge by the Malacca Chief Minister that communists are behind the "politicisation" of the Bukit China issue.

What exactly was the reaction expected of

those who see the justice of the cause to preserve Bukit China in its entirety?

"Politicisation" is indeed a curious word in the Malaysian context. It has become associated with instilling fear and loathing, if not obfuscation.

The Chinese community can never win — if it is not the "communists", it's the "DAP". Association with the latter is intended to convey the impression that the cause has no objective moral right or justice but is fanned by "opportunism of the opposition parties using chauvinism and communalism".

This is the sad reflection of Malaysian politics, frequently reinforced by the superficial analyses of social scientists as well as the mass media. It is a sad reflection of the Malaysian intellect, willing to allow such irrationality to pass unchallenged.

In the case of the DAP taking up the Bukit China issue, it must be clarified to the non-Chinese educated public that the Chinese Press had publicised the issue and many sections of the Chinese community had pledged their support for the temple trustees well before the DAP took it up.

The Chinese community would be only too happy to receive the support of all sections of the nation irrespective of ethnicity.

The rhetorical question has been raised in the Press as to why Chinese interests alone are being championed when Bukit China is said to symbolise Malay-Chinese friendship, the reasoning being that "development" is for the good of all.

First of all, Bukit China, as its title stipulates, belongs to the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple Trustee in public trust for the Chinese community. This is

128

indisputable and is laid down in the 1949 Ordinance.

Like all cultural and historic heritage, Bukit China is a natural symbol of the stake that the Malaysian Chinese community has in this country.

Such a symbol is vitally important in a country where the Malaysian Chinese are quite often mischievously told they are "guests" or "immigrants" of sorts — a slur which has no place in any country which claims to uphold democratic rights! It would seem that Bukit China's status is no less insecure even though its title was bestowed in the 15th century.

On the other hand, the Chinese community during the controversy has never failed to simultaneously point to Bukit China as a symbol of Sino-Malay friendship and ties, by pointing to the Sultan Mansur Shah-Princess Hang Li Poh episode in the *Sejarah Melayu*.

Is this not evidence of the good faith of the Chinese community? How could anyone insinuate that the response by the Chinese community "could lead to racial tensions"

Is it any wonder that national unity seems so elusive?

Talking of "politicisation" — who politicised the issue in the first place? Was it not the Malacca State Government when it demanded the $2 million in quit rent and late payment fines, when it gave the ultimatum to the trustees to develop the hill?

The recent revelation of the land reclamation project using the soil of Bukit China, conducted by two Japanese firms (Ohbayashi-Gumi and C. Itoh) with the go-ahead from the Malacca State Government, shows why all of a sudden everybody

thinks Bukit China is "unsightly" and should be "developed".

How many more skeletons must be revealed (pardon the expression) before the State Government decides to lay off Bukit China?

The Chinese community and the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple Trustees have declared their wish to preserve Bukit China in its entirety for the following reasons. They hope all the communities in this country can support their just stand:

• It is well within the rights and prerogative of the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple to preserve the hill solely as a cemetery in public trust for the Chinese community. This right was granted to the trustees by the 1949 Ordinance.

• Bukit China is no ordinary cemetery. It holds some graves which date back to the Ming period. Besides the historical and cultural heritage, the symbolic significance of the hill must be left intact.

This is fully in line with the Government's call to inject spiritual values into public policies instead of giving away to crass commercialism and philistinism.

Bukit China as a whole has outstanding value as a national monument from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological, as well as anthropological points of view and must be protected from any commercial disfigurement.

• The character of the landscape and site of Bukit China in its natural environment is a rare endowment of Malacca town. It must be preserved as a public park, as a retreat from the city, to be enjoyed by Malaysians from all walks of life and of all communities.

Bukit China belongs to the people first, tourists

130

second. It represents a source of physical, moral and spiritual influence.

It is landscapes, sites, historical and cultural heritage like Bukit China which contribute to the artistic and cultural life of people, not prophylactic condominiums or plastic hotels.

Like the Papan issue, we should salute the people for standing up, applaud the rare occasion when Malaysians have transcended narrow parochialism to support just issues in some other part of the country.

If Malaysians can support just causes in communities other than their own, we have the makings of genuine national unity.

[The Star, 22 December 1984]

Freedom and Religion

In recent years, we have witnessed the progressive role played by the clergy of religions in the struggle for freedom in various countries. The Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 was a historic landmark because it swept away the corrupt and oppressive regime of the Shah and, at the same time, rid the country of foreign control.

The selfless involvement by Catholic priests in the struggles of the downtrodden in the Philippines, Latin America and elsewhere similarly reminds us of this liberating role of religion.

This is not to say that religion has always played that role. Some of the worst wars in history have been fought in the name of religion. Religion itself has formed the ruling ideology in many societies since feudalism.

Islam, for example, was used by the Shah for reaction in the same way that the ulamas have been used against the Moros in the southern Philippines. The "liberation theology" of the Catholic priests is now being cross-examined in the Vatican.

There are certain trends in religious thinking

that have accompanied this phenomenon which warrant observation and comment.

It is without doubt that the religious resurgence and the rediscovery of cultural identity have been a response to the experience of political, economic as well as cultural imperialism of the West.

The evidence of "western decadence" is in fact the daily diet that is offered by the cultural centres in the West. The response to this is not only peculiar to Islam ideologists. Confucianists in Singapore and Taiwan, for example, frequently warn about the moral laxity of the West to spur their masses to greater spiritual heights.

The attempt to reassert one's cultural and moral identity is certainly laudable and is on the agenda of many developing countries attempting to shed the yoke of cultural imperialism.

However, we should try to avoid a tendency towards seeing one's own religion as the singular path to salvation or societal harmony. Therefore, when we try to characterise the rest of the world, one should be reminded of the particularity of other countries in which Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism or whichever may be the dominant religion in the respective countries.

Because of the history of capitalism/colonialism in just about every developing country in the world today, the urgency of lifting the standard of living of the people in these countries is not a matter of choice but of necessity.

Their efforts should not be equated with the same "materialistic, evolutionist" outlook of western civilisation.

From the point of view of social analysis, it is perhaps not useful to use the professed ideology

of the elites in different countries as the defining feature since their underlying economic systems may not reveal many fundamental differences.

It is also important that religious sectors do not treat the principle of secularism like a dirty word. The loss of the secular principle is certainly inconsistent with democracy and freedom. If we look at the history of the western nations, we will appreciate that this principle of the separation of religion and State was part of the struggle for freedom and democracy itself.

Seen from the point of view of minorities of different faiths as well as those who simply profess freedom of conscience, the principle of secularism is very valuable indeed and therefore should not be down-graded as part of the "western malady."

Sociologically, the phenomenon which has been too conveniently attributed to "moral decline" of the West is a subject for scientific study by also uncovering the economic and political undercurrent.

It should not be subjected to the obscurantist blanket label of "permissiveness" or "western disease."

One has to be more specific in criticising the faults of a particular socio-political and economic system instead of simply attributing the blame for increasing crime and divorce rates, suicide and juvenile delinquency on the West.

When we consider the case of religions in which the concept of an absolute yet personal Creator-Deity is absent, it is clear that the denigration of "Godlessness" to suggest a spiritual crisis is unfortunate.

In the case of Buddhism and for that matter religions of tribal peoples whose only solace is

134

what has been called "animist worship," these religions teach nothing more than the spiritual experience of life itself. It is unlikely that they suffer from crisis of values as a result.

Tolerance and mutual respect for other religions therefore involves a reconciliation, one might say a wisdom in accepting all beliefs for what they are. There should not, for example, be an attitude of superiority by monotheistic religions for other beliefs.

Besides, the concept of a monotheistic God is not exclusive to Islam. Christianity and Judaism share this theosophy. Thus, especially in the light of the liberationist Catholic priests, the differentia specifica of each of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism should be demonstrated.

Religions have certainly helped to establish the moral basis of most societies. At the same time, moral and political philosophy has also founded modern societies upon secular principles, social utility and common interest while incorporating many universal values in laws of the respective countries.

One of the most important implications of this is in the safeguard for the freedom of worship of minorities in all countries in the world community.

Even if a nation is made up of a homogeneous people sharing the same religion, institutionalising a theocratic State is still of doubtful feasibility.

What is more, in the real world, it is difficult to find a country which bears this feature. The question of the position and rights of minorities has to be faced by most countries.

Muslims in this country should be reminded of the problem of Muslim minorities in the West, Soviet Union, China and elsewhere.

The magazine *Arabia*, the *World Islamic Review*, very correctly pointed out that: "Assimilation ... is clearly unacceptable to Muslim migrants ... Integration, on the other hand ... is the process whereby foreigners and nationals adjust their behaviours and attitudes to one another; this implies an effort on the part of the nationals of the host country to understand what is different and, at the same time, the right of foreigners to distinctive cultural features."

The European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers was quoted to back up this stand.

The article went on to show that this means a right to various social amenities including "the right to appropriate schooling ... mother tongue instruction and religious education, and the maintenance of the cultural and religious identity of migrants."

More importantly, it referred to: "... the host country's obligation concerning the freedom of worship. It is vital that host communities should not ridicule the migrants' traditions and ways of life but regard any difference as a source of intellectual enrichment."

This conclusion of the *World Islamic Review* speaks for itself. It also speaks for minorities everywhere, who in most cases are not even foreigners or migrants but long-standing nationals in their countries of domicile.

It must be appreciated therefore that the principle of secularism is inextricably bound with tolerance and mutual respect.

This necessarily entails a restraint on the part of the dominant religion in any country and consi-

136

deration of the sensitivities of its peoples of diverse faiths and cultures.

Consequently, evangelism must also be self-restrained for after all, there is but a thin line between state-endorsed evangelism and assimilation.

[The Star, 5 February 1985]

TV 3 ... Untuk Siapa?

Judging from the near-hysteric clamour by TV3's fans of its solid-gold titillating pop, rock-round-the-clock, its opiate soap operas and its other superhero serials, it would be foolhardy to snipe at our new media idol.

Yet TV3 has had its share of detractors: the moral moghuls who frown on the immodest dressers and too explicit scenes; the Tamil lobby who want proportional representation on the air waves; the Chinese sector who ask why Chinese characters are conspicuously absent in Chinese-language advertisements and news programmes; ruffled Catholic feathers over the *Thorn Birds* controversy ...

To begin with, TV3 is certainly a change from RT-ahem (... is anybody there?).

But if we ask if our new media idol is living up to the promise of what a private commercial TV channel could be and if some of the complaints are well founded, then there are some bitter pills to swallow.

Take the *Thorn Birds* controversy. If we lived in an enlightened, liberal and truly self-critical

society in which the arts are boldly explored and the human condition dissected without fear of injury to vested interest, there would have been no such fears over the screening of the mini-series.

But sad to say, in our society, many sectors are still not able to look at life and its integuments of contradictions in an open, tolerant and self-critical way.

Nevertheless, before TV3 barons too quickly claim this noble intention for their decision to put on *Thorn Birds*, let them consider this scenario: Just supposing Ralph what's-his-name had not been a Catholic priest but an Islamic clergy and the writer had touched on some "sensitive" areas of Islamic orthodoxy, questioning its theosophy with just a dash of sex and passion thrown in for a good soap opera recipe, would TV3 still have shown such a series?

This is the sad fact of Malaysian life. If the powers-that-be cannot tolerate such a scenario, then why the double standards? One can therefore have sympathy for the Catholics who protested over the manner in which the decision was taken.

Until our society as a whole is prepared to accept openness, tolerance, self-examination and criticism or appraisal by others — the essence of the arts itself! — we must at least be seen to be fair. Therefore, if the dominant community in this country cannot tolerate such an attitude towards its religion, then the feelings of the other communities towards their respective religions should be similarly respected.

The Tamil community's protest at the dearth of Tamil films and programmes over TV3 was very much in order. Talking of fairness to its constituent viewers, TV3 seems to be pandering not only

to crass commercialism but also the Government's national cultural policy.

For example, can it explain why Chinese characters are conspicuously absent in Chinese-language advertisements and news programmes?

Are Chinese characters not allowed to be sighted over the public air waves?

When we look at the glut of English-language programmes, it brings home the inconsistency in a national cultural policy in which the Chinese and Tamil Malaysian cultures have to vie for a place even though they are two of the major constituent cultures of this country.

Sure, TV3 is popular. You can't fail with those populist ingredients which absolve us from the necessity to think, to create our own local cultures. For that matter, even our local Malay culture will not stand a chance if the only yardstick is commercialism.

At symposiums, seminars and conferences, we hear the sound and fury of noble declarations of intent, but in practice crass commercialism takes over. Are our local cultures of no "popular appeal"? A serious point to ponder. When will our very own "new wave" break?

We are told to "buy Malaysian" to save ourselves from a deepening debt crisis and yet nobody bats an eyelid when it comes to importing Texan soapies and video pop. It would be interesting to know just how much it costs to buy *Dallas* for instance.

What happened to the promise of more locally produced features and plays? Has there been sufficient government financial and institutional support for such ventures to promote new creative works in all our local cultures? Are those gallant

tobacco companies ready to sponsor all these local cultural initiatives?

It is not difficult for TV3 to be a truly dynamic, independent and alternative channel to RTM. On the newsfront, there is a tendency to inform about everything but on a superficial level.

The national scene is not devoid of issues which can be investigated and the views and feelings of the people aired — the BMF scandal, anti-radioactive dump protest, Bukit China, the national culture policy, problems of our farmers, fishermen, squatters, mine, factory and estate workers, municipal labourers, hawkers, the public services, health, housing, etc.

All our myriad social problems could be investigated and brought into the living room of Malaysians.

In every social niche, there are cameos and social truths waiting to be captured on video. For example, it is truly appalling that after three years, no investigative journalist in any of the media has come out with anything more substantial in a scandal as grotesque as the BMF affair. It really mirrors the priorities in our society.

TV3 should not cower from thoroughly reporting and investigating all our social issues. These together with more informed commentaries, panel discussions and debates with fair representation are what we need for a healthy and responsive media. Perhaps I am being a bit naive. When we consider who owns TV3.

[The Star, 22 February 1985; China Press, 5 March 1985]

Fee Hike, Racism and Double Standards

The Australian Government's decision to increase fees for overseas students by 20 to 30 per cent has the familiar ring of opportunism to it.

The response to this by our Education Minister, Datuk Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi — that "Australia's proposal to increase fees for foreign students is its right" — has the jarring incongruity of double-talk when we remember our Government's response to similar action by Britain a few years ago.

The Australian Government's opportunism can be seen in two contexts. First, in its decision to allow the fee increase to be spread out between now and 1987 for government-sponsored students but that private students will have to pay the full increase from this year.

We have since heard that the Australian Government's response to overseas students' protest is that if they don't pay up now, they will get the boot.

One wonders if our Government has fallen for such blatant attempt at divide-and-rule. An explanation is in order.

142

The Education Minister's response certainly gives cause for speculation. Our Government must decide whether private overseas students should be defended as Malaysians or whether they belong to a separate nation, in which case the calls for halting racial polarisation are mere empty gestures.

Australia's decision is especially loathsome to private overseas students in view of the fact that the Goldring Committee on Review of Private Overseas Student Policy had specifically pointed out that over half of the foreign students in Australia come from Malaysia alone and that "most come from families which, by Australian standards, are not wealthy, and most have parents with relatively low levels of educational achievement. A substantial proportion need to work part-time or during vacations in order to support themselves."

The Goldring Committee was commissioned by the Australian Government to make an extensive study of its private overseas students policy.

It consulted widely. Early last year, it came to Malaysia to study the situation here, and met and received submissions from organisations and individuals.

Its report, *Mutual Advantage*, contains much sensible insight but after the latest decision by the Australian Government, it all seemed a rather expensive, time-consuming and wasted exercise.

The Australian Government's attempt to appease the Malaysian Government has already been seen in its granting of at least 50 per cent entry quota to Malaysian-government sponsored students.

This is part of the reason why private overseas students face so much difficulty and increasingly

...mind or do they mean political relations between the respective governments-in-office?

The Australian Government's action certainly smacks of the latter. While we are on this subject, it is pertinent to ask what has happened to the $7 million pound sterling that the British government is supposed to have granted to us after the furore over their fee hike.

Have all of it gone only to government-sponsored students? Aren't the British authorities interested to know where the money has gone and whether it has benefitted private overseas students in any way?

146

The Politics of Famine

Book Review: "The Politics of Famine" by Paul Kelemen

The plight of famine victims in the Horn of Africa has finally made the famine an international issue. It is good to see that it has also unleashed a positive public response from Malaysians. However, the fact that governments that had known of the deteriorating situation for *four years* have only recently pledged increased aid should teach us something of the politics of famine. An illuminating book by Dr. Paul Kelemen of the University of Manchester on the subject reveals the politics involved in what we have beheld as a straightforward mercy mission.

When the recent relief operation gained momentum, the Ethiopian regime, Western governments and relief agencies — notable exceptions being 'War On Want' and 'Christian Aid' — all made the Ethiopian government's feeding centres the main spectacle to create the impression in the international media that food donations were reaching their intended target.

The fact was that the governments' camps held less than 3 per cent of the famine victims. The rest were presumed to receive USAID, Canadian and

147

EEC aid through the Ethiopian government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. Their distribution was, however, not subject to follow-up reports or on-the-spot monitoring and, outside the camps, visitors were allowed access to only selected villages.

In the worst affected areas — Eritrea, Tigray, and northern Wollo — the Ethiopian regime was not in control of most of the population and was therefore not in a position to distribute food. The reality is that, not only did it not want to, it did everything in its power to prevent aid from reaching these areas. It rejected appeals for international agencies to be allowed to carry food into the guerilla-held areas and confiscated, when it could, shipments of grain sent for Eritrea and Tigray (Observer, 20-1-85).

The Western governments have no intention of embarassing the Ethiopian regime because they wish to improve relations with the military regime. For example in 1984, for the first time since the fall of Haile Selassie, Britain provided military training for the Ethiopian armed forces. Western policy has been more subtle and contradictory than is usually thought. They have sought to pressure the Ethiopian government to weaken its ties with the Soviet Union by withholding all bilateral aid, while at the same time leaving the door open for the regime to improve its relations with the West. This second aspect is seen by the West allowing Ethiopia large increases in aid through multilateral agencies like the World Bank and the EEC.

The agencies had their own reasons for not wanting to draw attention to the situation in Eritrea and Tigray. They feared that to project

the Ethiopian regime in an unfavourable light might undermine public support for the famine relief and also jeopardise their cooperation with the Ethiopian government on which many of their projects depended. As a result, these relief agencies have been unable to mobilise adequate supplies for Eritrea and Tigray. The voluntary agencies generally agreed that 60 – 80 per cent of the famine victims were in guerilla-controlled areas.

On Feb. 25th 1985, the 'Times' of London reported:

> "A confidential Ethiopian Government report has cancelled for the first time that more than three-quarters of the people in the famine-stricken province of Tigray are failing to receive food aid."

To get an idea of the proportions of international donations allocated between the Ethiopian government on the one hand, and the agencies working for the guerilla controlled areas on the other: In 1983, the EEC, one of the largest donors, provided thirty times as much aid to the Ethiopian government as to the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) and the Relief Association of Tigray (REST). The ratio from US voluntary agencies – the largest non-governmental source for famine relief in Ethiopia – was 9 to 1 in favour of the Ethiopian government.

By the end of November 1984, 1,500 Tigrayans were dying daily and tens of thousands sought refuge in neighbouring Sudan. Moreover, the Ethiopian government, confident that the international community would on the whole ignore the situation in Eritrea, Tigray and northern Wollo, used the famine as a weapon to starve and disperse the population of the areas held by the

liberation fronts (EPLF and TPLF).

For the outside world, the most serious effect of the Africa famine on the attitude of people towards such tragedies is its reinforcement of racist ideas about Africa and the Third World in general. As long as the policy of keeping silent on the political content of famine or Third World poverty is allowed to hold sway, such racist ideas about Third World peoples will persist with profoundly negative effects.

While we gawk at the pictures of the famine on TV and in the newspapers, we would do well not to feel pity, for as Dr. Kelemen put it:

"The spontaneous humanitarian response of the Western public was thereby deflected from its initially critical thrust and confined to expressions of pity, which itself then became an object of celebration, as the manifestation of a superior civilisation. The West's ideological representation of itself as the benefactor of the Third World was salvaged"

The famine has led to an unprecedented expression of concern for the peoples of the Third World. Initially it fueled popular indignation at the "mountains of surplus" of the West. In 1984, it was reported that in addition to the butter and beef mountains, a grain mountain had been stock-piled by the EEC. This was at a time when 7 million people were on the verge of starvation in Ethiopia and there were serious food shortages in 22 other countries. The EEC intervention fund held in store 16 million tons of grain by the end of 1984.

This is not evidence of a "more superior civilisation", merely an aspect of the world economic order that the famine pushed to the

political fore-front. But while the reality of the world economic order aroused widespread concern in the West, the political forces which maintain that order were allowed to keep their camouflage. The policy that censored the politics behind the famine absolved the West, the Soviet Union and the Ethiopian regime of responsibility for the famine.

Like many other Third World countries, the Ethiopian government had neglected food production oriented to domestic needs. In the Third World as a whole, 25 per cent of all cultivable land is now turned over to cash crops for markets of the industrialised countries. In recent years, the Third Worlds' agricultural export has increased by 17 per cent annually, while its food imports have increased by 20 per cent. This had been the pattern of development in Ethiopia which increased its investment particularly in coffee cultivation.

Explanation which attribute Ethiopia's inability to mitigate the impact of the drought to population increase do not hold water. Ethiopia is relatively sparsely populated and its agricultural potential is largely unexploited. Of 84 million hectares of arable land, only 14 million are cultivated.

For all the aid Ethiopia receives, much of it is directed toward the small urban sector and cash producing rural sector, not the 95 per cent of the population who live as peasant smallholders. The projects for which the Ethiopian government has secured funding, are intended to maximise the marketable surplus in the cash-producing sectors, from which the state can increase its revenue. A group of experts, headed by the development

economist, K. Griffin, warned in 1982 of the consequences of such a policy on the country's food requirements (The Times, London, 30-10-84).

The Ethiopian government persisted with its economic strategy because its political priority allowed it no other alternative, necessitated by the regime's anti-democratic character and its military aim of crushing the Eritrean independence movement, the Tigrayan and other opposition within Ethiopia. Thus the repression of these minority nationalities has brought about a war economy, which has turned the drought into a famine and the famine into a political weapon.

In 1984, 46 per cent of the Ethiopian government's budget went on armaments (The Guardian, 20-11-84). Much of the military hardware has come from the Soviet Union and has been obtained on credit. Despite being one of the poorest countries in the world, with a per capita income of $111 a year, Ethiopia now has an army of about 300,000 troops, 3 mechanised and 21 infantry divisions and more than 100 combat aircraft (Int. Herald Tribune, 20-11-84). It has also several thousand Soviet technical and military advisers and there are still Cuban troops in the Ogaden. The bulk of the war machinery is aimed at Eritrea and Tigray.

In propping up the war economy, exploitation of the peasantry through government pricing and land policy as well as the power of the economically dominant classes have been consolidated. Much of the regime's policies — producers' cooperatives, peasant associations and state farms — were trumpeted as "socialist" policies but in fact profited the richer peasants who were political extensions of the regime.

The concentration of resources on the state farms has been encouraged by the Soviet Union. The Soviets claim that the state sector provides the economic basis for the socialist transition in Ethiopia even though the workers there are prevented from organising as an independent political force, either in the factory or outside. Whatever its ideological justification, this corresponds to the Soviet Union's political and economic interests. The Ethiopian state is today Moscow's closest ally in Africa. In the name of "socialist division of labour", Ethiopia's economic links with the Soviet Union reinforce Ethiopia's concentration on mineral extraction, cash crops and dependence on foreign industry.

There is ample evidence to show that food from relief agencies is being used as a weapon by the regime in the war in Eritrea and Tigray. Foreign correspondents report that food is being resold in these provinces or used for feeding the Ethiopian army.

Even as the cooperation between the Ethiopian and Western governments was being given approval, the Ethiopian military continued its bombardment of the drought affected areas outside its control. In October 1984, a market place in the Eritrean village of Molki, crowded with peasants, was the target of a bombing raid. 42 people were killed and 92 injured (New Statesman, 7-12-84). A few weeks later, the British TV 'ITN' cameras were in Orota, in northern Eritrea, when a nearby school was bombed, killing several of the children (The Guardian, 29-11-84).

Despite mounting evidence of the Ethiopian regime's flagrant disregard for the interest of the famine victims in all these provinces, it continued

153

to receive the lion's share of the famine relief. Western governments, through the famine relief, were pursuing their long-term objective of regaining from the Soviet Union the dominant influence in Ethiopia.

Much of the critics of Western aid point to the miserliness and its self-servicing purposes, being geared to boost the donor's trade. But the famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea raises the even more important issue of the political orientation of Western aid. The politics of the famine should teach us about the political forces which can provide a lasting solution to such disasters as well as a political direction for aid based on solidarity with the just struggles of the peoples of the Third World.

[Nanyang Siang Pau, 31 March 1985]

Beyond the Rhetoric:
Democracy in the Third World

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's "Message to the First World" speech at Oxford in April was the stuff to warm the hearts of Third Worlders but not necessarily to electrify their minds. The flourish of rhetoric by the Prime Minister must be examined in the right context.

Who were the object of Dr Mahathir's ire? *"From their high pulpits ... From their comfortable armchairs they preach. And in the columns of their newspapers and in the pages of their books, they lecture, expound, declaim on all that is wrong with the Third World."*

Are we to believe that media pedlars and academicians are wreaking more havoc on the Third World than the policy makers in the corridors of power and business magnates of the First World?

Instead of a declaration of our rectitude and a staunch commitment to the principles of democracy and justice, the Prime Minister chose to indulge in "pot-calling-the-kettle-black" repartee, hardly comfort to us citizens.

The shameful aspects of many Third World

countries lie not simply in the fact — as Dr Mahathir also pointed out — that inequality, totalitarianism, corruption and the dearth of democracy abound, but the alarming aspect that these regimes lean economically, politically and militarily on the First World.

In other words, the hypocrisy of many First World observers is seen not in their decrying the inequality, corruption and the dearth of democracy of many countries of the Third World (which is irrefutable and contemptible) but in their refusal to acknowledge that these regimes are supported by their own First World Governments.

A Third World country that is truly committed to democracy and justice must adopt and practise consistent non-alignment in its relations vis-a-vis the First World.

Speaking only for our own country, can we say that Malaysia's foreign policy reflects this principle? What was our stand during the Vietnam War in the sixties? Did we raise a voice of protest over the US intervention in Chile during the seventies; Grenada, Nicaragua, El Salvador and others in the eighties? Was it Third World solidarity when we condoned Indonesia's invasion and atrocities in East Timor?

The Third World countries can only become a "moral force" if its member States do not harbour double standards.

Why, for example, has Malaysia only selectively adopted the PLO and the forces of Democratic Kampuchea (albeit correct stands) in its support for national liberation movements?

The Third World can only be a political force if it supports all legitimate national liberation movements.

What criteria do we use in our foreign policy?

These are crucial questions that must be posed beyond the rhetoric. They beg an appeal to democracy, to justice and to reason.

Dr Mahathir's running down of the West's racism was well-taken, if a little dated. Exhuming Cromer, Sartre et al belonged to that stage of Third World history at least three decades ago.

Certainly racism of the West has not been eradicated but it was disingenuous of the Prime Minister to throw out logic with the colonial bath water as when he posed this sarcasm: *"What would the world have been had all Europeans gone to Oxford to study logic ...?"*

The racism of the West has nothing to do with logic and rationality, which can only be jettisoned if we want to go back to the Dark Ages. The West's racism has its roots in colonialism and continues to be perpetuated in the neo-colonial present on a political and ideological plane quite separate from that of logic and rationality.

What I fear is that such fashionable sarcasms, if unchallenged, are frequently meant to legitimise a relativism in order to justify executive actions of sorts.

It is creeping relativism that is fearful in many Third World regimes which justify their denial of democratic rights to their people with claims that "each nation must seek its own path to democracy."

The particular forms of parliamentary democracy of the West aside, there are certain basic tenets and principles of democracy that cannot be slighted simply because — as Dr Mahathir has correctly pointed out — "participatory" liberal democracy is a myth when wealth and political

157

influence of the minority hold sway. Defenders of democracy should be more interested in the substance rather than the mere forms of different parliamentary systems.

Those basic tenets of democracy are concerned with ensuring that the Government of the day carries out the will of the people, for the people, and, as far as possible, is checked and balanced by the people.

In other words, the people are sovereign and not the Government-in-office as it has come to be presumed in many countries.

In a democracy, guarantees like the rule of law, equality before the law and the fundamental freedoms emblazoned in the Constitution are the substantive aspects, quite apart from the particular form of democratic system.

The fundamental liberties of the freedom of speech, assembly and organisation, etc. are vital safeguards against abuse of power, which is not difficult to imagine given the realpolitik of power brokers behind the scenes, as exposed by Dr Mahathir.

Consequently, the Press, intellectuals, social groups and movements play an invaluable role in pointing out the glaring inconsistencies of their society — certainly not to be sneered at if one is truly committed to democracy.

To say that the Government elected into power once in four years must have a carte blanche because it is "the expression of the democratic will" is a gross reification of a vital principle.

For a start, such a claim is empty when the freedom of speech, information, assembly and organisation in so many countries has been curbed

and other deterrents to any change in the status quo exist.

Let us not forget that Hitler, the Shah of Iran, Ngo Dinh Diem, all had equal claim to being the "expressions of the democratic will." The more important questions we should be asking is how the free expression of the people can be ensured and carried out.

It is a common fact of politics the world over that every Government-in-power claims it stands above vested interest and realpolitik. How are we to be convinced that Malaysia is somehow different from every other society?

In the final analysis, such judgments like, whether Governments need reform or whatever, cannot be left to a few God-like personages but must be left to the people themselves to decide.

If we go beyond the rhetoric, we will realise the chicken-and-egg quality of Dr Mahathir's claim that:

"... There are hundreds of millions indeed billions, who believe that an Economic Bill of Rights is even more important than a Political Bill of Rights."

Are not the two inseparably linked? Isn't the municipal grass-cutter and Cuepacs member or the poor farmer, fisherman, artisan, electronics factory worker asking for an Economic Bill of Rights?

Would they not also be demanding a Political Bill of Rights if and when they are warned by the Government of the day not to pursue their industrial actions?

And if their Economic Bill of Rights is brushed aside on the grounds that this is "tyranny of particular interest groups and movements," surely

159

are in danger of entering the twilight zone of ic and rationality?

1984 Now and Then

Every writer in Malaysia — whether journalist, essayist, polemicist, novelist or playwright — exercises self-censorship. Let us have no illusions about the contrary.

This is the crux of the often banal and tokenistic claims about freedom of speech and of the Press in Malaysia. But it is by no means the only gauge of whether "freedom" exists in Malaysia.

Therefore, even when Kee Thuan Chye, the playwright of *1984 Here And Now* (Experimental Theatre, Universiti Malaya, July 12-16), calls a spade a spade, it still has to be done within the vehicle of George Orwell's *1984*.

This is where the play tended to grate in places, when it had the makings of a Malaysian classic. It would have added to our literary wealth if Kee Thuan Chye had used our own vehicle or even dispensed with vehicles.

To begin with, it seemed to be doing no more than borrowing those 'Orwellian' images and symbols: Big Brother, Inner Party, etc. They were very convenient and effective set designs, of course.

A few of Orwell's symbols may be applicable in the Malaysian content, but we would be committing the gross error of 'misreading' Orwell's novel and miss the intended target of Orwell's satire. Not only that, it blunts the object of our own critique of the Malaysian reality.

Orwell's *1984* was a particular satire of the intelligentsia of his day, not of some futuristic 'modern' society. Nor was it meant to be a satire of "totalitarianism" as conveniently defined by Western "liberal democracy".

Orwell was, after all, not just a committed political writer, he was a passionate Socialist who fought in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Republicans.

The "collective solipsism" of the Inner Party in Orwell's *1984* and the propagation of 'New-speak' culture was sophisticated and the particular creation of "intelligentsia-power" — if there could be ever such a ruling class.

Transpose this scenario to the Malaysian context and the literary product doesn't quite gel.

The very idea of that sort of possibility is quite remote, not only in the role that Malaysian intellectuals have traditionally played in this country, but the crude level of propaganda in general.

In many instances, intellectuals in this country have added to the myths and mystifications of very simple issues facing the country. We are presented with examples daily.

On July 13, for example, one newspaper headlines a top Minister's speech thus: "NEP won't be extended beyond 1990". Another newspaper reporting the same speech heads it: "NEP strategies even after 1990". This is not "doublethink", which

162

involves considerable skill at creating logical double binds.

In most cases, it is not the "Proles" who are hoodwinked but "middle-class intellectuals" who seem complacent enough to allow to pass what in Latin is called *taurus turdo*.

Whether you are a middle-class non-conformist or whether you are a "Prole" matters very much since "freedom" has a meaning relative to each of these classes.

In Malaysia, the more voluble sectors tend to define it in terms of TV3 freedom to watch Solid Gold and other Western fare. One cannot be too sanguine.

For all these reasons, the simple transposing of Class for Race to represent the Inner Party was too convenient, since it obliterated other issues which must be explored if we are to present a fuller Malaysian reality.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the typically Malaysian scenes worked best, especially Yone with father and mother; the mahjong scene.

The parts which followed Orwell's book too closely, especially the speeches in the last few scenes in the detention cell, were less credible.

The trouble with zappy scene changes was that the initiation of Wiran into the movement and his relationship with Yone were not very convincingly unravelled.

Consequently, Salleh Ben Joned did not have the space to develop the character Wiran. These are all constraints of Orwell's novel where much of the action happens in the mind of the protagonist.

K.K. Nair was superb as Jumon. Some fine acting too by Kee Thuan Chye, Leow Puay Tin and Sukania Venugopal. A creditable set by M. Eeel.

All in all, it was reassuring that there are Malaysian middle-class intellectuals who have the guts to bare it all to exercise a very basic human right of expression.

The "intellect" is, after all, that which distinguishes the human soul from the animal soul. Would-be intellectuals take note!

This itself is credit to the playwright Kee Thuan Chye, director Krishen Jit, producer Sabera Shaik, the cast and everyone else who made the play possible.

[New Straits Times, 26 July 1985]

Moralists Who Cheat at Chess

Professor Semi Fine, lecturer in Government and unabashed defender of the Western liberal democratic system, used to tell his undergraduates that all other systems do not measure up to the fair play and free choice guaranteed in the Western electoral system ...

"It's like cheating at chess!" he would taunt the absent adversary, much to the delight of his impressionable students.

For at least 20 years, the instant Republic of Singapore lived up to Professor Semi Fine's ideal while each general election produced a clean sweep by the People's Action Party. The PAP and its helmsmen are never short of admirers in the Western centres of liberal democracy.

By any country's standards, the winning of two meagre seats by the Opposition would hardly cause a ripple. But in Singapore in December 1984, this triggered a raw nerve in the PAP's paranoia, with warnings of dire consequences should the electorate veer from the PAPal truths.

The morning after the electorate had made two dents on the PAP juggernaut, Mr Lee grimly

hinted that the system of "one man one vote" might have to be changed. Suddenly, the champions of the liberal democratic system during the Fifties and Sixties were changing the rules of Professor Semi Fine's noble game of chess.

The sudden catastrophic downturn in the island republic's economy has provided the ideal climate for the further elaboration of this theme. On Aug. 1, rising star Goh Chok Tong did not fail to raise this spectre when he spoke to students at Singapore University: "... The loss of a single seat to the Opposition would undermine investor confidence ... My context was the poor quality of the opposition parties and their candidates in the 1980 general elections ... My point was that investors would judge the political maturity of a country from the way the people vote."

It would seem that democracy in many Third World countries is no longer a sovereign will of a nation's people. The "international investor" looms to caricature the principles of the right of people to self-determination.

Mr Goh may well deserve to ascend into the premiership by his consistency in the elite philosophy of his mentors. To show such scant regard for his fellow Singaporeans' intelligence is perhaps a lesser insult than the deferment of their political fortunes to the "international investor."

How does one judge "quality" in politics? Is a Ph.D. in Statistical Correlation from the University of Empiricism the ultimate accolade? In which case, even Mr Goh and Mr Lee would not qualify.

But why would the electorate be particularly concerned with electing candidates with strings of academic titles as the people's representatives? Are they likely to be less careerist and less elitist in

disposition than a people's champion from Mediocre High School? Most ordinary folk the world over regard elitism, careerism, authoritarianism as "character flaws," contrary to Mr Goh's presumption that:

"If voters choose a weak candidate with character flaws over a carefully selected PAP candidate, then something must be seriously wrong. They must question the maturity of the electorate. Or conclude that the society contains an element of instability."

To cast aspersions on your political opponents is one thing, but to also insult the intelligence of the people is as good as scuttling the good ship Democracy. Social scientists have furrowed their brows over the definition of "stability" and "instability" of the societal organism to no avail, for the social actors in every society will not play the functionalist's board game. Mr Goh should therefore not attempt to do the same.

To come back to Singapore's current economic woes, it was disingenuous of Mr Goh to attribute it to international investors' lack of faith in the Singaporean's political maturity. To begin with, for a republic that prides itself with being in the advanced country league, this is as good as an admission of continuing dependence on the Metropolitan Capitals.

It is ironical that in the same speech, Mr Goh pointed out the fragile nature of the island republic's existence — its dependence upon its old hinterland Johore for precious water. This brings back the by now buried issue of the existence of the republic itself, for while we are on the subject of democracy, the question of consultation with the Malaysian and Singaporean peoples in 1965

before the separation is not merely academic.

The question of viability of the island was raised then as it is now. Doubtless, the republic can survive through the precision of its systems analysts and operational researchers.

In the last analysis, the Singaporean people, like the people in every other country, will decide their fate. Mr Goh and the PAP would do well not to tamper with the noble democratic game of chess, which demands no higher morals than that players stick to the rules.

[The Star, 5 September 1985]

Immigrants and Nationality

At Lubok Antu, Sarawak, on Aug. 21, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad called on the various communities in the country to "sacrifice a little" (*The Star*, Aug. 22): "... small issues involving communal interests should not become obstacles to national unity."

The sentiments expressed were praiseworthy and irreproachable if rather unspecific. The issues arising from various government policies and regulations that cause alarm and unease among the non-Malay communities are quite specific but they can hardly be considered "small issues involving communal interests."

The New Economic Policy and the National Culture Policy affect the various sectors of Malaysians: students, graduates, workers, farmers and their community, educational and cultural institutions.

All the grievances of Malaysians are well-known and we need not go into them here.

However, the Prime Minister went on to say: "The Government did not stop the immigrants from keeping their own language and culture nor

did it force them to change their names as had been done in several countries ... But they (the immigrants) should accept the fact that this country has an official language which can become the foundation to further strengthen unity."

The serious issue at hand is the reference to "immigrants." The Prime Minister was certainly not referring to the illegal immigrants from Indonesia, Thailand or the Philippines for they certainly have not been clamouring for the preservation of their own language and culture. It can therefore be concluded that the Prime Minister was referring to the non-Malay communities in this country.

This is by no means a new feature of the "official" view. In Parliament on Nov. 8, 1983, the then Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Anwar Ibrahim similarly referred to the non-Malays as "new immigrants."

Consequently, whatever small issues the Prime Minister had in mind, the reference to the non-Malay communities as "immigrants" is itself a big and serious issue for it has implications for the political and economic rights of citizens of this country.

Was the Prime Minister merely stating a historical fact? If that was the intention, then as history is our witness, so are the Malays immigrants of sorts in this country, leaving the Orang Asli sole claim to the epithet "original people."

Fortunately, the world community today – and for at least 60 years now – does not recognise any ranking or discrimination of citizens in any country.

Today "nationality" is a legal relationship denoting membership in a nation or sovereign State. It implies duties of allegiance on the part of

the individual as well as of protection on the part of the State.

Nationality is regarded as an inalienable right of every human being in the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948). It is of cardinal importance to every person because through nationality, the individual comes within the scope of international law and it is his or her access to the political and economic rights and privileges conferred by modern States on their nationals.

The State, through constitutional and statutory provisions, sets the criteria for determining who qualifies to be its nationals; for example, any person born within the State's territory; inheritance from one or both of one's parents; naturalisation; etc.

The conditions under which the privilege of naturalisation is granted vary from nation to nation e.g. period of residence; intention to settle; good character, etc.

Citizenship is somewhat synonymous with nationality except that the latter includes the relationship of an individual to a State but suggests other privileges, especially protection abroad.

The status of nationality and citizenship has the crucial implication that every citizen, every national, is equal in the eyes of the law. It does not matter in the least whether a citizen has been recently naturalised, or, that his/her fore-fathers came from other lands centuries gone, or even that his/her ancestors were the truly original people who had grown out of the native soil itself.

All that matters within the national boundaries is whether the person is a legal citizen/national or whether that person is an illegal immigrant, in which case, the latter cannot claim the rights to

which the nationals are entitled, and is liable for deportation. But whatever the status, every person is still entitled to humanitarian treatment and basic human rights and dignity.

The non-Malays in this country cannot be faulted for being sensitive over the issue of citizenship or the designation of "immigrant" status for they have had an unpleasant experience of this throughout the 20th century. Some blunt facts regarding the injustice of their status since the colonial period should provide some light.

Despite the fact that Chinese and Indian immigration had started in earnest in the early 20th century, by the Second World War, citizenship was granted to few of the non-Malays by the colonial power. For example, as late as 1950, only 500,000 Chinese and 230,000 Indians held citizenship (Fed. of Malaya Annual Report, 1950:24).

This represented merely a fifth of the total Chinese population even though by 1947, more than three-fifths of the Chinese and one-half of the Indian population in Malaya were local-born (1947 Census, 1949:29).

A speech by Mr Tan Cheng Lock, then senior Chinese representative on the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements on Oct. 19, 1932 is rather revealing:

"I look in vain for any tangible sign or indication of any active interest, practical sympathy, and encouragement that has been shown by the Government of late towards that body of worthy, staunch, and traditionally loyal British subjects, viz. the Straits-born Chinese who have formed a continuous colony in this country for more than 500 years, and the locally-born Chinese subjects of

the Protected Malay States who have made this country their home.

"On the contrary, these loyal citizens of Malaya are, practically speaking, not to be allowed in future to own and cultivate rice lands in this country of their birth though foreign Malaysians from Sumatra and Java are granted that privilege;... while at the same time the Government intends to disown, or has now actually disowned, according to this council paper now laid on the table, all responsibility for giving them any Chinese education at the expense of the State.

"They are told that if they want free education they can go to the Malay vernacular schools, which it is impossible for them to do and is therefore not a practicable proposition but a useless concession ..." (cited in R. Emerson, 'Malaysia,' p. 513).

After the Second World War, with the birth of the United Nations and the proclamation of its Charter as well as the part played by the non-Malays in the anti-Japanese resistance and the development of the country, the British proposed liberalisation of the citizenship rules with equality for the non-Malays in the Malayan Union proposals in 1946.

Although this would have meant nothing very significant in terms of democratic rights under colonial rule, it would have enabled 83 percent of Malayan Chinese to become citizens.

The opposition by Umno to the Malayan Union put paid to these British intentions to liberalise the citizenship rules. When the Federation of Malaya proposals were subsequently drawn up, instead of the five-year residential qualification

173

stipulated in the Malayan Union, the new proposals required 15 years of residence before citizenship could be conferred.

In addition, the applicant for Malaysian citizenship had to have an adequate knowledge of either Malay or English. Under those terms, it was estimated that only about 10 per cent of the Malayan Chinese would have been eligible for citizenship.

The opposition to these proposals by the Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action and Pusat Tenaga Rakyat is also well-known and as much a part of our history of anti-colonial struggle. The final compromise was worked out between component parties of the Alliance themselves.

Victor Purcell wrote: "But up to Independence the fact remained that Malaysians (whether Malayan born or Muslim immigrants from Indonesia) were 'subjects of the Rulers' and automatically Malayan citizens, whereas the Chinese, Indians, etc. had to satisfy certain conditions of the law in order to become citizens."

Independence and the new Constitution did make it easier than before for non-Malays to obtain citizenship by registration or naturalisation and any person, irrespective or race, born in the Federation on or after Independence Day was automatically a Federal citizen. Nevertheless, as recently as 1984, it was reported that there are still over 300,000 persons with red identity cards in this country.

Despite the legal definition of nationals and aliens, history has been littered with numerous cases of infringement of rights of national minorities, religious-intolerance and other abominations.

After the First World War, recognising religious

174

persecution and intolerance as fertile sources of war, the Peace Conference of 1919 decided to set up under the guarantee of the League of Nations, a system of protection of minorities taking the form of five special treaties called Minorities Treaties.

The States which signed the Minorities Treaties undertook to grant all nationals full and complete protection of life and liberty and recognise that they are entitled to the full exercise, whether in public or in private, of any creed, religion or belief whose practices are not inconsistent with public order or public morals.

They lay down the following general principles:

• EQUALITY of all nationals of the country before the law;

• EQUALITY of civil and political rights; and

• EQUALITY of treatment and security in law and in fact.

Moreover, the treaties expressly stipulate that differences of race, language, or religion shall not prejudice any national of the country as regards admission to public employment, functions and honours, or to the exercise of professions and industries.

It also provided that nationals belonging to minorities shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control, at their own expense, charitable, religious or social institutions, schools or other educational establishments, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their religion freely. ("Protection of Minorities," UN, No. 67, XIV 4:47-58).

The Permanent Court of International Justice stated in 1935 that the idea underlying the treaties

was to secure for minorities the possibility of living peaceably alongside the rest of the population while preserving their own characteristics.

Since the Second World War, further protection of minorities has been afforded by Article 5 of the Convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, 1965; as well as Article 27 of the International Convenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966:

"In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion or to use their own language."

It is of course problematic whether we can consider large communities like the Malaysian Chinese a "minority" for there is no generally accepted definition of minority: Should it be based on number or numerical ratio to population as a whole? Is it necessary to limit the concept by introducing the idea of minimum and maximum size, or is the quantitative aspect secondary?

In the last analysis, the concept of "protection of minorities" is linked to the concept of "equality and non-discrimination." In as far as the Malaysian Chinese community has its grouses related to the latter, the concept applies.

On this point, it is instructive that the Yugoslav Government avoids the designation "minorities" for the following reason:

"The term nationalities is used in the Yugoslav Constitution for national groups usually referred to abroad as national minorities ... This more current term is avoided because the status of a minority

can never be the status of full equality with the majority, and the Yugoslav Constitution guarantees full equality, free of even the least discrimination, of all the working people and citizens regardless of the nation, nationality or ethnic group to which each belongs ..." (Nada Dragic, ed. "Nations and Nationalities of Yugoslavia," Belgrade, 1974:85).

During the discussions on the protection of minorities in both the Sub-Commission and the Commission on Human Rights when the UN Charter was being drafted, a memorandum was submitted by the Secretary-General entitled, *The Main Types and Causes of Discrimination:*

"The protection of minorities, on the other hand, although similarly inspired by the principle of equality of treatment of all peoples, requires positive action: Concrete service is rendered to the minority group, such as the establishment of schools in which education is given in the native tongue of the members of the group.

"Such measures are of course also inspired by the principle of equality: For example, if a child receives its education in a language which is not its mother tongue, this might imply that the child is not treated on an equal basis with those children who do receive their education in their mother tongue ..." (UN publication, No. 49 XIV 3, paras 6 & 7).

As far as we are aware, there is no section of the Malaysian public that questions the fact that we have an official language. But that does not contradict the fact that the non-Malay communities also desire to preserve, practise and promote their respective languages and cultures.

They certainly have the backing of inter-

national opinion despite our prevailing official view. In a report issued by Unesco, the question to what extent the designation of a single language as the official language would foster unity in developing countries was discussed in the following terms:

"It cannot be denied that the business of government is easier in a monolingual than in a multilingual nation. However, it does not follow that legislation or school policy requiring the use of the official language at all times will give the same results as actual monolingualism.

"On the contrary, it is fairly likely that absolute insistence on the use of the national language by people of another mother tongue may have a negative effect, leading the local groups to withdraw in some measure from the national life. In any event, it seems clear that the national interests are best served by optimum advancement of education, and this in turn can be promoted by the use of the vernacular language as a medium of instruction, ..." (The Use of Vernacular languages in Education, Unesco, 1953:50).

The Prime Minister should therefore measure our achievements in line with the standards set by the world community instead of citing backward countries which force their national minorities to change their names.

It is not surprising that in our region, a country that has forced its national minorities to change their names has also afflicted unspeakable genocide on a people they have annexed. Do we have to be thankful our country has not degenerated to that level?

[The Star, 18 September 1985;
Nanyang Siang Pau, 19 September 1985]

178

PAS' Present "Perfect" Stance

From a sober perspective, the recent speech by PAS vice-president Ustaz Haji Abdul Hadi Awang, who said "the question of privileges for the Malays will not arise under Islamic law," would have spurred no more than excited discussions and electoral speculations.

It might perhaps have caused a political scientist or two to choke over their erstwhile model of the local speculations.

The fallout was in fact worse than expected, reminding us of the warped climate of communalism that still surrounds us.

The Deputy Labour Minister described PAS as "traitorous to the religion, race and country."

A Mentri Besar similarly berated PAS for "selling out the birthright of the Malays."

The Prime Minister said the Attorney-General would have to determine if the speech was seditious. He also said that Umno Information Bureau would study the speech before any further action was taken, although the role of Umno's bureau in this connection is somewhat baffling.

Even the Home Minister indicated that his

Ministry was studying the speech. Not only was the Sedition Act invoked, some quarters maintained that the utterance was tantamount to treason.

In other words, there was not the slightest semblance of discreet charm. The only voice of reason emanated from that of former Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn who said:

"The Sedition Act should not be invoked too easily just because people express views which do not conform with established views ... the authorities should not stretch the provision of the law to make every non-conformist statement seditious or the law itself would fall into disrepute ... There is the political aspect which involves the rights of the people to express their views. If it is plausible, one has to be careful in invoking the Act as it involves the freedom of speech" (*The Star*, Sept. 20).

To anyone familiar with the democratic political system, PAS' statement was entirely within the form and procedure of any political party.

In every democratic electoral system, political parties display their programmes for the electorate to judge. As if this was anything new, Wanita Umno warned non-Muslims not to be fooled by PAS. So did Umno Youth, who added that PAS was only fishing for votes. ...

On this point, why is it always assumed that the non-Malay electorate are somehow gullible and incapable of making the right decisions when the time comes or that they are always politically passive?

One thing is certain, any electorate would prefer a political party to lay its cards on the table, to make public its stand on various substantive

issues rather than make empty abstract declarations of intent.

From the non-Malays' point of view, PAS was at least honest enough to make its stand public before the whole nation instead of say, making secret promises with the Chinese community while whispering differently in their Malay constituencies.

If one were to have an absolutely cynical view of political parties, one could similarly say that the Deputy Prime Minister's subsequent announcement to develop the new villages was a vote-catching stance to up-stage PAS.

At every general elections, the ruling coalition has made promises to new villagers. The forthcoming elections just happen to be nearly 30 years too late.

The significance of PAS' recent statement cannot be denied. At a stroke, PAS has undermined the communalist basis of the hitherto dominant ideology of our society.

Certainly, we are faced with the as yet unknown quantity of PAS' theocracy but at least they have (rightly) repudiated the fact that any policy for progress, development and national unity could be couched in communalist or racial terms. For this one simple yet fundamental fact, we should all be thankful.

It is ironical that something which the non-Malay communities have been maintaining for years but which apparently has not made any headway in the Malay community, has suddenly been taken up by PAS! The politics of our society is such that issues like these can better be aired if they arise from the Malay community itself.

To come back to the issues raised by PAS, it is

incomprehensible to say, as others have done, that the provisions in the Constitution cannot be altered and that it is seditious or even treasonable to raise these issues.

The Federal Constitution has been amended on numerous occasions, made possible by the ruling coalition's two-thirds majority in the legislature.

This is part of our Constitutional democratic system. How often have we heard our political leaders say that the laws and the Constitution must reflect the times and if need be, they can and should be amended.

The urgent task on our nation's agenda is national unity which can only be built on mutual respect and equality of all our communities and never from the point of view of one particular race.

Any special assistance to uplift the livelihood of the poor must therefore be based on specific sector needs and not on "race".

If more of the country's poor sectors are found in the Malay community, then indeed more of our country's resources should go toward alleviating their plight. But so should proportionate resources be channelled to the poor in all our other communities.

After all, who cannot see that such special aid based on particular needs is the proper basis for any restructuring and national unity?

This year's National Day theme being *Nasionalisme Teras Perpaduan* — which presumably includes all communities in Malaysia — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call to Umno members to 'defend their special rights by holding fast to the spirit of nationalism" ... leaves me more than a little puzzled.

[The Star, 10 October 1985]

182

The Need for Race Relations Legislation

At a time when the eradication of racial polarisation is widely acknowledged to be high on the national agenda, recent examples of racism and communalism committed by our foremost institutions must be exposed.

Frequent complaints by the public of excesses of government officials purportedly implementing the New Economic Policy further shows the urgent need for some form of race relations legislation.

In a recent edition of a major Malay-language newspaper, the writer of an article, *Benarkah Kaum Pendatang Lebih Maju?* Dr Ahmad Badri Mohamed was allowed to publish his specious "observations" of immigrants.

This hardly intellectual piece was laced with flagrant racism. These are a few examples:

Walau pun secara amnya kita bencikan kaum Yahudi, kita kagum dengan kedudukan mereka di negara-negara orang lain.

(Although generally speaking we hate the Jews, we are astonished at their position in other people's countries.)

On this point, Malaysians may recall the similar

183

dubious reasons that were given by the authorities for the cancellation of the New York Philharmonic's performances last August — Information Minister Datuk Rais Yatim had said that our government policy discourages "the screening, portrayal or musical presentation of works of Jewish origin."

This is therefore a point that not only Dr Ahmad Badri and the newspaper need to be set straight. The international community and all rational antiracist people are anti-Zionist but they certainly do not hate the Jews.

Those who hate the Jews as a people have more in common with the likes of Adolf Hitler than with the enlightened freedom-loving people of the world. There are in fact many Jews in the West who have been supporting the Palestinians' cause long before we ever did.

This is by no means a moot academic point. If we fail to make this distinction, I fear our understanding of nationalism and inter-ethnic harmony stands on very shaky grounds and we fail to identify the basis of national unity.

However, this was not the only offending item in the cited article. The writer also did not hold back his stereo-typing racism when he looked at Malaysian Chinese and overseas Chinese in general:

Orang Cina di Benua Cina masih ikhlas dan tidak pandai berbohong saperti tauke-tauke Cina di negara-negara Tenggara Asia. Hampir semua orang Cina dari Negeri China Kommunis yang pernah saya temui di luar negeri, seolah-olah terlalu "betul bendul," tidak saperti Cina-Cina dari Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapura atau Malaysia.

(The Chinese in mainland China are still honest and not so clever at deception like the Chinese

184

towkays in South-East Asian nations. Nearly all the Chinese from Communist China whom I have met overseas seem too "honest," unlike the Chinese from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia).

The spurious quality of such writings does not merit comment but this sort of racist generalisations is unbecoming of a main newspaper in the country to lend itself to propagating.

Racism is universally recognised as one of the lines where limits to the freedom of the Press must be drawn — racism and fascism do not have a place in the free and democratic world community. Did not our Prime Minister go to the Commonwealth conference to speak vehemently against it?

Regarding the reference to overseas Chinese, one scarcely need to point out that "dishonest" types can be found in every ethnic community whether white, black, yellow, brown or pink.

Do we not know of the culprits in the BMF scandal, Bank Rakyat scandal, corrupt officials in the government services?

Such racist stereo-typing is downright insulting and distasteful to all Malaysians of Chinese origin and it makes them wonder if there is sincerity or mere lip service paid to promote national unity and inter-ethnic harmony.

This is by no means the only occasion when a Malay-language newspaper has given vent to such unabashed communalism.

On Feb. 12, to cite another example, in a front-page report of the PAS symposium at the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, another newspaper described the place in its sub-headline thus:

Dewan ini biasanya digunakan untuk hidangan babi dan minuman keras.

185

(This Hall is normally used for consumption of pork and alcohol).

Such appallingly bad taste and insult to the Malaysian Chinese community is unlikely to contribute to good inter-ethnic relations and it is shocking to see that the culprit is a major newspaper which is capable of impressing upon the general public.

To set the record straight, the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall is frequently booked for use by Malaysians of all faiths and communities — Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Taoists and others. It has also been used before by Umno Youth.

All in all, these occurrences plus the many other complaints of discrimination in the spheres of employment, education, social services, media, culture, etc. point to the urgent need for some form of race relations legislation.

Such a law is necessary to prevent racial discrimination and the sort of racism in the public domain cited above.

This will serve not only to uphold the dignity and integrity of every ethnic community but also to promote equality of opportunity and harmonious relations between persons of different ethnic groups.

Too often have we heard the authorities explain away discrimination as the "excesses" of particular officials.

In such cases, a race relations court will be able to determine and define the legality or illegality of their actions. So too will public institutions like the media be held responsible for ever allowing racist views to be published or aired.

The British Race Relations Act, 1976 is a useful reference. It applies to different forms of racial discrimination and racism, in employment in the private and public sectors; in other fields like education; in the provision of goods, facilities, services; discriminatory practices, advertisements and others.

The sort of racism cited in the foregoing would then be covered under "Incitement to Racial Hatred" in the British Race Relations Act:

"A person commits an offence if —
● HE publishes or distributes written matter which is threatening, abusive or insulting; or
● HE uses in any public place or at any public meeting words which are threatening, abusive or insulting, in a case where, having regard to all the circumstances, hatred is likely to be stirred up against any racial group ..."

Its precise phraseology to suit the Malaysian situation can be left to the scribes but the object should be to deter all forms of racial discrimination, racism and other such outrage against the sensitivities of ethnic groups in our society.

A "Commission for Racial Equality" could then be formed to work towards elimination of racial discrimination; promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups; and keep under review the workings of this Act.

The commission may also issue codes of practice containing such practical guidance for achieving the objectives of the Act, and it should also be vested with powers to conduct formal investigations and to serve notices to furnish information or documents in order to enforce the law.

The effectiveness of such a race relations legislation will ultimately depend on the commission's enforcement "in the public interest" and how far it is prepared to redress any injury to victims of discrimination and racism.

In addition to the law, the other policies and attitudes of the central and local authorities would also be of critical importance.

Enforcement will further depend on the kind of resources at the disposal of such a commission.

While such a race relations law may not strike at the roots of racial polarisation, at least it should ensure that the limits of the implementation of government policies are scrupulously delineated, and just as importantly, the Malaysian public is not treated to racist and communalist garbage, which should be spurned with all the contempt it deserves.

[The Star, 28 October 1985]

Integrated Schools and National Unity

Now that the dust from yet another episode in our sorry history — the controversy over the integrated school system — has settled, let us see if the fundamental issues stand out any clearer.

As usual, the non-Chinese language media have not bothered to highlight why the Malaysian Chinese community opposed the previously touted "integrated schools system."

The editorial of one of our major newspapers is perhaps representative of this general attitude when it asked "why the seemingly innocent and laudable proposal to foster unity among school children was met with panic and fear."

The protests by the Chinese community were united and vehement, political parties and associations alike.

There was a lot of anger but there was no panic. From beyond the cultural curtain, the widespread protests were interpreted as "oversensitivity" and aspersions were cast on our efforts at national integration.

There was loathing at what the community saw

was yet another episode in a chronicle of "policy aberration."

Many of these were not reported in the non-Chinese language Press, so permit me to list several of them to let the public understand why the community is justifiably suspicious of each new policy or directive on the vernacular schools.

When the former Chinese secondary schools were converted to national-type in 1962 (those that did not become Chinese-medium "independent" schools), it was agreed that they would have a minimum of seven or eight periods for their mother-tongue instruction.

This promise has not been kept and today, the appalling state of the Pupils' Own Language (POL) classes are well-known — some are put on after school hours, in the weekends, and lame excuses are given for the delay.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Musa Hitam's well publicised statement last year about the trend of ethnic polarisation among our schoolchildren was a signal for a series of so-called "integrative" policy measures.

The academicians picked up the scent right away. The Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) had already made up its mind and research premises when it announced that it would embark on a study of race relations in the country by examining the effects of vernacular primary schools on national unity.

It was indeed a bad advertisement for the "value-free social science" lobby. From such a premise, the results of the proposed study by ISIS were a fore-gone conclusion.

Soon after, the Director-General of Education issued a circular to all headmasters that all school

cultural activities must reflect the principles stipulated by the National Culture Policy.

Schools would not be allowed to put up items which highlight "foreign" culture without any bearing on Malaysian culture.

Unfortunately all the cultural items listed as "Malaysian" were only Malay ones. Were we to assume then that the cultures of the Chinese, Indian, and other communities are considered "foreign" under the policy? Was there case for hysterical reaction?

The Fourth National Convention on Education last August was an occasion for academic legitimation of this diversionary basis for national unity.

The Director-General of Education said that curriculum and language alone were not sufficient to enhance unity.

Dr Ibrahim Saad spoke of the "unhealthy trend for national unity" of the development of the non-Malay vernacular schools while arguing for maintaining the grossly imbalanced quota in favour of Malay undergraduates in local universities.

Prof. Noramly Muslim at another seminar at UKM propounded that racial sentiments were derived at the primary school level and therefore, the Government should take the initiative to put together children of the various communities in a big school to increase contact and integration.

Prof. Amir Awang of USM also stressed that the existence of Malaysian citizens with different linguistic behaviour was a hindrance to national integration.

These were not mere abstractions or intentions. In a Malacca school, the Chinese language society there was not allowed to publish its magazine.

Then the "circulars" issue broke out when the

Deputy Director of the Federal Territory Education Department took it upon himself to issue a directive that only Bahasa could be used during school assemblies and other functions.

Even then, there was no panic or hysterical reaction. Mr Loot Ting Yee of the United Chinese School Teachers Association held a sit-in protest at the Education Ministry which drew support throughout the Chinese community. The circular was subsequently rendered ineffective.

The latest controversy over the "integrated school system" bore the same trademark.

There was no prior consultation with the administrators and representatives of the Chinese and Tamil schools. No details were given for the scheme although there were grounds for concern.

For example, a Deputy Minister had said that music would be included as one of the items in the integrated school system, reminiscent of the 3R controversy when materials in the non-Malay medium were left out as an "oversight."

But although no details were released, we did have a model at Teluk Sengat, Kota Tinggi, where three different medium schools shared the same compound.

It was touted as an "integrated school." Unfortunately, the school had only a Malay name; the school library had only Malay books; its canteen could not sell non-halal food; its caterers had to be Muslim, etc. After some protest, some of these features were withdrawn.

Consequently, what did the Chinese and Tamil schools have to go by when the Minister announced the integrated school scheme except this chronicle of assimilationist tendencies?

The widespread protests did produce the desired results. Contrary to the impression put forward by the media, it was not merely the name of the scheme which was changed, making it look as if the Chinese community was behaving so childishly.

One day before the dialogue with the Minister, the new draft, *Buku Panduan Rancangan Integrasi Murid-murid*, revealed that the demands and proposals of the Chinese education lobby had been incorporated.

Besides the name change, the demands relating to committee representation, sovereignty of each school, type of extra-curricular activities, free use of the respective media of instruction, consultation and voluntary participation, administrative autonomy of each school, etc. were all met.

Throughout this controversy and others, the Government continually said that there was no attempt to change the character of the vernacular primary schools.

If it is totally sincere, it should explain to the public why there still exists a need for Section 21/2 of the Education Act which stipulates that the vernacular primary schools can be converted to national schools at a stroke of the Minister's pen.

It is small comfort to be told by the hangman that his noose around your neck should not be a cause for concern since it has never been used before. Up until now, no satisfactory explanation has been given by the Government for why there is a need for this Section 21/2 clause.

The seemingly commonsensical "contact thesis" for promoting national integration has led one of our major newspapers to ask after this latest

affair: "Do the major ethnic groups in this country truly believe in national unity or are they merely giving it lip-service?"

First of all, how can the Government solve the problem of national integration when it has not identified the main cause for racial polarisation?

On this fundamental question, the ordinary person in the street can probably give a more truthful analysis than the academicians who continue to peddle the theory that vernacular schools are an obstacle to national unity.

The honest and truly concerned Malaysians will tell you that it is discrimination based on ethnicity that is at the core of the problem — the policies and the whole gamut of social institutions where, for dubious reasons, it is necessary for Malaysians to state their "racial origins."

The Government and the "contact theorists" are, however, not consistent when they have not in the same breath explained why they can justify institutions like residential schools and Mara Institute of Technology which are predominantly "mono-ethnic."

It is also hypocritical to accept communally-defined political parties while decrying legitimate social institutions which cater to the basic human right to cultural needs of an ethnic community.

Have our democratic souls ever wondered why the right to mother tongue education and cultural identity is safeguarded in international conventions and not condemned as "segregationist?"

The hypocrisy of the call to promote national integration can also be seen in the fact that in the predominantly 'bumiputra' institutions, the "third language" is either Arabic, Japanese or some other foreign language.

If Malaysians are sincerely interested in understanding their brothers and sisters in the other communities, shouldn't their third language (if not second) be either Chinese or Tamil?

The frequent rumpus over education and culture and the attitude of the mass media have amply shown how much ignorance there is of Malaysian cultures.

We may soon be in a situation where we know more about the Arabs, Japanese and even the penguins of Antarctica than we do about our Malaysian people.

To suggest that the right to mother tongue education threatens national unity is, to say the least, a mystification.

Aside from this fundamental question of rights, the fallacy of the "contact thesis" has been shown in many studies conducted here as well as elsewhere.

The explosive situation over the "bussing" of blacks and whites in the United States also shows that when the fundamental cause of racial inequality has not been solved, the "contact thesis" can exacerbate rather than solve the problem.

The fact that racial polarisation is a serious problem not only in our national schools but also in the universities and civil service proves that the roots of polarisation do not lie in the existence of our vernacular schools.

Racial polarisation cannot be laid at the door of the school — the school institution merely reflects the ethos and norms of the various communities, which in turn are determined in the broader economic, political and social arena.

The road to national unity is eminently clear. It can only be based on civil and political equality

f all our communities; a consistent commitment
o freedom, democracy and the improvement in
he living standard of all Malaysian masses.

There are in fact ample opportunities for
contact between our various people if there are no
obstacles to free association and organisation in the
political, economic, social and cultural institutions.

It is surely the tragedy of our times that such a
clear solution to our nation's biggest problem
should be turned instead into a chimera.

[The Star, 20 November 1985;
Nanyang Siang Pau, 2 November 1985]

What it Means to Support the Joint Declaration

Since the release of the 'Joint Declaration' by the Chinese Guilds and Associations, the too ready show of support by all the Chinese-based political parties makes it look as if this is merely a "communal" document.

Certainly we should welcome their support for this "manifesto" is in fact a recipe for national unity.

But we don't need a genius to see that the political divisions in the Chinese community are basically unchanged and that we do not as yet have that elusive unity.

That being the case, it is worth the while of all our political parties to take a closer look at this document in an effort to make fundamental changes to their own thinking and party positions.'

What, then, is entailed in declaring support for the 'Joint Declaration'? Or, what is the significance of this document?

A CONSISTENT COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY: This 'Joint Declaration' is not a document written only from the point of view of the Malaysian Chinese community.

Its stand is strictly consistent with the universal standards of democracy.

Its demands for civil and political equality are therefore part and parcel of the general demand for democracy by all the Malaysian masses — Malay, Chinese, Indian, and other ethnic groups.

Any moral, just and honest person cannot harbour double standards when it comes to demanding democratic rights — our parties should take note.

We cannot invoke human rights and democratic rights when it concerns our civil rights to equality but pretend not to notice when the masses also demand democratic human rights in the political, economic, social, cultural and other spheres.

That is one of the main reasons why this 'Joint Declaration' is also a basis for national unity.

The declaration has raised many issues involving the erosion of democracy in our country.

Therefore, for all our Chinese-based political parties which have leapt so quickly to support it, let us pose these questions to them and see how well they score:

● HAVE they consistently championed the cause of the poor and downtrodden in all communities — not only Chinese squatters, retrenched workers, smallholders, but also Malay farmers and fishermen; Indian estate workers and the like?

● HAVE they consistently voted in Parliament against every legislation that has eroded our democratic rights and freedom — the Internal Security Act, Printing Presses and Publications Act, Universities and University Colleges Act, to name but a few?

● HAVE they consistently spoken out against foreign countries which violate basic human rights

198

conventions and which violate the political and economic sovereignty of other nations?

If our political parties have had a poor record on all these issues in the past, how can they be so quick to support the declaration without so much as a recant of past mistakes?

What evidence is there to show that from now on, they will change for the good and progressive?

What we do see of our Chinese-based political parties is that those in the Opposition emphasise the aggrieved in the Chinese sector while those in the Government often do not even champion the causes of the Chinese masses.

Here we are not talking about paying lip service to "poverty" in the abstract, granted many of our political parties now have to include this is their statements and manifestos if only because it is one of prongs of the New Economic Policy.

More than material assistance, the poor and working masses — squatters, workers, farmers, fishermen — need support in their demand for their just and democratic rights.

The latter is more fundamental and substantial than either donations, sympathy or crocodile tears.

On the second point, it is time our Chinese-based parties in the Government give up the charade that we have witnessed these twenty-odd years.

It is a useless token to speak against a piece of legislation but to vote for it or even to abstain.

This is politics of the absurd, for ultimately what the people suffer is the effects of the legislation and not the mental confusion of our supposed "representatives."

More often than not, our "representatives" do

not attempt to speak out against such unjust legislation.

How then can we count on them to initiate moves to abrogate undemocratic laws?

For those who pretend not to face the reality, all the undemocratic laws that we have to bear today only exist through the majority the ruling coalition has enjoyed since Independence.

On the third point, political parties that have failed to take a consistent stand to condemn any acts of aggression by any foreign power or any foreign country that violates basic human rights of their people fail to appreciate the essential links between foreign policy and commitment to democracy in general.

Those who practise double standards in condemning some but not others can only have dubious motives.

A COMMITMENT BEFORE THE ELECTIONS: The Chinese community demands a tangible show of commitment on all these fronts BEFORE the coming general elections.

The electorate will not accept being given empty promises yet again.

Therefore, merely paying lip service in supporting the 'Joint Declaration' is not enough.

As far as parties in the Barisan Nasional are concerned, they must have some results to show the Chinese community well before the next general elections.

The Malaysian Chinese community has presented some specific grievances which must be solved once and for all.

The concrete demands include the repeal of Section 21/2 of the Education Act and the abolition of the various laws, policies and practices that

ostensibly will make for a better society, but which in reality only serve to further divide it.

These are merely the minimum demands which must be satisfied before the elections for they are the fundamental issues which seriously affect the community and the nation.

As for the other requirements demanded in the "Joint Declaration," our political parties still have much to live up to before they endorse it.

[The Star, 4 December 1985;
Nanyang Siang Pau, 20 November 1985]

Nationalism & Multiculturalism

The constant plea for National Unity by concerned Malaysians and the widespread recognition of widening communal polarization in Malaysian society are evidence that the nationalistic spirit of our people has yet to be fully galvanized. The negative effect this has on the all-round development of our country and its people extends beyond economic concerns. The notion of cultural identity is central to the whole question of development.

Among the meanings of nationalism lies the idea or aspiration of an integral, endogenous development of the nation based on the cultures of its people. The overarching aim to forge a self-reliant, self-sustaining and harmonious society cannot be accomplished solely by enriching national values but must draw on what is best in the cultures of our peoples and well as those of other cultures. Culture is therefore, an integral part of the overall transformation of society — it provides the function of imparting impetus and deciding the particular path of development.

This paper addresses itself to the question of

Malaysian nationalism and the imperative of a cultural policy based on multiculturalism, i.e. cultural democracy. It is a response to the official view of nationalism that is reflected in the 'National Cultural Policy', based on Malay-centrism. In fact one still hears reference in official circles to "Malay Nationalism"[1] — surely a contradiction in terms. At the same time, this paper takes up the point made by some of our intellectuals that such a policy based on multiculturalism and cultural identity would lead to the probable demise of Malaysian Nationhood.

The advent of nationalism as a driving force in the birth of nations was accompanied by a cultural self-awareness which in turn led to the blossoming of vernacular cultures. In many new nations that had emerged from the throes of colonialism, the principle of cultural equality in many nations toward their various ethnic communities provided the unity, the mutual trust and respect and the common bond for the nationalistic spirit.

Three Epochs of Nationalism

Nationalism has been defined as: "a state of mind in which the individual feels that everyone owes his supreme secular loyalty to the nation-state."[2]

Behind the concept lies not only a whole complex interplay of human factors, sentiments and emotions but a history encompassing progressive forces as well as those that unleashed genocidal madness. Three distinct epochs of nationalism can be delineated:

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1. For example, speeches at the recent UMNO General Assembly, NST, 28-9-85.
2. Encyclopaedia Brittanica, 1984, Vol. 12: 851.

Nationalism first arose as a revolt against the medieval idea of a universal State whose frontiers stretched as far as Christendom commanded. The concepts of 'nation-state' and sovereignty emerged out of mid-17th century England where linguistic, political, economic and religious factors merged to unite the people.

The next great landmarks were the American and French Revolutions, when a self-conscious nationalism emerged as a potent force in the world. Feudal obstacles to national unification collapsed as nationalism swept through Western Europe and also Japan. With the new aspirations toward nationhood and common sovereignty was borne a new liberty and dignity to all peoples. The French Revolution, for example, marked a triumphant expression of common humanity, democracy and equality.

The next epoch of nationalism saw the demand for the right of self-determination by the peoples conjoined in the multi-national states of Eastern Europe where one oppressor nation exercised hegemony over other nations. The different nationalities' aspirations and wishes were being suppressed by the dominant nationality in control of the State. This "Great Power Chauvinism" was seen in the case of the Germans in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Great Russians in Russia.

But the liberal tradition that swept through 19th century Europe with the emergence of the new middle and working classes and the revolutionary wave of 1848 was reversed by Bismarck.

This epoch was brought to a close with the end of the First World War which saw the question of the protection of the rights of minorities and

nationalities top the agenda of the world community. Consequently, the Peace Treaties of 1919-20 specifically imposed upon States certain obligations designed to protect minorities against denationalization. Furthermore, some agreements were concluded between different states with the object of safeguarding the position of certain minorities:

"The League of Nations shall require all new states to bind themselves, as a condition precedent to their recognition as independent or autonomous states, to accord to all racial or national minorities within their several jurisdiction exactly the same treatment and security, both in law and in fact, that is accorded the racial or national minority of their people."[3]

The Treaties promised equal civil rights, facilities for the free use of minorities' languages in the official arena as well as in schools.[4]

The present epoch of nationalism still belongs to that which led to the emancipation of the former colonized nations from their colonial masters after the Second World War. This has vindicated the democratic ideal committed to national liberation and independence.

In newly Independent countries like ours, nationalism is not only the most potent vehicle for lifting the masses from misery and degradation to new human dignity and equality, but it also provides the common idiom to rally the people of diverse cultures within the Nation. It is in this

3. 'Study on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religions and Linguistic Minorities' by Francesco Capotorti, UN 1979: 16.

4. *Ibid*, p. 18.

ortant aspect that the Right of Nations to Self-
ermination broadens the political democratic
ts of people for it implies the full political
ality of nations.

In this epoch, nationalism has served as a
itically positive force, as the ideology of the
wly Independent states struggling to free them-
ves from Metropolitan control by the developed
untries. The struggles for national liberation in
ia, Africa, Latin America after the Second World
ar were all part of this historical process.

Far from being outmoded, nationalism is still
levant today as the ideology in many Third
orld countries because their sovereignty con-
nues to be undermined by the Big Powers or
eir surrogates. This is not only confined to the
olitical but to the economic sphere as well.

Neo-colonialism has been highlighted ever
ince the sixties by Third World leaders like
Nkhrumah, Nasser and Sukarno. It was neatly
summed up by President Nyerere of Tanzania:[5]

"The reality of neocolonialism quickly
becomes obvious to a new African government
which tries to act on economic matters in the
interests of national development, and for the
betterment of its own masses. For such a govern-
ment immediately discovers that it inherited the
power to make laws, to treat with foreign govern-
ments, and so on, but that it did not inherit
effective power over economic developments in its
own country. Instead, there exist in its land various
economic activities which are owned by people
outside its jurisdiction, which are directed at
external needs, and which are run in the interests

5. Nabudere W. 'Essays on the Theory of Imperialism', 1979: 90.

206

of external economic powers ... Neocolonialism is a very real, and very severe limitation on national sovereignty".

Only last year, the spectre of neo-colonialism was raised by our own Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir when he hit out at the developed countries during the 25th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting at the Nassau. Neo-colonialism is therefore a pointer to the erosion of political sovereignty of the nation-state through the activities of multinational companies and their backing by the developed countries.

Nationalism — Chauvinistic or Democratic?

The reality of neo-colonialism does not mean, however, that the political demands for democracy must be suspended as it tends to be put in many Third World States. For nationalism to be effective and the nationalist spirit of all the people to be harnessed, full political, civil and cultural equality of all the nationalities within the States must be recognised and guaranteed in order to forge real National Unity.

It would be futile to pretend that nationalism has always played this progressive, rational role. As it swept through the world, in time it began to lose its early liberalism and humanitarianism as it was also usurped by those with a distorted view of nationality based on narrow-minded communal, class and racist interests. Notions of dominance and exclusiveness crept it. The glorification of "The Nation" and "The State" led to the overriding of the dignity and rights of minorities as the symbol of the Nation-State assumed metaphysical proportions to subsume political rights and liberties. Thus nationalism applies no less to the

history of German, Italian and Japanese fascism as it does to the careers and personalities of Amin of Uganda, the Shah of Iran.

This chauvinistic nationalism is clearly of the pathological and reactionary kind, involving the exploitation of senseless fears and prejudices and often violence and genocide. Its particular character in any country corresponds to the ideology of its elites who have to resort to populism, chauvinism and even racism.

These brands of nationalism are universally recognised as reprehensible. For this reason, the international community's concern for human rights has the role of a universal answer to the many transgressions of human rights throughout the world. It is therefore recognised that the nation-state is no longer the ultimate sanctuary for the citizen. Human rights are now established as obligatory upon every member of the world community of nations and serve as a criterion for policies and actions of governments.

For our purpose, the fundamental component of the nationalistic spirit is the possession of a national consciousness embodying a conception of nationhood as the status of a free, independent sovereign people striving for political liberty.

This spirit of nationalism has therefore a dual character — a positive and progressive aspect in the striving for national solidarity, freedom and democracy; a negative and reactionary side which imposes standards of domination and subordination in its policies toward its peoples.

In pluri-ethnic societies where the State is to some extent identified with a dominant community, the result is disastrous to the whole nation. The minority groups are not the only losers

for in the long run, internal unity is affected and energy dissipated in unproductive controversies.

It is therefore essential that the nation be perceived by all cultural groups as their common property and concern. In this respect, the 'bumiputra/non-bumiputra' dichotomy and all policies flowing from it must be one of the biggest obstacles in the way of national integration.

Malaysian Nationalism — The Colonial Legacy

There is no doubt that the present state of Malaysian society has its roots in the colonial legacy. It is not the intention in this paper to delve into the historical details of the Malayan nationalist movement. For our purposes, it is important merely to observe the manner in which the colonial power denied the Malayan people the right to cultural democracy. This has had consequences right up to the present day.

It is a well-known fact that, in contrast to many other former colonized countries, Malayan Independence was not won through a truly broad-based nationalist movement in direct confrontation against the colonial power. Instead, at Independence, political power was passed on relatively amicably to the Alliance, a coalition led by the English-educated elite of the three main ethnic groups in the country. The newly Independent Malaya did not radically depart from the cultural-linguistic policies that had been forged by the colonial authorities.

To consider this question in its proper context, we need to look at the broader nationalist movement that had begun to take shape in the early post-war years.

209

Just after the Second World War, the clamour for self-government was heard throughout the colonized world. In 1946, the British colonial authorities proposed the Malayan Union with its minimal conditions of civil equality, including citizenship rights for the non-Malays. Besides the prevailing political climate of the time, the patriotism of the non-Malays had been demonstrated in their defence of the country during the anti-Japanese resistance. However, the Malayan Union was by no means a serious preparation for self-rule.

As things turned out, the ferocity of the opposition to the Malayan Union by the Malay rulers and UMNO led the colonial power to change its plans and the British began to negotiate only with this Malay elite to the exclusion of all other groups and communities.

The secret negotiations with the Malay elite were intended to isolate the more broad-based nationalist forces of the three major ethnic groups which had united in the Pan Malayan Council of Joint Action-Pusat Tenaga Rakyat coalition. This coalition included the Malay Nationalist Party, Malayan Democratic Union, trades unions, Malayan Indian Congress, Ceylon Tamil Association, Straits Chinese British Association.

The subsequent Federation of Malaya proposals in 1948 tightened up the citizenship provisions for non-Malays: instead of the 5-year residential requirement under the Malayan Union, the new proposals required 15 years of residence before conferment of citizenship; furthermore, applicants were required to have an adequate knowledge of either the Malay or English language.

It was therefore in the light of the colonial power's post-Malayan Union strategy that the

Barnes' Report was released in 1951 which put paid to any possibility of cultural democracy in the linguistic-educational sphere. It proposed the abolition of vernacular schools and their replacement with a single National Education System using English and Malay as the only media of instruction.

Thereafter, the demand for the inclusion of the Chinese and Indian vernacular schools in the National Education system was denied by the Colonial authorities on the grounds that Chinese and Tamil were not official languages of the country as stipulated by the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement.

This denial of multiculturalism by the colonial power also served to divide the Malayan nationalist movement for it deflected the demands for self-government by putting the non-Malay nationalist on the defensive with regard to the citizenship and language issues while playing on "bumiputraism".

The Multicultural Perspective

After the long years under colonial subjection and its imposition of Metropolitan culture, the demands for cultural pluralism and cultural democracy must be seen as part and parcel of this trend throughout the colonized world.

In the last analysis, culture is inseparable from freedom — the exercise of creative cultural activity demands freedom of expression: "Culture liberates, but it also requires freedom if it is to flourish. It is not legitimate to subject that which the community creates to dogmatic rules, political guidelines or ideological censure. Neither should market criteria be imposed on it".[6]

6   World Conference on Cultural Policies, Final Report, Unesco, 1982: 180.

211

In many new nations that had emerged from the throes of colonialism, the principle of cultural equality and democracy among the various ethnic communities provided the unity and bond for the nationalistic spirit toward reconstruction.

An ethnic culture — whether Malay, Chinese, Indian, Kadazan, Iban or whatever — depends on its language, schools and other cultural institutions for its sustenance and survival. The right and opportunity to promote, preserve and enjoy one's ethnic traditions and cultural is a basic human right and fundamental freedom recognised in the international community as well as in our nation's Constitution. This is regardless of the rights and freedoms one may already enjoy in all other aspects.

In the attempt to develop national integration, what is good in the cultures and traditions of our diverse ethnic communities must not be lost. This involves a conscious effort on the part of the authorities at cultural development of all our ethnic forms of music, folk arts, and other cultural media.

Another important point in this question that must be stressed is that cultural autonomy is a concrete question and not merely an idea — there is no such thing as a "cultural idea", such as "National Culture", but real cultures of real peoples and classes. Consequently, cultural identity — that of individuals, groups, communities and classes is multi-dimensional in nature, existing at many different levels.

The cultural policies of states based on democratic and progressive principles were laid down, for instance, at the World Conference on Cultural Policies organised by UNESCO at Mexico City in

1982. The Conference's unmistakable stand on multiculturalism can be seen in its affirmation of: "... cultural diversity — a corollary and affirmation of cultural identity — far from being a divisive factor, could contribute to enrichment and balance, as exemplified by many pluri-ethnic countries in the North and South and by young Third World States that had emerged victorious from their struggles for national liberation and had reduced and transcended the ethnic or regional differences that formerly divided them. ... the active participation of the various communities in the cultural life of the nation favoured national integration and unity".[7]

The World Conference declared that the following principles should govern cultural policies:[8]

"The universal cannot be postulated in the abstract by any single culture: it emerges from the experience of all the world's peoples as each affirms its own identity. Cultural identity and cultural diversity are inseparable ..."

Special characteristics do not hinder, but rather enrich the communion of the universal values that unite people. Hence, recognition of the presence of a variety of cultural identities whenever various traditions exist side by side constitutes the very essence of cultural pluralism.

All this points to the need for cultural policies that will protect, stimulate and enrich each people's identity and cultural heritage, and establish absolute respect for and appreciation of cultural minorities and the other cultures of the

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7   ibid, p. 9

8. ibid, p. 42.

...orld. The neglect or destruction of the culture of ny group is a loss to mankind as a whole.

Among the recommendations by the ʼ⸱⸱⸱ʼ onference on Cultural Policies were:[9]

"... ensure that the state and the members of he national community recognize the cultural alues of each group and the fact that belonging to ne's own cultural group is an inherent part of ach individual's dignity, and further ensure that he members of cultural groups are not deprived of he free enjoyment of their culture or of the pportunity to develop it within the state either ndividually or in co-operation with the other members of their group ..."

To conclude, once we accept the multi-cultural perspective in the promotion of Malaysian nationalism, we must spare no effort to root out, wherever it may appear, any manifestation of intolerance — from overt racism and ethnocentrism right through to the subtler forms of cultural discrimination.

National integration will doubtless crystallize when Malaysians of all our ethnic communities join in the never-ending search for points of convergence among our various cultures. Ultimately, these shared values intrinsic to every culture in this earth of ours are universal and not strictly national — they are the values that enable all peoples of the world to express their unity through their very diversity. Among these shared values, democracy surely stands as the most important common principle in every community throughout the world.

9. *ibid*, pp. 69, 184.

214

he people when these are of no risk to national security. The editors' acquiescent attitude to the government was witnessed, for example, during recent Constitutional crisis and in the initial stages of the BMF scandal.

It has been said that "information is the currency of democracy". A democracy like ours, by its very nature, trusts its citizens to make intelligent choices but how can they make intelligent choices if they do not have access to the knowledge and information? Clearly, information and knowledge helps the citizens while secrecy helps the vested interests. The "right to know" is, in the last analysis, a principle about whether real power in a democratic society ought to lie with the top echelon in the Cabinet or diffused more widely in society. The lack of information regarding the operations of off-budget agencies and other government departments clearly shows how the interests of the Nation are being eroded by non-accountability of government officials for inefficiency, waste and corruption. In the light of the situation, would it be inappropriate to expect an ethical press to be at the crusading front in the campaign for Freedom of Information?

The press has certainly not been fair to the Opposition especially in the run-up to the general elections. A good indicator of the Barisan-bias is in the number of articles, column inches, space and frequency allotted to the Barisan and the Opposition respectively. One would also need to dissect the media portrayal of the political parties. For example, an English-language daily had this headline recently, 'Lim Kit Siang's Autocratic Hold Over the DAP'. It would be hard to envisage the same newspaper with the headline, 'Mahathir's

218

Autocratic Hold Over UMNO'. While Kassim Ahmad's and Syed Hussein Alatas are given front-treatment for why they are joining UMNO, one does not see the same for a new member of any of the Opposition parties. The "propaganda effect" of such commissions therefore smudges across the simplistic question of whether the press is ethical or not.

The press has — in its failure to delineate the interests of the Nation from that of the government's — also stayed within the terms of the latter, which tends to pose the Barisan as the only hope for the country even though it is widely recognised that communal polarization is worsening under the Barisan. Alternative views and political forces based on non-ethnic lines are not accorded serious or adequate attention even though such trends are quite evident in Malaysian politics today and they are rational answers to our nation's problems.

Aside from the more overtly political aspect, the English and the Malay-language press can hardly admit to being serious about trying to promote inter-communal understanding when they have not made enough attempts to understand the other ethnic communities. For example, the number of reporters versed in Chinese sent to cover functions and events in the Chinese community are visible by their absence. This is amusing if not shocking when we hear Malaysians adding their stoic voice for a 'New International Order' to give stronger weight-age to the cultural values of the Third World. The sad truth we haven't even remotely established our own National Communications Order to realise in-depth understanding of our various ethnic communities not only in West Malaysia but also in Sabah and Sarawak.

For the press to play its part in intercommunal understanding, they need journalists for each of the ethnic communities versed in each of Chinese, Tamil, Kadazan, Iban, etc. It is a simple principle of participant (not necessarily partisan) journalism which draws the same wisdom from linguistic-philosophers' emphasis on 'verstehen' (understanding) in order to know a culture. The consequences for failing to do so were obvious in the misinterpretation of issues like Bukit China, integrated schools, and the like which are invariably interpreted as manifestations of "Chinese chauvinism" or else opportunist machinations by the DAP. By any standards, they were examples of poor journalism aside from the question of ethics.

But can we put it all down to simple ignorance? To take but one example, when the Chinese guilds and associations recently issued their 'Joint Declaration', none of the English and Malay press bothered to publicise it despite the fact that it originated from the broad sections of the Chinese community throughout the country. It only began to appear in the non-Chinese press when a disaffected politician decided to take it up as his political *piece de resistance*. In terms of providing the hearty "flow of information" to the people, this must have only baffled the non-Chinese educated public since no background information had been provided about how the Joint Declaration originated. Similarly, no newspaper editorial saw fit to comment on the Joint Declaration.

Certain sections of the press are not innocent of exacerbating communalism either by providing the platform for politicians who breast-beat about the threats to their "race" or else providing their own communalist slant on events. The latter was

220

seen for example when PAS held its forum with the Chinese community at the Chinese Assembly Hall and one of our newspapers chose to remind its readers in a sub-headline that: "This (Chinese Assembly) Hall is ordinarily used for the consumption of pork and alcohol". This was not only communalist, it was an affront to the Chinese Assembly Hall and to the simplest standards of good taste. The limits of the press should rightly be drawn at such clear offences to the standards and values of the anti-racist community. But even then, these limits must be regulated not by the government-of-the-day but by a Race Relations Tribunal or a Press Council.

Has the press been true to its function of being a faithful watchdog for the people? From the point of view of the profession itself, one can hardly recall any case of excellent investigative journalism through which a breach of public trust was uncovered. I may be wrong. Recent horrendous scandals like BMF should have produced some leads through investigative journalists but we were disappointed. I dare say that there is probably a whole mountain of unaccounted truths from as far back as 1970 waiting to be uncovered by investigative journalists. They could start by trying to account for every sen of oil money that flowed through the 1970s and see if it was all productively invested.

It is understandable if a Malaysian paper cannot afford to send a correspondent to cover a story in a foreign country but it is disappointing that the press was not at Memali in force to provide a full account of the tragedy. The consequences of this failure are quite clear to Malaysians who only have the "official" version to go by.

he dearth of information merely provides grist for he rumour mill and speculation. Apart from the are facts of the Memali incident, some competent ccounts based on participant journalism could ave provided better insight into its causes and onditions there. The Memali incident shows that he press needs to cross the great cultural divide not only beyond the ethnic but also class barrier.

The press can therefore play a positive role in educating the public about the life confronting workers, farmers, fisherfolk, squatters, hawkers, various minorities, women, poverty groups. The government leaders can afford to do with just a little less coverage for a change.

We could also do without Western trivia. The press creates a spurious community of interest between themselves and the readers when they proffer trivia about elite circles and their carryings-on. All this can surely be dispensed with in favour of expanding the horizons of press coverage and contributing to national political, economic, social and cultural development.

The press has a social responsibility, for instance, toward educating the public about women's position in society. Instead of illuminating the fact that women's grievances are rooted in society's general attitude towards women, the press actually perpetuates sexual stereotypes when it uses sexist language like 'Superbitch' as if they were unchallenged vocabulary, when it patronises the beauty pageant culture, all in the name of "giving what the public wants". The press could actually play a positive role in not only monitoring cases of assaults on women but also providing a contact point for women and others in need.

Ultimately, to ensure a more ethical press,

steps must be taken to diversify ownership of the press to prevent control of large capital blocks by any person or group. But such efforts require government intervention, which has led some to compare it to "setting the cat to watch the milk"

[Paper presented at a Seminar on 'Press Freedom and the Law' organised by the National Union of Journalists in March 1986. It was published in the Nanyang Siang Pau on 29 March 1986 but did not appear in 'The Star'.]

Debunking Official Secrecy

The deferment of the Bill to amend the Official Secrets Act (OSA) 1972 is certainly welcome but there is no cause for euphoria unless the Act itself is replaced by another which:
(i) stringently restricts the use of criminal law to protect the nation's secrets; and
(ii) at the same time provides adequate legal avenues for the right to know. The government has merely said it will review the amendments.

As we know, our OSA is modelled after the Westminster Official Secrets Act. When we trace the history of the British OSA, we shall find similar reasons given at the appropriate stage of its evolution by the government-of-the-day, which gives cause for vigilance.

The first such Act became law in Britain in 1889, which set the framework for all subsequent legislation. Section 1 dealt with spying; Section 2 dealt with the wider protection of official information. This established the principle that the communication of official information by a person in a position of public trust was subject to criminal sanction. But it is important to note that it

provided for the limitation of criminal law to those cases which could be shown to the against *public interest.*

Thereafter, the Government attempted at various intervals to introduce amending Bills to shift the burden of proof from the prosecution to the defence in certain circumstances and other proposals to tighten up the law. These failed after protest and opposition especially from the press. In March 1908, for example, the Liberal Government introduced an amending Bill in the House of Lords to ban publication of certain official information. The press reacted strongly and the Bill was withdrawn.

Instead of abandoning its proposals, the Government merely waited for a more propitious occasion to re-introduce them so that they could claim an urgent necessity based on national security and secure their aims with as little debate as possible.

The opportunity cause in 1911 over an international crisis. The new Official Secrets Bill was introduced in the House of Lords. It repealed the 1889 Act and introduced a more draconian Section 1 (in which the burden of proof was on the defendant) and a "catch-all" Section 2 covering both the receipt and communication of official information. In the debate, espionage was emphasised but Section 2 was not once mentioned during the parliamentary debates.

In hindsight, the key change in the law was far from "slight" but the government tried its best to play down the significance of the proposals at the time. It is now appreciated that Section 2 had monumental consequences for the right to know and the freedom of information.

From this brief excursion into the history of the British OSA, we find two striking similarities with our current controversy over the new Bill. Firstly, the arguments used by the Government to justify the Bill are familiar. The British government through its various amendments to their own OSA had used the same arguments. Secondly, at each of these junctures to tighten up the OSA, there has been protest from those concerned for justice and freedom of information, especially the press.

Therefore we should be satisfied not when the government decides to review the current Bill but only when it decides to review the Act itself to the satisfaction of the people.

One of the main obfuscations in Malaysia society is the confusion of the "interests of the government-of-the-day" with the "public interest". Nobody would disagree with the need for criminal sanctions against those who deliberately betray the nation's secrets to a foreign power but in none of the convictions under the OSA to date has national security been at risk. Therefore the use of criminal law should be restricted to the protection of national secrets pertaining to security. Any law must allow for the *defence of public interest*. Furthermore, the law must be framed so that there are no grounds for ambiguity which could give rise to differing judicial rulings.

We know that under section 15 of the OSA 1972, no prosecution can be instituted without the consent of the Public Prosecutor. Thus he is entrusted with the decision of what constitutes the "public interest". Furthermore, his power of discretion cannot be challenged.

The all-important question is: what happens to "public interest" if a possible offence has damaged

the political interests of the government-of-the-day or exposed some malpractice or misdemeanor?

On this point, the Franks Committee of 1971-2 set up to review Section 2 of the 1911 act argued that:

"A number of witnesses pointed out that Section 2 could be used to serve the political interests of a Government, or to save Ministers or officials from embarrassment. No witness suggested that this was a proper use of the criminal law. We reject entirely the use of criminal sanctions for such purposes."

One witness, Mr. Justice Caulfield, who had been the judge in an OSA trial of Jonathan Aitken, a journalist charged over his report about the Nigerian civil war, told the Franks Committee:

"I could add many other worries I have about this section but perhaps it is sufficient to say that I think the Section in its present form could be viciously or capriciously used by an embarrassed executive."

The recent Ponting trial in Britain over the secrets of the Belgrano Affair showed that the only matter at risk was the political reputation of certain government Ministers. The government had admitted that national security was not involved. Why then was the OSA invoked? Why did Parliament not have the right to know this information?

The burden of accountability should lie with the government, not the people. This issue has also served to remind us of the role and duties of civil servants, who owe a higher loyalty to Parliament and the public interest than to Ministers.

The scandals in the public services of recent years should alert us to the urgent need for freer flow of information and greater accountability by

vernment agencies. If this happened, politicians ould come under greater scrutiny by the people nd we would have a better idea of how govern- ent policies are arrived at.

The experience of the past twenty years in britain has shown that reform is not easy but has be, as it has been, blocked by the vested interests every inch of the way. Information can be used for political purposes so those with political power have no incentive to permit reform to have free- dom of information. Politicians prefer to feed journalists with selective "background briefings" (or 'leaks') as part of their public relations exercise. This is itself evidence of the double standards of official secrecy when a clerk can be prosecuted for revealing relatively minuscule bits of information while a government minister can unload much more confidential information to his lobby journa- lists.

To conclude, it is ironic that the current attempt to make the OSA even more draconian has unwittingly served to put the questions of the level of secrecy and Freedom of Information on the political agenda. Let us hope there are enough concerned Malaysians as well as Members of Parlia- ment to carry through the task.

[Paper presented at a forum on 'Amendments to the OSA' organised by the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall on 10 April 1986. It appeared in The Star on 12 April 1986 and Nanyang Siang Pau on 11 April 1986.]

Strange Bedfellows, Familiar Politics

At a time when the Barisan is trying its best to tell the electorate that UMNO is "the better choice", UMNO Youth Leader YB Anwar Ibrahim has not been a good advertisement for UMNO. His reference on April 14 to Chinese-based organisations which have dialogues with PAS as "extremists' and the jibe at "strange bedfellows" is unfortunate. A week later on April 20, he followed with another indiscretion, warning that UMNO Youth would raise the question of citizenship if youth leaders of the other communities, particularly the Chinese, continued to question what he called "national policies". According to him, these include issues on language, Islam, Malay privileges and the position of the Rulers. He added that this revealed their ignorance of the history of the country and jeopardised understanding among the various communities.

It is irrefutable that various Chinese-based organisations have had dialogues with PAS and many PAS-convened ceramahs throughout the country have been well-attended by Chinese Malaysians.

(b) nothing in this Clause shall 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 in the Federation".

No section of the Chinese community has ever questioned the status of Malay as the national language. However, vast sections of the Chinese community have questioned policies such as the National Culture Policy, which has contravened the letter and spirit of the Constitution regarding this issue.

On religion, no section of the Chinese community has disputed that Islam is the religion of the Federation as stated in Article 3(1) of the Constitution. On the other hand, they do question the legitimacy of the governments 'Islamisation Policy', which is likewise contrary to the spirit of the Constitution.

The community does not question the special position of the Malays' as stipulated in Article 153 of the Constitution. However, the experience in recent years of worsening communal polarisation has shown that Article 153 cannot be used as a carte blanche for "bumiputra" policies to discriminate against "non-bumiputras". In this respect, it must be pointed out that Article 153 also provides for "the legitimate interests of other communities".

The experience of the last three decades has proven that policies based on the interest of "race" rather than sectoral needs of the poorer classes are not only counter-productive but are the main cause of communal polarisation. Consequently, it is legitimate to question the extension of the New Economic Policy.

As for the position of the Rulers, YB Anwar should be more specific instead of indulging in unsubstantiated allegations. As far as we know, no section of the Chinese community has raised this question.

It is regrettable that YB Anwar Ibrahim has chosen to ethnicise these issues by singling out the Chinese community despite the daily lip service by the government against communal politics. The simple reason why these grievances by the Chinese community are not communalist is seen by the fact that PAS, a Malay-based party has publicly declared that it supports these legitimate demands. Any democrat worth his salt can see that these demands are reasonable and just. As PAS has declared, civil equality and cultural democracy are basic tenets of Islam, hardly communalistic or "extremist".

YB Anwar has warned that "national" — which are in fact Barisan — policies cannot be raised any more since they were foreclosed at Merdeka. The fundamental point concerns the relation between Constitutional rights and democracy. The Prime Minister himself has said that the Constitution must reflect the times and if need be, it could be amended. The Barisan is certainly no stranger to such practice, the recent Constitution Amendment Act being a glaring example.

If, for example, the nation feels that Article 152(1) does not fully reflect the spirit of the Malaysian Nation simply because the Merdeka University Judgement has ruled that it does not provide for the 'teaching or learning (in) any other language ...", then there is no reason why the Constitution cannot be amended to insert the precious two-letter word "IN".

In threatening to raise the question of citizenship if the Barisan policies continue to be questioned, YB Anwar Ibrahim has mistaken a faux pas for a forte.

Rather than live uneasily under the threat, I am sure most Malaysians would prefer to face this citizenship question squarely and request YB Anwar to substantiate his unwarranted threat. In the full glare of modern-day democracy, UMNO's stand on these issues will only be seen by all to be anachronistic, to say the least.

As Malaysian nationals, we have a stake in this country through blood and legal ties that are inviolable and inalienable. The status of nationality and citizenship has the crucial implication that every citizen, every national is equal before the law.

History can testify to the injustice suffered by many non-Malay Malaysians. Despite the fact that many were born and bred in this land for generations, few obtained citizenship right up to Independence day. YB Anwar merely betrays his position if he implies that non-Malays should be glad to have citizenship at all. It would be interesting if he could come out publicly with what he had threatened. If YB Anwar did look into our history he would discover more skeletons in the Alliance/Barisan cupboard than he would care to admit .

The 'Merdeka Agreement' was basically a communal formula between UMNO, MCA and MIC to accommodate the communalist politics that prevailed at the time and which still exists today. Consequently, the legitimate democratic demands by the non-Malay communities for civil and political equality cannot be seen to have been

234

"exchanged" by MCA and MIC for citizenship granted by UMNO. This makes a mockery of democratic and human rights.

To come back to the current speculation in the press regarding PAS and its dialogues with the Chinese community, it is comforting to see so much concern by the Establishment. They can set their mind at ease as I am sure the Chinese community will only be prepared to accept any PAS promises in black and white — in a draft constitution or manifesto — regarding the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims. The fundamental point is to ensure that our inalienable democratic and human rights are not infringed in any prospective Constitution and that there are no obstacles or conditions imposed on non-Muslim as well as women's representation in the legislative, executive and judiciary. The nature and relation of any 'Council of Ulama' to the People's Representatives would likewise have to be clearly spelled out.

Since PAS also upholds the principle of constitutional democracy, there is no reason why we should not give them a chance to deliberate on their alternative conception of the better society.

The Islamic movement in recent years has shown that Islam embodies democratic elements which need not contradict the aspiration of non-Muslims. At the same time, the movement in other countries has revealed that it can be hijacked by opportunist elements. The best guarantee against any eventuality is for us to be organised and vigilant always.

[Sin Chew Jit Poh, 16 July 1986.
It did not appear in The Star]

Whatever one thinks of Col. Gaddafi's regime, there was no justification in the least for the U.S. bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi — the largest single American air raid since World War II. Between 80 to 100 U.S. military aircraft were used in the attack, including 18 F111 fighter bombers from bases in Britain. The civilian casualties, or "collateral damage"-in the Orwellian euphemism of the U.S. military — was "... greater than expected". The blatant U.S. aggression showed a callousness and warped logic reminiscent of the Vietnam War and threatens the principles of peaceful co-existence of nations and the right of nations to self-determination.

No Justification for U.S. Aggression

According to White House spokesman, Larry Speakes, the attack had been carried out to prevent Gaddafi "making further attacks on us — it is a self-defensive move ... if necessary, we will do it again".

The U.S. has claimed it had proof of Libyan involvement in the disco bombing in West Berlin

on April 5, in which one U.S. serviceman was killed. While on the whole the U.S. has suffered relatively few terrorist incidents within its own borders, after the West Berlin bombing, Germany was one of the main European countries which urged caution on Reagan even though a far larger number of Germans were injured in the incident.

Spain had banned the use of U.S. bases in that country, France forbade over-flights by U.S. planes and that was what necessitated the long round-about route for the F111s from British bases. It meant that each had to be refueled in mid-air by giant tanker KC-10s a total of 6 times on the return journey. The fighter bombers could have shortened their trips by 1,200 nautical miles if they had flown over France and prevented added risks to the pilots.

The U.S. media have referred to this flight route as the "line of shame", a pointed reference to the lack of support by the US' European allies. Holland, Italy and Greece were also opposed to US military action. According to subsequent polls carried out by the British press, the majority of the British people are very much against the Thatcher government's decision to allow the U.S. use of their military bases in Britain.

The cynic might point out that the European allies refused to support the US mainly because of the large Libyan — EEC trade balance, worth £9 billion annually, composed mainly of European imports of Libyan oil worth £6.8 billion. That may well be, but at issue is a highly important principle which must be adopted by all non-aligned nations vis-a-vis the superpowers, a point we shall return to later.

The issue of international law is whether the

U.S. action fits the definition of "self-defence" in Article 51 of the UN Charter. The Charter outlaws the use of force in relations between states except in the case of a nation defending itself against attack. Legal experts dismiss the use of "retaliation" as a motive which is permissible in international law.

For years now, the Big Powers have been extending the notion of their privilege to cover the "defence of vital interests" outside their own territory. This is the crux of the issue of international law which threatens the non-aligned nations of the world. Lloyd N. Cutler, who was President Jimmy Carter's White House counsel has said in so many words that, despite Article 51,

"... as a superpower with global responsibilities, if our forces are attacked in another country, we can construe it as an attack on our territory, and we are entitled to make a measured response."

Oscar Schachter, professor of international law at Columbia University and former chief legal counsel of the UN, has been quoted in the 'Washington Post' as saying that the right to respond militarily requires a more stringent test than whether U.S. citizens were attacked:

"Our government would have to be able to make the case that the foreign power is engaged in a concerted plan to attack the U.S.".

To claim refuge in Article 51 therefore, Schachter opines that the U.S. would have to establish that its actions were not punitive reprisal but were necessary to meet the threat to U.S interests and that its actions were proportionate to the offence. On this occasion, the US did not exhaust all means available in the highest world forum, the Security Council.

Prime Minister Thatcher's own understanding of Article 51 was seen when she used it to justify the sinking of the 'General Belgrano' during the Falklands War. It was subsequently discovered (after Clive Ponting leaked a Secret Government document) that the Argentine ship was actually on its way home when it was attacked.

David Hirst of the London 'Guardian' has also considered the US justification unconvincing:

"Reagan's official objective, however, is the checking of international terrorism, and that, it can be said with virtual certainty, he will never achieve by such methods ... For the plain fact is that the main centre of international terrorism is not Libya at all, but Lebanon".

It has been widely acknowledged that the American action would only lead to more such responses until the U.S. shows a positive attitude toward solving the Middle-East problem which lies at the root of terrorism. Gaddafi, for all his revolutionary posturing, is merely the U.S. administration's quantifiable Symbol of Hate foisted on the American public. This is Rambo's answer to a Middle East conflict the US does not want to come to terms with. Peace in the Middle East will only come when the Palestinian problem has been justly settled.

American policy on the Middle East is consonant with Israel's. The Israeli Foreign Ministry has exhibited satisfaction over the latest incident, "encouraged by the firm stand of the U.s. against Gaddafi".

For all the U.S.' appeal to Article 51 over the April 5 West Berlin bombing incident, the fact remains that ever since January this year, U.S. "gunboat diplomacy" has been active over Libyan

ters. With 3 aircraft carriers (carrying some 250 nes) and 40 escort ships in the vicinity, U.S. rplanes had attacked 4 Libyan patrol boats and missile site at Sirte previous to the devastations April 14. In 1981, U.S. F-14 jets had also shot wn 2 Libyan jets over the Gulf of Sirte.

The hypocrisy of the U.S.' stand against "state-nsored terrorism" is seen in the fact that while US bombed Libya, American oil companies tinued to carry on oil on which Gaddafi's regime ives. It has often been pointed out that despite reality of the many innocent victims of Israeli orism and Pretoria's armed forces, the U.S. has sistently voted in the UN Security Council nst sanctions on these two states. American-nced terrorists have killed even more Nicara-ns. The lesson of the Vietnam War must surely hat such aggression will always fail to intimi-a determined people.

erpower Intervention and Destabilization
Although the Reagan administration's official ctive was to check international terrorism, the target was Gaddafi and the destabilization of regime. The two military bases at Tripoli and ghazi are where Gaddafi has his offices and e. That is why civilian residences and diplo-omatic missions were struck. The US had d that some forces in the Army and ruling tutions would rebel but it did not succeed.
n previous attempts, the U.S. had relied on an exiles and hired gunmen but this time they d themselves. The use of an armada of aircraft miniscent of the Israeli attempts to assasinate at 1982 in Beirut and Tunis in 1985.
he week of the U.S. air attack on Libya

240

happened to be the 25th anniversary of the 'Bay of Pigs', which saw U.S. interventionism in Cuba. This aspect of U.S. policy cannot therefore simply be blamed on Ronald Reagan. His current actions are by no means a departure from his predecessors. Like Rambo, as a journalist has observed, "Reagan merely lacks polish".

The 'Bay of Pigs' affair was President Kennedy's fiasco. It was a CIA-inspired invasion of Cuba by expatriate Cubans supported by US aircraft which failed. It succeeded, however, in driving Cuba into the hands of the Soviet Union. It led to Castro's acceptance of Soviet medium range rockets on Cuban soil which sparked the 'Cuban Missile Crisis' the following year. This brought the world near the brink of nuclear war in 1962.

The Vietnam War was likewise a crass example of U.S. intervention — started by Kennedy and escalated by Johnson and Nixon.

These examples reveal the effect of US intervention in driving the country concerned into the arms of the Soviet Union, which is not in the interest of that country nor that of the non-aligned movement. It has been speculated that the latest US actions on Libya may indeed produce this effect and induce Gaddafi to seek more sophisticated arms, political and other Soviet support and grant the Soviet Union bases in Libya. Soviet warships were reported off Libya just after the U.S. attacks on April 14.

The Soviet Union is by no means less imperialist even though it sells itself as a "socialist liberator". It has had a hand in the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea and also has its presence in the Middle East, the Pacific, Mediterranean, the

orn of Africa and Southern Africa. Its interven-
on in Afganistan has brought it ever closer to the
ulf, a dangerous flash point in Superpower
valry. Its influence in Cuba has also seen its
tempts to make use of liberation movements
sewhere. All these exploits, including its aid to
e Ethiopian regimes' suppression of the Eritreans
d Tigrayans have shown that it does not respect
e right of nations to self-determination.

hallenging The Super Powers' "Defence of Vital
terests"

In 1979, US Defence Secretary, Harold Brown
oke in no uncertain terms about the US' Middle-
ast interests and its protection of the "free
arket": "The oil supplies in the Middle East
elong clearly to our vital interests. Should those
pplies be threatened, we would undertake any
propriate action, including the use of military
rce" (NYT, 26-2-79). These threats were carried
it when US interests were threatened by Nasser
Egypt and Sukarno of Indonesia, to name but
o cases when governments tried to nationalise
eir industries.

The Soviet Union acts no differently. In
neral, the two Superpowers put all their
onomic, political and military might into
opping up their allies, surrogates or puppet
gimes and ensuring that they have access to
ilitary bases to "defend their vital interests'.

The recent refusal by Spain, France, Italy and
reece to allow the US use of military bases on
eir soil and overflight by U.S. warplanes has
monstrated an effective and concrete means to
allenge the SuperPowers' assumptions. It has
en generally speculated that the future of all

American bases in Britain will be an issue in the next British general elections. Not only Labour supporters, but many Conservative and Alliance voters have voiced their anger over the air strike on Libya.

There must be a concerted attempt by all countries to frustrate the attempts by the Big Powers to carve out their areas of interest or "spheres of influence" as they please. In this, we do not seek the advantage of either Nato or the Warsaw Pact. International tension is fueled above all by Big Power rivalry.

Since the sixties, it has been established that the Big Powers now fight their wars in the Third World since they have decided that neither can win a war in Europe. In any case, the respective spheres of influence in Europe had been drawn up at Yalta since the post-war period. In the Third World, on the other hand, this division of the post-war world has never been accepted and is continually being challenged.

Only the principle of the right of nations to self-determination can lead to real peace. Peace, in turn, will provide the necessary conditions for the peoples of nations all over the world to make whatever changes they may wish to their own societies without external interference.

The non-aligned nations, if we are to act as a moral and political force in the world, must never be slow to condemn all acts of aggression against sovereign nations and support legitimate national liberation movements. This stand must be consistent and principled and not merely a stance. We cannot lean on either Superpower Bloc nor join any military pact with the Big Powers and be implicated in Superpower rivalry.

Each member country of ASEAN must therefore ask itself if its foreign policy has been totally consistent; if it provides facilities for foreign military bases on its soil; if it has infringed the right of nations to self-determination or condemned all infringements thereof. Did we, for example, condemn the U.S invasion of Grenada, Indonesia's invasion of East Timor ...? Can we accept the U.S. military bases in the Philippines? Why do we even have a squadron of Australian Mirage fighters on our soil?

Only a truly non-aligned course, well clear of the Superpowers can ensure peace in the region and our freedom to carve our own destiny.

[Paper presented at a forum on 'Libya, Super powers and Self-Determination' organised by the Selangor Graduates Society at South-East Asia Hotel on 3 May 1986. It appeared in Nanyang Siang Pau on 14 – 16 May 1986 but not in The Star]

Features of a Democratic Education System

An education system is conditioned by the prevailing political and economic system. For example, we have still not attained an integral, self-reliant, self-sustaining orientation in our economy as a result of which the reliance on foreign capital and foreign market conditions has resulted in a warped production of redundant graduates. Social planning of education to meet the needs of our people is difficult while our economy is still so dependent on the economies of the developed countries.

We do not have an endogenous economy as such in which the urban and rural sectors, agriculture and industry are intricately linked and complementary. Even our education system has a strong urban-bias in the provision of financial aid and quality teachers. In fact, many of the ills of our education system today are outgrowths of the dominant social, political and economic values of our present society. Therefore, the observations and proposals in this paper are necessarily "preliminary notes" as a comprehensive study would require much more exhaustive survey and research. Also, the views expressed in this paper are premised

upon the existing conditions and situation. A different set of conditions and values in the near or distant future would therefore necessitate further rethinking of these proposals.

Looking at our present education system, there are two fundamental features – the lack of cultural democracy and the lack of social democracy – which are inextricably linked. To be more specific, the present education system does not provide adequately for the right and opportunities for mother-tongue education; at the same time, it does not provide for equality of opportunities for the poorer classes of Malaysians. The lack of cultural and social democracy and their determinants by the political and economic system has also led to the negative and adverse aspects of our education system bemoaned by so many of our educationists and academicians: Students are not trained to think critically and rationally; they are not taught to be independent-minded and problem-solvers nor encouraged to freely express themselves.

Hence, our proposals in this paper are some pointers to how our education system can be democratised.

We wish further to point out that the guarantee of cultural and social democracy in our education system is a vital precondition for the realization of National Unity.

Background

Our education system has its foundations in the colonial period. It is a legacy that has resulted in the denial of cultural democracy to the Chinese and Indian communities as well as the perpetuation of an elitist education system and high 'wastage'.

The Barnes Report, 1951 put paid to any

246

possibility of cultural democracy in the linguistic-educational sphere when it proposed the abolition of non-Malay vernacular schools and their replacement with a single National Education System using English and Malay as the only media of instruction. Thereafter, the demand for the inclusion of the non-Malay vernacular schools in the National Education System was denied by the colonial authorities on the grounds that their languages were not official languages of the country as stipulated by the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement.

The post-Independence government has on the main followed the reasoning and argument of the Barnes Report premised upon a monolingual educational system to promote National Unity. The problems and impediments that have plagued the non-Malay vernacular schools to the present day are attributable to the attitude of the authorities which is averse to the principle of cultural pluralism.

For these schools, officials of various levels from the Ministry of Education have often issued all manner of directives and circulars to restrict and obstruct the proper running and development of mother-tongue education of the non-Malay communities. All these incidents certainly do not contribute to developing a congenial climate for inter-communal understanding, unity and co-operation.

In short, the language policy of the government has negated the status of the languages of the non-Malay citizens; and, while promoting the growth of Malay-medium schools and institutions, the government has denied the rights of the non-Malay citizens to develop their mother-tongue

lucation. The linguistic-educational and cultural policy of "one language, one culture and one race" completely unsuitable for our multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious society and isolates basic human rights and democratic principles universally accepted.

The colonial legacy, which was mainly geared toward producing an English-educated elite has today produced a situation which is no less inequitable. The lack of social democracy is certainly not conducive to the promotion of National Unity, especially when the cause of the existence of poverty and inequality is pinned on race rather than class factors. It is of course well-known that educational policies flowing from the NEP mainly benefit "bumiputra" students. Such discrimination based on ethnicity is not only unconducive for the promotion of national unity but is directly contributing to communal polarization. (Table II)

Democracy as the Basis of National Unity

["Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom" — Article 26(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948]

The conception of cultural diversity as a potential source of communal strife is seriously mistaken. Our cultural pluralism should be seen as an asset rather than an impediment to National Unity. On the other hand, policies that attempt to promote cultural assimilation or homogenization and ignore cultural democracy will always meet with opposition from the other ethnic communities.

Cultural democracy is fully upheld by the

international community. The World Conference on Cultural Policies organised by UNESCO at Mexico City in 1982 declared that "cultural diversity — a corollary and affirmation of cultural identity — far from being a divisive factor, could contribute to enrichment and balance ..."[1]

It also recommended that: "... the state and national community recognize the cultural values of each group and the fact that belonging to one's own cultural group is an inherent part of each individual's dignity, and further ensure that the members of cultural groups are not deprived of the free enjoyment of their culture or of the opportunity to develop it within the state either individually or in co-operation with the other members of their groups ..."[2]

Besides the denial of cultural democracy, the deprivation of social democracy has failed to promote National Unity. The effects of the New Economic Policy in the education sphere have not only produced much resentment among the 'non-bumiputra' communities, the "restructuring" of Malaysian society has mainly benefitted the middle and upper classes of 'bumiputras' while the poorer classes in all ethnic communities have remained at the bottom heap of the education system.

The cause of communal polarization cannot be laid at the door of the school — the school institution merely reflects the ethos and norms of the various communities, which in turn are determined in the broader economic, political and social arena.

The road to National Unity is abundantly clear.

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[1] World Conference on Cultural Policies, Final Report, UNESCO, — 1982: 9

[2] ibid, p. 69

It can only be based on civil and political equality of all our ethnic communities; a consistent commitment to freedom, democracy; and the improvement in the living standards of all our Malaysian masses.

There are in fact ample opportunities for contact and interaction between our various peoples if there are no obstacles put in the way of free association and organisation in the political, economic, social and cultural institutions.

It is quite clear that the education system discourages democracy and stresses conformity. Such a system is unlikely to equip our students with the means to deal critically and creatively with reality and to discover how to participate in the betterment of our society.

Take our universities and colleges, for example. Students who are supposed to be encouraged to be critical and independent thinkers are not allowed to take an active part in political and social issues because of the deterrent by the Universities and University Colleges Act.

In this brief discussion, we hope to raise some of the issues concerning: medium of instruction; education expenditure; scholarships and study loans; the curriculum.

Medium of Instruction

In a democratic education system, no restriction should be imposed upon the medium of instruction used by the schools — any language should be permissible as the medium of instruction if the people or community concerned so desires.

The State should be responsible for the maintenance and development of all primary and secondary schools whose media of instruction are

the mother-tongues of the citizens of Malaysia. Schools using any other languages as their media of instruction should also be allowed to be established but not necessarily maintained by the State.

Certain conditions should, however, be complied with. Bahasa Malaysia must be a compulsory subject in all primary and secondary schools. Further, the study of the history of Malaysia and its peoples must be an essential part of the school curriculum, although it may be taught in any language.

All school children must be seriously encouraged to have a good command of BM which serves as the lingua franca for the various communities in our country. The study of Malaysian history with emphasis on the contributions by all the different ethnic communities to the country's economic and cultural wealth will inculcate a sense of common belonging and love of our country. Likewise, an awareness of the struggles by Malaysians of all ethnic communities in the defence of the country and its democratic institutions will promote National Unity.

Such a policy thus acknowledges Bahasa Malaysia as the National Language and lingua franca of our peoples while respecting the democratic principle that all peoples' languages and cultures are equal. It respects cultural pluralism while promoting national consciousness and patriotism. The above measures are in line with the spirit of the 1957 Education Ordinance which says:

"The national education policy of the Federation is to establish a national system of education acceptable to the people as a whole which will

atisfy their needs and promote their cultural,
ocial, economic and political development as a
ation, with the intention of making Malay the
ational language of the country whilst preserving
nd sustaining the growth of the language and
ulture of peoples other than Malays in the
ountry".

The 1961 Education Act, in its preamble, while
uoting the national education policy declared in
he 1957 Education Ordinance omitted the part
which says "whilst preserving and sustaining the
rowth of the language and culture of peoples
ther than Malays in the country". Instead, it
dded the notorious "ultimate objective" of
making the national language the main medium of
nstruction in the national education system". By
o doing, the 1961 Education Act has in effect
ubstituted the somewhat liberal national
ducation policy of the 1957 Education Ordinance
y a policy of linguistic and cultural assimilation
nd homogenization.

We believe that the proper stand to take
egarding the existence of diverse languages and
ultures in our country is not homogenization but
armonization in order to harness the process of
exible expression contained in a system of diverse
ultural heritage. It is vital to note that the
emand for cultural pluralism is often confused
ith a demand for separation. Cultural pluralism is
ot separation. The non-Malay communities are
ot asking for separation from the rest of society.
here is no desire for isolation or a separate nation
f some kind. They are merely asking for the right
o pursue the development of their own culture
nd heritage within the larger Malaysian society.

Educational Expenditure

The amount of public expenditure on education is grossly inadequate: In 1971-80, the allocation was 6.4%; 1981-85, it was 7.6% of public expenditure[3] With the disproportionately smaller percentage of education expenditure allocated to primary schools, children of poorer families receive not only less education, but also education of lower quality.

While primary schools contain the most number of pupils and proportionately fewer students are found in the higher institutions of learning, the government spends more of its educational expenditure per student on maintaining and developing the universities and other institutions of higher learning, and spends the least per student on primary education. (Table I)

Another feature of the lack of social democracy is seen in the fact that students from higher-income families receive more subsidy than poorer students.

According to a World Bank Study in 1979, 60% of students at post-secondary level receive aid compared to 23% of secondary school students and 7% of primary school students[4]

Since primary education is a prerequisite for every person to be equipped with the very basic skills to cope with the literate world, the bulk of education expenditure must be spent on providing quality primary education. Next in order of priority must be the secondary schools, which

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3. Rancangan Malaysia Keempat, 1981-85, Jadual 6-2; Jadual 13-1.

4. Toh Kin Woon, in CAP, 'Key Questions on Malaysian Education', 1984: 19.

253

should receive the second largest share of the education budget.

Because universities and other institutions of higher learning are accessible only to a correspondingly smaller percentage of students, these should receive a proportionately smaller share of the education expenditure. However, the overall education expenditure allocation should be increased especially in relation to such expenditure as defence. In the light of the current shortage of state-run universities and other institutions of higher learning, private or community-run universities and colleges should be allowed to be established. Ways and means must be found to redirect the more than 1.5 billion ringgit that Malaysians spend abroad annually back into local universities and institutions.[5]

While private institutions of learning should be allowed at the present juncture, the government should ensure that fees are regulated so that parents are not deprived of the right of choice, only of the right to purchase privilege.

Scholarships and Study Loans

In such an education system, especially with the existence of privately-funded institutions, the State should provide financial aid to students from poorer families who show good potential and capabilities. Study loan schemes rather than scholarships should be the norm and these should be awarded on the basis of socio-economic need to students who have the requisite academic qualifica-

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5. In 1984, 24,000 would be undergraduates were turned away. Out of the 1.4 billion ringgit spent by Malaysians abroad annually, the government alone spends 500 million ringgit. (Malaysian Business, 1-11-85).

tions or related credentials. Students with excellent results but come from well-to-do families should waive their eligibility for scholarships or study loans. Therefore, while scholarships and loans are not awards for academic excellence alone, nevertheless, recipients must also possess the necessary qualifications and proven capability to successfully complete the course and serve the community.

According to a recent study, the majority of scholarship holders in the five Malaysian universities come from upper-middle and higher classes. Only 15% come from the poorest segments[6]. Furthermore, 43% of scholarship holders graduated with general degrees with no bearing on the manpower needs of the country and ended up in the government services.

It is doubtless that the present policy of awarding scholarships on the basis of "race" is a major contributory cause of communal polarization. It also denies many deserving and capable non-'bumiputras' the opportunities for further education. As proposed above, financial aid must be provided on the basis of sociol-economic need and NEVER on ethnicity.

The Curriculum

At present, the curriculum in schools as well as in institutions of higher learning is geared essentially toward reproducing the needs and attitudinal requirements of the labour market. Moreover, it does not help to promote inter-cultural understanding.

In order to promote National Unity, the curriculum and text books of all schools and

6.   Ozay Mehmet & Yip Yat Hoong in CAP, 1984: 24.

stitutions of higher learning should include the
story, cultures and contributions by all ethnic
oups toward national development and defence
the Nation. Any manifestation of racism in
alaysian books must not be tolerated and history
oks must give a truthful account of the struggles
Malaysians of all ethnic communities in building
is country.

Besides the teaching of basic skills to cope with
e's working life, the curriculum in schools
ould inculcate in pupils social responsibility, a
nse of morality, compassion, respect for justice
d democracy. 'Civics' in school is not taken
riously especially when it is taught as a dry
bject to test pupils' knowledge about the various
ate institutions.

The core of moral education in schools should
the teaching of human rights and democracy for
ese are the "common values" that can provide
e unifying factor for National Unity. It is a
oven fact that didactic moralising does not work.
e sense of moral responsibility must be in-
lcated and requires imaginativeness and resource-
llness of teachers, otherwise 'moral education'
comes merely another examination subject. The
manist and democratic approach is more likely
nurture self-discipline.

Human rights lies somewhere between law,
nics, politics and civics and pupils can be
roduced to it in subjects as diverse as history,
ography, languages, literature, economics. In the
ssroom, for example, children can learn about
n-violent settlement of disputes and respect for
ners; they can be stimulated to take an interest
issues like free speech, child labour, death
alty, the like.

256

The aim in such a curriculum should be to teach moral autonomy, rationality, moral responsibility, social conscience and awareness using real problems in the enquiry. The democratic milieu is most conducive for promoting moral strength while the authoritarian approach merely stifles moral judgements. This is based on the premise that by making judgements on the basis of equality, we are applying moral principles. The mutual respect of teacher-student is the basis of moral education.

Pupil participation in school life is essential for promoting the democratic spirit. Teachers then become a wholesome part of moral education since there is the necessity on their part to demonstrate the same democracy.

When we base moral education on real problems in the greater social arena, it all boils down to the safeguarding of democracy and human rights. These can teach moral values as well as help our children to solve real-life problems such as the rights and wrongs of international conflicts, industrial disputes, domestic problems as well as national political issues. For example, understanding the position of women in society can lead to an awareness which can govern self-discipline besides an appreciation of women s rights; knowing the rights of minorities can change one's attitude to other cultures. The democratic spirit will instill a humanism toward the exploited and dispossessed.

It is commonly acknowledged that the examination-orientation of the curriculum does not encourage creative and intellectual development of students. The tyranny of the syllabus hardly allows time for the teacher to discuss problems with students never mind creatively

provise lessons. Rote learning of facts commands
a higher premium than the development of
thinking and reasoning faculties. Scientific
knowledge tends to be treated as dogmas to be
memorised and reproduced mechanically rather
than as a creative and rationalist activity.

The school should not be treated as an island
cut off from life and society outside. All generalisa-
tions, abstractions, theories must be applied in
actual circumstances to work and to economic,
social and political problems. The collective rather
than competitive spirit in education must be en-
couraged. Continuous assessment and performance
on projects and dissertations are evidently better
means of testing than annual examinations. Those
who do not succeed in getting the necessary grades
should be allowed to do specially-tailored courses
to suit their talents. The minimum school-leaving
age should be raised to 18 to enable students
from poorer families to continue education.
Students with differential learning capabilities and
interest should be given due consideration and
accomodated.

The content of courses such as science must
teach techniques and skills in the social context in
which they will be practised. The limitations of
academic degrees from foreign Universities and
their inapplicability in the local context have been
pointed out by many, while the preferable need for
"appropriate technology" warrants consideration
of real and local contextual application of
knowledge.

Conclusion

In our multiethnic society, education can
certainly be an institution to promote mutual

258

understanding and cooperation among the various communities as well as to strengthen the sense of belonging of Malaysians to the Nation. Unfortunately, in the nearly 30 years since Independence, the phenomenon of communal polarization has become alarming in the National School System itself, right from primary level to the institutions of higher learning.

It is our contention that the denial of cultural and social democracy is one of the contributing factors to the widening communal polarization of Malaysia society.

Only through the democratization of the education system as well as greater democracy in the other political, economic, social and cultural spheres will Malaysians be able to achieve real National Unity.

*[Sin Chew Jit Poh
23 — 27 May 1986]*

Table 1: Average Government Expenditure Per Student*

	1980	1985	1990
(1) Primary	$\dfrac{\$74,898,000}{2008587} = \$37$	$\dfrac{\$151,896,000}{2191676} = \$69$	$\dfrac{\$156,982,000}{2434407} = \$64$
(2) Secondary	$\dfrac{\$103,750,000}{1065417} = \$97$	$\dfrac{\$204,842,000}{1267898} = \$162$	$\dfrac{\$131,372,000}{1455445} = \$90$
(3) Tertiary @	$\dfrac{\$89,022,000}{38823} = \$2293$	$\dfrac{\$259,178,000}{75042} = \$3,454$	$\dfrac{377,246,000}{137047} = \$2,753$
(4) Technical & Vocational	$\dfrac{\$9,168,000}{18045} = \$508$	$\dfrac{\$57,528,000}{20335} = \$2,829$	$\dfrac{\$139,608,000}{41169} = \$3,391$

Source: Rancangan Malaysia Kelima, Pg. 544 & 564

*excluding Mara Junior Science College and Tunku Abdul Rahman College

@ includes various certificate, diploma and degrees courses

260

Table II: Ethnic Composition of Student Enrolment in Local Institution of Higher Learning for 1980 and 1985

Courses	1980			1985		
	No. Of Students	Bumiputra %	Non-Bumiputra %	No. of Students	Bumiputra %	Non-Bumiputra %
Certificate	2,603	61.1	38.9	6,878	65.8	34.2
Diploma	12,262	93.5	6.5	25,046	94.5	5.5
Degree	21,944	62.0	38.0	37,838	63.0	37.0

Source: Rancangan Malaysia Kelima, Pg. 525.

Restoring Faith in Our
System of Democracy

The victory of the Barisan Nasional at the recent general election has been trumpeted by its leaders and the media as a "vote for stability" or "an endorsement of Barisan policies".

On the other hand, political pundits and academicians alike are of the consensus that but for the very questionable basis on which electoral constituencies are delineated, the overall gains by the Opposition would have been better reflected in the distribution of seats won.

The inconsistency in the delineation of constituencies must be rectified. Thus, it is unacceptable to have urban constituencies with 65,000 votes and rural seats with 20,000 votes, which make a mockery of the democratic principle of "one-man, one-vote".

A prerequisite for the restoration of faith in our democratic system is the reinstatement of the Election Commission's independence in the eyes of the public.

Since the 1962 Constitution (Amendment) Act, the independence of the commission has been in question since its powers to delimit constituen-

cies were transferred to Parliament and it was seen when (Deputy Prime Minister) Abdul Ghafar Baba told the country before the recent elections that the election rules were to be changed.

A month later, the Election Commission gazetted the changes, which resulted among other things, in the shortening of the campaigning period and the increase in candidates' deposits.

An independent commission is not only paramount in regulating the electoral system, it must also ensure impartiality in the other vital factors that affect the democratic process, notably, the Press and media.

The short duration of campaigning allowed at the recent elections meant that whatever discreet charm the Barisan-controlled Press and media normally exuded was abandoned. Few would disagree that the crucial issues in the elections were not highlighted in the blanket coverage of the Barisan while there has also been accusations of distortions, slants, half-truths and even untruths on the part of the Press and media.

While the Press and TV3 for example, are privately-owned, one could say that their conduct in the recent general election indicates an excess of our political system.

There is, therefore, an urgent need for a truly independent Press Council to ensure that not only Press freedom prevails but Press ethics and honest journalism reign at all times.

When we turn our attention to the publicly-owned RTM, it does not have the argument that "might is right" principally because unlike the Press and TV3, RTM belongs to the people, and not to the Barisan Nasional. Consequently, only some form of an Independent Broadcasting

authority can ensure the equal access of all political parties and the ordinary people to the public media.

There is yet another area that desperately needs independent arbitration if we are to achieve genuine national integration and to save our collective psyche from the depths of irrationality.

It was most disturbing, especially during the election campaigning, when the Barisan and the media portrayed multiethnic parties as a threat to stability while the communalism of the mono-ethnic component parties of the Barisan Nasional was presented as contributing to national unity.

If the overtures by PAS to the Chinese community can be condemned as "a betrayal of the Malays" especially in the Malay-language Press rather than as a healthy trend in inter-communal understanding, there is cause for concern by all Malaysians.

On this score, the National Unity Board desperately needs a radical revamp with new members who are respected as unbiased and independent people. To arbitrate on this most crucial yet sensitive of issues, it would not be a bad idea to invite some representatives from international bodies so that some objective light can be shed on the issue.

There is a further aspect of the election which questions the manner in which government policy is formulated. This is seen in the dispensing of "election goodies" just before the general election. Some of these which immediately come to mind were:

Firstly, funds for Chinese schools. These were granted to some schools as if they were special

favours by the BN to the community rather than their rightful claim to public funds.

Secondly, the cut in assessment rates in Hulu Langat. The serious question this raises is of course, how were the exorbitant rates increased in the first place to incur public wrath. Secondly, on what basis were such decisions made by the officials to cut the rates just before the election?

Then there were the timely decisions to review the Fisheries Act to placate angry fishermen, to allow non-Malay small industrialists to benefit from the World Bank aid; to renew new villagers' TOL and to proffer some funds for their development.

These may seem to be smart political gimmicks but such ploys have merely exposed the questionable nature of the Government's policy formulation.

[The Star, 16 August 1986]

265

Of CCC, CRC and the Opposite Front

Permit me to clarify some points in Sharifah Rozita's article, *Role of the CRC in the Opposition front* (NST, Aug. 15).

Firstly, the CRC's (Civil Rights Committee) talks with Pas and the DAP were part and parcel of a series of dialogues held by the CRC with political parties and organisations.

It started with Gerakan, MCA and SDP before holding talks with Pas, PSRM and DAP. This was followed by non-political parties like Aliran, MTUC, EPSM and women's organisations.

These talks with organisations and interest groups are likely to be an on-going process and are intended to gauge their opinion and attitude towards the Joint Declaration by the Chinese guilds and associations.

The CRC will hold talks with any organisation or voluntary body that shows an interest in jointly building a just, egalitarian, democratic and non-communalist society.

The CRC floated the idea of an opposition front in order to give the electorate a simple choice between two fronts. This was a common aspiration

of the grassroots of the guilds and associations in the various towns where the CRC held forums.

The concept of a stronger opposition — as a healthier check on the BN Government — has similarly been echoed by other public personalities and organisations.

Up to the eleventh hour before Nomination Day, the CRC still appealed to the DAP to join the opposition front in order to realise the common electoral pact vis-a-vis the BN. It was therefore disingenuous of your writer to say that the CRC had "backed the wrong horse."

Among other things, it does not make sense to say that the CRC was in favour of an opposition front and then to say that it should have backed one opposition party at the expense of another.

Furthermore, the CRC is not "wholly interested in securing the cultural, language and educational rights of the Chinese" as claimed by your writer. The stand and demands of the Joint Declaration 1985 are clear for all to see. They contain the legitimate demands for the civil rights of all Malaysians, irrespective of ethnicity.

Pas de facto leadership of the opposition front was the component parties' own decision. It had nothing to do with the CRC's choice.

In the last analysis, Pas' poor showing in the number of seats they garnered must be put down to the red herring of the "Islamic State" that was raised by several parties and individuals who should have known better.

The CRC had no illusions about an Islamic State. In the Joint Declaration, the Chinese guilds and associations unequivocally state their objection to the concept of such a State.

However, it was stretching reality a bit to

267

assume that Pas would secure a two-thirds majority to establish its Islamic State.

The CRC would give credence to any party or organisation that shows a willingness to understand the demands and aspirations of the Chinese masses.

This would apply to any sincere individual, never mind a credible Malay-based party like Pas.

For all the caricature by the Barisan Nasional during the election campaign, the fact remains that the opposition parties in the pact, as well as the DAP, are multi-ethnic and not mono-ethnic like the main component parties of the BN.

To their credit, these opposition parties also share some basic commonalities of a commitment to democracy, equality and social justice while the component BN parties only pander to the communalism of their respective social bases and perpetually justify the Barisan Nasional's policies.

Consequently, it would have been most unfair to condemn a party like Pas simply because it clings to the concept of an Islamic State, the details of which everyone agrees has not been properly elaborated by Pas.

One would have thought it better for all parties if Pas is confronted with our political realities when it has to thrash out these issues in public.

As it is, we may perhaps suffer the ill effects of a Pas (or for that matter, other sections of society who feel they have been poorly represented) that becomes increasingly disillusioned with the status quo.

Therefore, until the eventuality of Pas reneging on its public commitment to civil equality, democracy and justice, one has to give it the benefit of the doubt. The same applies to all the opposition parties.

On the other hand, the Chinese community has experienced enough of BN policies over the years and this accounts for their strong vote for the Opposition in the recent general election.

Like other democratic organisations in this country, the CRC will continue to be on the lookout to ensure that democracy, civil equality, justice and the truth are consistently defended. In particular, communalism will be condemned and combated whenever it raises its ugly head.

During campaigning one heard the ludicrous argument that "only the BN has the experience to rule the country". If this was similarly touted in 1957, we could well have never attained Independence since then only the colonial power had the experience.

Again if this is raised as a justification for the status quo in South Africa, the Blacks would never ever attain political power since only the apartheid regime has the experience of ruling the country!

The results of the elections have many lessons for the opposition parties. It should be a pointer to Pas that the Islamic State is not only unacceptable to the non-Muslims but also to many Muslims in the country.

Pas is, however, certainly on the right track when it emphasises that its stronger, truer adherence to Islam is a weapon against corruption, social injustice and oppression.

Finally, it is symptomatic of a great failing in our mass media when it keeps confusing Pas' CCC (Chinese Consultative Committees formed by Pas to help it "understand the Chinese community") with the CRC, which is the "Civil Rights Committee", formed by major organisations of all the Chinese guilds and associations in Malaysia.

Pas' decision to form its CCCs had nothing to do with the CRC. The imputation by your writer that "the CRC ... contributed indirectly to Pas' decision to form its CCC as a channel to gain non-Muslim support" is not grounded in fact.

Unity Needs Equality and Respect

No one will doubt that the speech by Datuk Abdullah Ahmad at the Institute of International Affairs in Singapore was bold, perhaps even the boldest that any Umno leader has come near saying so far.

It was certainly not new heresy. This is testified by the fact that his utterances have not been disowned by anyone in the Umno leadership since.

Clearly, Datuk Abdullah had forgotten the humanistic roots of modern-day thinking when he warned:

"Let us make no mistake — the political system in Malaysia is founded on Malay dominance ... The Malays must be politically dominant in Malaysia as the Chinese are politically dominant in Singapore... The New Economic Policy must continue to sustain Malay dominance in the political system in line with the contract of 1957. Even after 1990, there must be mechanism of preservation, protection and expansion in an evolving system".

The only "social contract" we share as Malaysians is what is contained in the Federal Constitution. If Datuk Abdullah can read more into it, he should quote article and clause to back up his assertions. Needless to say, the Malaysian nation would never have been born if such a concept of "Malay political dominance" had been emblazoned in the 1957 constitution.

Taking the issue of the grossly incongruous constituency delineation for example: The 1957 "social contract" provided for a weightage of 15 per cent for rural constituencies. Since then, impatient politicians have taken it upon themselves to amend the constitution until today the weightage has been removed altogether.

Such glaring inconsistencies cannot be justified simply by pointing out cases of gerrymandering in the West.

Datuk Abdullah may have got away with the half-truth when he tried to justify our unfair situation here by pointing out that this "... occurs everywhere, including the United States, where urban constituencies such as in New York have 300,000 voters while rural constituencies such as in Iowa have only 36,000 voters."

This may be true of election to the Senate, in which each state is allowed two senators. However, election to the House of Representatives is based on population and urban states are naturally allocated more seats than rural ones to reflect as much as possible the principle of "one man, one vote".

In any case, gerrymandering is not unknown in the West but that is surely not an example for us to emulate if — as our politicians frequently say — we are more moral than the West.

Despite the frequent aspersions cast on our democratic institutions by such impatient politicians, our political system is still founded on constitutional democracy and the rule of law. No one should forget this.

It is quite fantastic that we go to all the trouble to hold general elections but every time people vote for the opposition they are accused of being chauvinistic, of "uprooting the Malaysian political system" and even warned of dire consequences like in May 1969.

If ours is a genuinely democratic country, there is no reason why appeals to rights safeguarded in the Federal Constitution should be seen as a challenge to "the basic premises of the Malaysian political system".

The legitimate demands for democracy by Malaysians of all ethnic groups cannot be simply caricatured by government leaders' reference to "white hypocrisy".

Only those who show no commitment or faith in democracy have to resort to pointing out Western double standards in order to justify their executive actions. Surely the expected behaviour of those who claim to be better and morally upright should be to aim instead for a cleaner, more consistent democratic record?

In the end, Datuk Abdullah will have to use all the conjuring skills he can master to reconcile national unity with his private thoughts on "Malay political dominance".

It needs hardly to be pointed out that unity of all Malaysians can never materialise except on a basis of equality and mutual respect between all communities, NEVER on a notion of dominance/

subordinance. This is not only a Malaysian but a universal truism.

Datuk Abdullah unwittingly hit the nail on the head when he posed the rhetoric: "If it is contended that the non-Malays are second class, then so are the Malays for being poor in their own country".

If after 16 years of the NEP, there is an admission that poor Malays are in the same boat as other second class citizens, it explains why 45 per cent of the electorate voted opposition. But does it justify the position of the rich, first-class citizens?

Here it must be stressed that the provision for "Malay special privileges" in the constitution is intended to improve the position of poor and less well-off Malays NOT to further enrich the Malay elite.

I do not think any non-Malay objects to such an objective nor does he disagree with the second prong of the NEP "to reduce poverty irrespective of race". Regarding this patently clear and simple point, many politicians will pretend not to comprehend.

It is the "bumiputra/non-bumiputra" dichotomy that is dividing the nation to benefit those who have the means to profit from such a system ... In political systems of discrimination, it is always the vast majority of ordinary folk that suffer. Therefore, even if there were 10 minister's posts allocated to non-Malays, the situation would not alleviate their plight.

However, Malaysians need not despair. Judging by the election results and the lessons of the NEP, we can see rays of hope penetrating the dark clouds of communalism.

There are still enough Malays, Chinese, Indians

and other Malaysians of diverse ethnic origins who are committed to the rational, democratic, socially equitable and non-racialistic path to national unity. Therefore, all that we hold in common, let no impatient politician tear asunder.

[The Star, 5 September 1986; The Straits Times, 18 September 1986; The China Press, 7 September 1986]

Privatising Telecoms:
A Great Sellout?

When we contemplate the phenomenal size (in terms of assets, number of employees, turnover and profits) of the Malaysian public's 'Jabatan Telecoms' (JTM), its imminent transfer to private hands has seen an incredibly smooth passage. In other countries, besides the response by the unions and social-democratic parties, privatization has sparked off serious public debate and concern.

While the unions concerned, the National Union of Telecoms Employees (NUTE) and the Malaysian Technical Services Union (MTSU) are negotiating a better deal for their members when Syarikat Telecoms Malaysia (STM) takes over on 1 Jan 1987, there appears to be a general acceptance of the privatization of Telecoms itself. Similarly, there does not seem to be a coherent position on this question emanating from the country's main "social democratic" opposition party.

Two pieces of legislation were instrumental in the privatization exercise — the Telecommunications Act and the Pensions (Amendment) Act —

which were passed in the Dewan Rakyat last year. When we look at the manner in which these two Bills were carried through Parliament, it would make a democrat blush. Here's how a local newspaper reported the particular parliamentary session.

"... the Dewan Rakyat shifted abruptly into fifth gear, zipping through four Bills including the all-important Telecoms privatization Bill ... Despite the stakes, the two Telecommunications bill were passed with minimal debate ... Part of the problem was that MPs were only given the Telecommunications (Amendment) Bill a day before it was tabled".

MPs certainly had grounds to complain about this mockery of our highest democratic institution but there is no excuse for the various parties not to come out with a stand on the privatization of Telecoms itself. Those who complained about the short notice given to the Bills and yet voted for them should question their qualification as the peoples' representatives.

A Profitable Strategic Industry

A case may be made for privatising loss-making government agencies but the undue haste in which the government has pushed the privatization of Telecoms is rather curious. There have been complaints by technical staff of the MTSU of harassment by regional telecoms controllers into submitting their option papers 40 days before the deadline (NST, 21-8-86). Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie has also declared that those employees who do not join STM will be deemed to have retired from government service once Telecoms is privatised.

Telecoms is not only one of the largest public sector employer of 30,000 employees it has assets worth over $5 billion. It is also one of the more profitable government bodies, with profits of $260 million in 1982, $400 million in 1983 and a turnover of $1.2 billion in 1984.

Telecommunications is a highly lucrative business which is earmarked for take-off into the next century especially with the merging of the computer and chip technologies for high-speed transmission of sophisticated data. Its future scope of activity is mind-boggling.

$9.6 billion has been allocated to Telecoms under the Fifth Malaysia Plan. The 1984 annual report of Telecoms shows that it has loans of $2.7 billion from the Treasury at an interest rate of 7.5 per cent annually and repayable over 20 years.

It is clearly a bonanza that awaits the private companies that will benefit from the privatization of Telecoms. The future private owners will receive an increasingly profitable company with benefits of investment funded by its customers. By selling off such assets, the public will have lost revenue for the future. The profitability of Telecoms is one simple reason why its privatization is not in the public interest.

Perhaps a more fundamental implication of privatization is that such a major industry is removed from democratic control and accountability with the consequence that the people in general will have less and less influence over economic and industrial policy.

Another serious consequence is the inevitable fragmentation of the public sector unions and the corresponding decreasing measure of control over

their work and bargaining power. For instance, when there is a departure from broad sectoral negotiations and the adoption of the principle of local accounting and negotiations, then the unions will have to accept that local losses must be taken into account in negotiation. The result will be that management will no longer be pushing national proposals but rather local ones. Workers' organisation will be splintered when one area demands increased productivity in a single section; a bonus system in another section; increased flexibility or redundancies in a third section; etc. The threats of competition and accelerated job losses will further destroy workers' solidarity which is something the Ministry of Labour and Manpower does not want to see.

The scenario of threats to the workforce is by no means far fetched. Last year, for example, Telecoms had some 7,000 employees in the industrial and manual groups engaged in cable laying and maintenance. This function was turned over to five private bumiputera companies (Binafon, Electroscon, Sri Com, Uniphone) which accepted the job but did not take on the Telecoms' staff. This merely exacerbated the problem of over-staffing and "underemployment". Then in July this year, these four bumiputera companies sharing the $2.4 billion cable network turnkey contract began laying off workers by the hundreds because they had failed to meet the 1985 performance schedule.

It can already be seen that this syndrome has set in even before the privatization of Telecoms is in full swing. It is therefore not surprising that the knotty problem in the way of the privatization of

Telecoms at the moment revolves around settling the 'Telecoms employees' concern for their future security, work conditions and pay.

Public or Private Ownership

There is more rhetoric than reality in the oft-proclaimed benefits of privatization. Despite the anti-Western posturing by the Government, we seem to have been converted easily by the missionaries of Reaganomics and Thatchernomics nonetheless.

Firstly, there is no evidence that privatization will actually foster competition and result in lower prices for the consumer. Rather, it is more likely that it will be a case of government regulation of a private monopoly. It has been reported in the press that there are fears among the private sector circles of a tendency for the government to dish out contracts to a select few. Auditor-General Tan Sri Ahmad Noordin has warned that: "For the concept to take hold here there must be absolutely no suspicion that certain sections of the business community are being favoured".

Once Telecoms becomes private, it will increasingly compete for the more profitable parts of the market, viz. the business customers. It is questionable then whether private consumers and residential consumers will get the appropriate service and charges. The idea of a national service to cater for also "uneconomic" lines such as less well-off communities will no longer exist.

If the British experience is anything to go by, during the two-year period between 1980 to 1981 when British Telecoms was opened up to competition there were three tariff increases. According to

the Post Office Users National Council, these increases amounted to an overall 50 per cent increase in customers' bills.

Another argument for privatization is that the government will be relieved of the financial responsibility and the asset sales would even allow tax cuts. On this, a Financial Times (London) report has shown that:

> "The truth, however, is that the total of £11 billion raised from asset sales .... has not reduced the burden of tax for those on average or below average incomes. In fact, the proportion of income taken in tax and national insurance contribution for these groups has increased over the past six years"

Asset sales have not boosted British government revenues because the government has undersold a large number of assets so far. In the case of British Telecoms, shares opened at 95 pence on the Stock Exchange, 90 per cent higher than the partly-paid price of 50 pence. The British Public Accounts Committee described one case of fixed price sale as "creating windfall gains for the investor at public expense".

Thus instead of cutting public expenditure and getting a good price for its assets, the political commitment to privatization turned it into a forced seller compelled to get the best price it could. This should be a lesson for us to avoid.

There is really no evidence that public ownership *per se* is inefficient. In fact we have many cases of "lame duck" private companies involved in tyres, cement, motorcar assembly, highways,

power stations. These would have gone under if it were not for continued government protection and subsidy.

The examples of mismanagement and ethnic bias in our government services cannot be made into a case for private ownership. The state of the public sector today is a nemesis of the NEP. If it was well-managed and equal opportunities exist for civil servants of all ethnic groups so that there is a positive attitude toward the common good, then there is no reason why Jabatan Telecoms will not be even more profitable. There is much to improve in the public sector besides inter-ethnic solidarity. Decision-making needs to be decentralised, procedures for industrial democracy established and accountability to customers and the public entrenched.

There is a genuine hope among local entrepreneurs that privatization can offer real opportunities for them to contribute to the national economy. However, the liberalization exercise in Telecoms so far does not give grounds for optimism. From the Telecoms' recent expansion programme, it will be evident who stands to profit from privatization. Japan's NEC Corporation won the M$1 billion contract to supply digital hardware, including integrated-circuit and integrated-chip technologies. This was part of a M$2 billion programme to replace analogue with digital equipment.

We noted the M$2.5 billion cable-network turnkey contract given to four local bumiputra contractors. In truth, many local bumiputra companies are mere vehicles for multinational concerns. For example, Telecoms' decision to buy 1.9 million push-button telephones (worth $95

million) last year attracted wide attention from international suppliers who submitted more than 30 bids:

> "Some suppliers are understood to have made more than one proposal, bidding through different Malaysian companies ..." (BT, 30-5-85)

Ericsson put in its bid via an agreement with EDC Communications, a wholly-owned bumiputera company. Perwira Ericsson, another local vehicle already had a 10-year $1 billion AXE-10 switching contract with Telecoms.

Last year, GTE Telenet, the second largest telecommunications company in the US supplied and installed Malaysia's $50 million packet switching network. Other high-tech companies like Pacific Telesis (a US company) have set up in Malaysia and waiting for other opportunities, especially electronic funds transfer in the financial market.

The nation-wide fibre optic network contract last year was awarded to Fujitsu, out of a total of eight international bids ranging from $45 million to $85 million. Fujitsu submitted its tender with Sapura Holdings while Philips bid through two local companies, one of which was Binafon. The Business Times reported that: "For Fujitsu, the contract will be its flagship in Malaysia and will help re-establish its foothold in the market ..."

Others who profit from privatization are the merchant bankers, cost-accountants and valuers involved in the preliminary exercise. This was undertaken by Arab-Malaysia Merchant Bank in association with the British merchant bank Kleinwort Benson and the public-accountant firm

Hanafiah Raslan and Mohamad. Kleinwort Benson has been responsible for privatising British state enterprises.

Directors of the new corporation also stand to benefit. It has been reported that the managing director of Syarikat Telekom Malaysia Bhd (STM) will be paid $12,990 a month compared to the Telecoms Director-General's $5,010 at the moment. STM's executive director will get $7,290 a month when the Telecom's deputy D-Gs only get $3,760.

When we look at who are in a position to profit from this sophisticated high-technology telecommunications expansion programme, it brings to question not only the privatization of Telecoms but the usage of national funds in the present lean economic conditions. The continued domination of these strategic and profitable industries by multinational companies will mean further dependence on them for technology, managerial and other knowhow. As a consequence, much of the industrial inputs have to be imported and further aggravate the outflow of capital and dependence. The hopes of sharing the benefits of privatization by many of our local entrepreneurs are therefore unlikely to be quenched.

Perhaps the most serious cause for concern is the future of Telecoms' employees. The government and especially the Ministry of Labour and Manpower must ensure that their expressed commitment to protect and improve the living standards of workers is carried through at the end of the day. For example, can the job security of employees who join STM only be guaranteed for five years? Does the government not have a responsibility toward those who opt not to join STM when Telecoms is privatised?

In this highly competitive and rapidly-changing telecommunications technology, the unions would do well to negotiate satisfactory redundancy agreements and be wary of job regrading which may threaten grade and promotion prospects of employees, and make working conditions more oppressive. The achievements of union organisation must not be rendered asunder by divisions and competition if employees' living standards are to be protected.

As for the Malaysia public as a whole, the privatization of Telecoms must not be allowed to be a great sellout for taxpayers, consumers and workers alike.

[Nanyang Siang Pau, 14 – 16 September 1986. It did not appear in The Star or the NST]

It's Not A Licence For Elite To Amass Wealth

The Umno leaders have declared that the New Economic Policy will be pursued even after 1990.

While we wholeheartedly support the second prong of its objective — to eradicate poverty irrespective of race — the experience of these 16 years has shown that the Government has mainly concentrated on the interpretation of the first prong to mean the creation of a Malay elite and a Malay middle class.

It is clear to most who are concerned about national unity and reconstruction that the implementation of the NEP so far has merely exacerbated communal polarisation and prevented national integration.

Far from solving the fundamental problems of the rural Malay masses, the NEP's prestige projects, the non-accountability of government agencies, corruption, mismanagement and wrong priorities in heavy-industrial projects are also responsible for the economic woes facing the country.

It has for example been pointed out by agronomists and other economists since the fifties that the problems faced by rural Malay farmers can

only be solved by partly political measures like land and other agrarian reforms and an industrialisation policy based on the agricultural sector.

This has not been granted mainly because of the political connections of the landed interests. Instead, hugely expensive land development projects have been adopted despite the strain this imposes on our financial resources.

If the past decade of growth has failed to solve the problem of the Malay rural masses — a fact recognised also by the Umno leadership — what can the bleak future promise them if there is to be no radical change to the NEP?

Every Malaysian should be more concerned with the well-being of the majority of the masses and the nation as a whole.

The NEP is based on the bumiputra/non-bumiputra dichotomy. While this institutionalised division exists, its proponents cannot be serious or sincere about forging national unity.

Malay special privileges safeguarded in the Constitution are intended for improving the lot of the Malay masses and not a licence and convenient vehicle for the elite to amass even more wealth.

Surely the Government can formulate a policy that directly benefits the poor rural Malay folk and other poor non-Malays which simultaneously promotes national integration and economic reconstruction.

In his speech at the Umno general assembly, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad mentioned the "chauvinist trend of the Chinese in the urban areas as demonstrated in the general election" and also the BMF and Pan-El scandals.

The fact that most urban dwellers (by no means only Chinese) chose to vote for the Opposi-

287

tion (which includes the Malay-based PSRM) showed that they were prepared to discard chauvinist politics for the serious national issues at hand.

If the general election results showed anything, it demonstrated that our communication and education services have a long way to go in letting the rural masses know how the nation's wealth is being spent and how Malaysian democracy is faring.

If the Chinese had chosen the chauvinist trend, they would surely have voted for the "Chinese" components of the Barisan Nasional just as the Umno leaders appeal to Malay chauvinism?

It was most unfortunate that the BMF and Pan-El scandals were communalised. Both were equally contemptible for they revealed the corruption and the breach of trust of public officials.

Truly patriotic and concerned Malaysians have condemned both scandals and persistently called for commissions of enquiry to get to the bottom of both affairs.
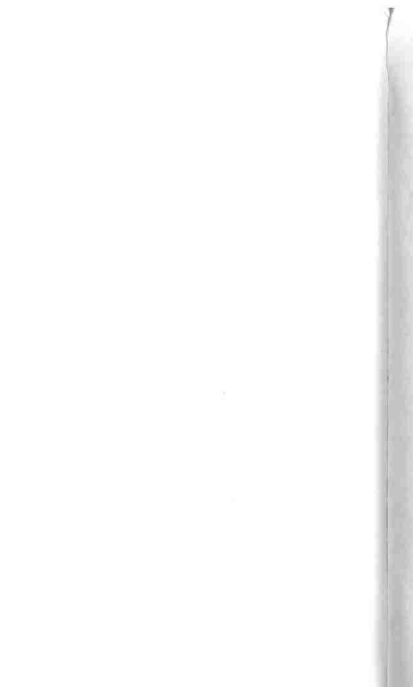
History has shown that the democratic peoples of all countries will continue to condemn and combat racism, racial chauvinism and all those who show contempt for the rights of all peoples.

Malaysian politicians who appeal for electoral support on the basis of racialism cannot hope to be believed when they pay lip service to national unity. Nor are they seriously concerned with educating the broad masses of our peoples to be socially aware, anti-communalist and rational in their out-look.

True lovers of Malaysia are those who will condemn communalism, corruption, non-accountability of public officials, breach of public trust

and democracy whether these be committed by officials who are Malay, Chinese, Indian, Kadazan or whichever ethnicity.

[The Star, 24 September 1986;
Nanyang Siang Pau, 5 October 1986]

INDEX OF TITLES