MALAYA
THE MAKING OF A NEO-COLONY

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Edited by
Mohamed Amin and Malcolm Caldwell

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"The function of the white man in a tropical country is not to labour with his hands, but to direct and control a plentiful and efficient supply of native labour, to assist in the Government of the country, or to engage in opportunities offered for trade and commerce, from an office desk in a bank or mercantile firm." (*British Malaya*, May 1926, p.6)

"It should be made clear that the Authorities will not tolerate anything that savours of organised agitation. This is British territory, and the men concerned in the strikes are aliens. They come here because the inducements held out appeared good to them, and once here they have to conduct themselves with the circumspection expected of any alien in a foreign country." (*Malaya Tribune*, September 21, 1936)

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Foreword

Events in Malaya* have moved with great rapidity since we embarked upon this volume. Their direction – towards more severe repression of the people and growing inequalities in wealth between the people and the elite – imparts, we believe, great topicality to the volume which follows. It should be clear from its general theme and argument that the disarray and feelings of insecurity now so palpable in Malayan ruling circles have not appeared inexplicably, out of the blue, but are the logical consequence of their own historical origins in the colonial period. In a second volume we will take the story from 1957 to the present, in the process amplifying the thesis and buttressing it with detailed illustration and substantiation.

Some of our colleagues who originally agreed to contribute to this volume are now themselves in detention in mainland Malaya or in Singapore. The volume is the poorer for the loss of their intended contributions to it, but we hope nonetheless that it speaks for them while they are silenced.

While this is a quite independent radical study, we make no apology for dedicating it to *all* political prisoners in Malaya, to all those martyred and abused during the long struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism, to all those now in struggle, and to the masses of the Malayan people.

The last chapter of the long march to liberation remains to be written. When it is, our own work must be superceded. But in the interim we trust that it will help counter the countless volumes by, or closely reflecting the views of, the British colonialists and their neo-colonial heirs.

Mohamed Amin
Malcolm Caldwell

London, March 1977

*For an explanation of usage in this book, please see the Note which follows.

A
Note on Terminology

It is essential to explain the usage of words employed in this book, for terminology is particularly complicated when dealing with Malaya. Once Britain had acquired the island of Penang (1786), the island of Singapore (1819), and the city of Malacca (1824), the three became known as the Straits Settlements (SS). After conclusion of the Pangkor engagement in 1874, Britain began to advance into the mainland Malay states. Four of these – Pahang, Perak, Negri Sembilan, and Selangor – were brought together as the Federated Malay States (FMS) in 1896. The other states – Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah, Perlis, and Johore – constituted the Unfederated Malay States (UMS).

After the second world war, peninsular (mainland) Malaya and Singapore were separated by the British. The former Straits Settlements (minus Singapore) was joined with the FMS and the UMS to form a Federation of Malaya in 1948; the Federation of Malaya achieved independence in 1957. In 1963, an independent Singapore merged with the Federation of Malaya; two other British-controlled territories (Sarawak and Sabah in northern Borneo) joined them, and the new grouping became known as the Federation of Malaysia. In 1965, however, Singapore left the Federation of Malaysia (which retained the name) and became an independent state in its own right.

In this volume, we endorse the usage employed by Malayan radicals and use the word "Malaya" (except where otherwise made explicitly clear) to mean mainland Malaya (currently known as Peninsular or West Malaysia) and Singapore, and the words "North Kalimantan" to mean Sarawak, Sabah and the British protectorate of Brunei. Sarawak and Sabah are currently known as East Malaysia.

All inhabitants of Malaya, as thus defined, we refer to as Malayans, reserving the word Malay to describe that part of the population of Malaya which is ethnically of local origin (as opposed to that part of it which is of originally Indian or Chinese or other origin). The status of "Malay" is not, however, entirely exclusive, as Muslims from South Asia and the Middle East who inter-marry and assimilate with Malayan Malays are commonly absorbed.

The British 'Forward Movement', 1874-1914

Malcolm Caldwell

Although the Malay States had felt the impact of European imperialism from the early 16th century on, it was not until the latter part of the 19th century that encroachments became serious and systematic as opposed to sporadic and peripheral.[1] Given secure occupation of the so-called Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore), the British at first glance appeared to have little real need to embark upon the actual occupation and day-to-day administration of the peninsular Malay states proper. How, then, are we to account for the 'forward movement' signalled by the 1874 Pangkor Engagement?

The conventional explanation implies that Britain was really pulled into the Malay states by the breakdown of civil order there, and rare are the attempts to go much beyond this by setting Pangkor* in the context of British capitalism's changing problems in a world where powerful industrial rivals were emerging to challenge her commercial hegemony. We need waste no time in discussing the supporting argu-

*The Treaty of Pangkor, concluded, on 20 January 1874 on the island of Pangkor off the mouth of the Perak river, between the Governor, Straits Settlement (Sir Andrew Clarke), and a Sultan and certain chiefs of Perak, became the model for Britain in its future relations with all the Malay states as they one by one succumbed to the status of British protectorates. The key passage (Clause VI) of the Pangkor Treaty read: "That the Sultan receive and provide a suitable residence for a British Officer, to be called Resident, who shall be accredited to his Court, and whose advice must be asked and acted upon in all questions other than those touching Malay religion and custom". Ironically, the "sultan" with whom Britain "negotiated" (in practice, to whom Britain dictated) the terms of the Treaty had, in effect, been appointed Sultan by the British specifically for the purpose of ensuring signature of the agreement – an appointment, of course, totally repugnant to Malay custom; so flagrant a proceeding – which completely ignored the legitimate ruling Sultan – naturally provoked violent resistance in Perak which led to the murder of the first Resident, J.W.W. Birch, and the 'Perak war' (see Chai Hon-chan: *The Development of British Malaya 1896-1909*, Kuala Lumpur, 1964, pp.4 et seq.). Clause X of the agreement provided that the collection and control of all revenues and the general administration of the State should be "regulated under the advice" of the Resident.

ments which have traditionally buttressed the conventional approach – such as the rationalisation that the Malays were "child-like" and required European guidance. But it is worth making the point that, while it is quite true that great disturbances were wracking the Malay states at this time, these themselves were in large measure the outcome of disintegrative forces traceable to capitalist penetration of the region. The growing importance of tin mining and the consequently accelerated immigration of Chinese miners cannot, for instance, be seen in isolation from a growing British and world demand for tin, and much of the peninsular trouble which agitated business circles in the Straits Settlements stemmed from gang warfare between rival groups of miners and their respective Malay patrons.

Any satisfactory explanation of British intervention must involve an analysis of the evolution of British and world capitalism. For the first two-thirds of the 19th century, British economic dominance – in commerce and shipping as well as in manufacturing industry – had largely dictated the nature of her foreign economic policies. Given freedom of access, the British trader was confident of making profitable sales and of securing the raw materials for home industry and the food for its workers. In South East Asia, a treaty concluded with the Dutch in 1824 in effect defined respective regional spheres of influence. With Singapore booming, the British navy in undisputed command of the Eastern seas, and British industrial pre-eminence virtually unchallenged, the next forty years were ones of bustling and profitable British economic activity. Unlike the Dutch, who were forced by their own economic backwardness to secure what they could from their colonies by state monopolistic methods, the British relied upon the enterprise of individuals to seek out commercial opportunities and to turn them to profit.[2]

As the 1860s gave way to the 1870s, it became increasingly clear that a major shift was taking place in the international economic constellation. In particular, British manufacturing and trading leadership was encountering increasingly effective competition from rapidly industrialising rivals such as Germany and the United States of America. Bismarkian unification, domestic 'liberalism', and paternalistic authoritarianism were transforming the former into a major power. Elsewhere on the continent parallel developments were unfolding. The gap between Britain as leader and the others was narrowing:

> ". . . while taxonomically Britain was still far more advanced than her continental emulators around 1870, was 'mature' where they were 'immature', *in terms of capacity to grow her lead had disappeared* . . . ".[3]

American industrial development leapt ahead after the end of the civil war and was generating exports in growing quantities and a hunger for

raw material imports, both of which impelled keen interest in the further shores of the Pacific. As early as the 1870s, astute European observers were confidently predicting US industrial and commercial ascendancy in the not too distant future. It was a daunting prospect for the British, whose self-confidence was in any case being slowly sapped after a century of international supremacy.

The reasons for this are complex, but certainly the onset of the "great depression" in 1873 was to provoke much heart-searching. Agriculture was plunged into acute distress by the mounting flood of cheap food from the vast territories in the Americas and Australasia opened up by European capital and labour in the preceding decades. Industrial flunctuations were becoming steadily more violent, with greater and greater dislocation and unemployment in the troughs of successive slumps. Britain's share of world trade shrank from 23 per cent to 19 per cent from 1876 to 1885, and whereas UK international trade had grown at an annual average rate of 4.6 per cent between 1841-71, it achieved a rate of only 2.9 per cent between 1870 and 1900 (and of 2.5 per cent between 1880 and 1910).[4] Social problems, such as inadequate housing and working-class malnutrition, were proving far more intractable than optimists had at one time envisaged. Besides, there were subtle cultural influences at work which undermined the certainties of the high-tide of the Victorian era. Long before the trauma of the first world war, British imperial aggression and ambition had ebbed.[5]

Nonetheless, it was quite clear that something would have to be done to meet the challenges of the 1870s and 1880s. It is in itself a significant comment on how seriously matters were viewed by the British ruling classes that they could so comparatively readily abandon positions so long held as to have become almost second nature to them. Thus it was in the question of acquiring colonies. During the heyday of Britain's economic primacy, colonies had come to be regarded as anachronistic survivals of an earlier age, rendered unnecessary by the evolution of modern manufactures and salesmanship. It is, of course, true that while Britain did shed some territory during this period – not always voluntarily – she never ceased to acquire piecemeal, as opportunity presented, other territories which it would have been considered foolhardy to let slip once fortuitously or by design within reach. Nevertheless, such acquisitions were frequently the result of local initiatives, not always greeted with pleasure and gratitude in London, for the centre had to take into account the worldwide picture, while local interests not unnaturally responded to more immediate needs and pressures. The case of Malaya affords an instructive illustration in this respect.

From the bases obtained by Britain in Penang (1786), Singapore

(1819) and Malacca (1824), entrepreneurs – both British and Chinese – had succeeded in devising a great variety of means of profiting from the neighbouring Malay states.[6] However, as alien-orientated economic activities multiplied in the peninsula, they subtly undermined traditional socio-political structures, and gave rise to the kind of disturbances which were, as we noted, to afford a pretext for direct British intervention. But, great though the pressure had been for some time prior to 1874 from the Straits Settlement business community for just such a move, it took other considerations to push London into acquiescence. What were these?

Leaving aside the more general, which we mentioned briefly above,[7] we may note the following. In the first place, Whitehall had good cause to view with apprehension the increased activity of imperialist rivals in the immediate South East Asian region. France, for instance, was busily engaged in extending its control and influence to the north – in Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. American nationals were eagerly in pursuit of economic openings throughout the region, and had already – from the British point of view – encroached upon inviolable British interests in both North Borneo and North Sumatra. But, significantly, it was Germany which seemed to pose the most tangible threat.

Germans had long been resident in the region, engaging in business and trade. In Singapore, the firm of Behn Meyer had been founded as early as 1840, and became one of the most flourishing in the colony; it was joined by Rautenberg Schmidt and Company in 1848 and by Puttfarcken, Rheiner and Company in 1857.[8] To be sure, the firms of many nations operated under the Union Jack umbrella in Singapore. But Germany posed a special threat with her combination of booming and highly efficient industry, disciplined and hard-working population, military traditions, and openly acknowledged imperial ambitions. By 1871 the original German firms in Singapore had been joined by seven more, while the German navy was ostentatiously making its presence felt locally.[9] Concurrently, Germany was busily engaged in extending her general power and influence in the Pacific – including, notably, at a later date, shows of particular interest in North Borneo and territorial acquisitions in East New Guinea and the Caroline Islands. Nor should we forget that the scandalous scramble for Africa was just around the historical corner nor that China was in the midst of the very process of being carved up into "spheres of influence"; from both Germany was to come out the richer. In the circumstances prudence alone counselled that Britain should move to consolidate her regional position against actual or potential trade and territorial challengers.

Then, in 1869, with the opening of the Suez Canal, the strategic importance of the Straits of Malacca to British trade routes was im-

measurably enhanced. It became more than ever vital to secure effective control now that virtually all of the steadily increasing volume of shipping from westwards of South East Asia would use the Straits – direct trade with Java had been of some importance when the Cape of Good Hope route was the only one available. Concurrently, British dependence upon both trade and foreign investment was scaling new heights.[10] In the whole complex of trade "East of Suez" the British base in Singapore played an essential and singular role, which no threat from the mainland to the north could be permitted to jeopardize – something later to be underlined by the swift Japanese successes in the Pacific war.

Moreover, the opening of the Canal and the rapid improvements in shipping taking place at the same time encouraged a greatly increased number of Europeans to venture as far afield as South East Asia and to settle there, temporarily or permanently. The distance from London to Singapore had been reduced from 12,000 to 8,000 miles, while the fastest passage time went down from 116 days in 1867 to 42 in 1870 (*Glasgow* to Singapore, *including stops*). Naturally, a considerable proportion of those involved in this growing human traffic were British, and both the British navy, *en route*, and the British authorities, on the spot, had a clear obligation to see to their interests. By the same token, it was clear that the other major powers with a growing stake in the region would also seek to safeguard the legitimate interests of their nationals, thus necessarily entailing increased concern with and presence in the area, with the distinct possibility of pretexts arising (or being deliberately manufactured) for intervention and annexation. With the arrival of steam, too, coaling stations assumed paramount commercial and strategic importance – Britain's annexation of Labuan, off North Borneo, in 1846 had greatly excited and exercised the Dutch.

Securing the Straits of Malacca was of the utmost importance to achievement of all other British objectives. The eastern reaches of the Straits were already effectively dominated by Penang, Malacca and Singapore. But Dutch control did not run all the way up the east coast or to the northern tip of Sumatra. There was always in the circumstances the danger of a third, and potentially hostile and expansionist, power obtaining a foothold in independent Acheh.[11] Again, the problem of piracy was becoming an extremely pressing one, of constant concern to all European residents – and not least these engaged in trade – in the region. (It is one of the ironies of history that this piracy was in large measure created by European destruction of indigenous trade and shipping and of much local industry.) Effective suppression of piracy and English control of the Straits could only be attained by co-operation with the Dutch. Britain much preferred to have Holland

installed in the neighbouring Indonesian archipelago rather than any more dangerous imperialist rival: from the Dutch neither British authorities nor British traders had now anything to fear. Accordingly, in the Sumatra Treaty of 1871, Britain freed Dutch hands for the subjugation of Acheh in return for an understanding that British trade in the Netherlands East Indies was to be treated on exactly the same basis as Dutch (free trade having been legislated for the archipelago by enactments of 1870).[12]

As we noted, settlers in the Straits Settlements had always taken a keen interest in the economic potential of the Malay states. European merchants advanced substantial sums of money to Chinese merchants in Singapore in the middle decades of the 19th century so that they, in turn, could finance the opening of gambier and pepper plantations in Johore under the *kangchu* system.[13] The produce passed out through Singapore to world markets, enriching those who handled it along the way. Europeans also planted directly on their own account, experimenting – on the whole unsuccessfully – with a variety of crops, such as pepper, tea, coffee, cotton, tobacco, cinnamon and sugar, in coastal stretches of the mainland accessible from the Straits Settlements. As Jackson has pointed out, Europeans in Malaya in mid-nineteenth century regarded themselves as permanent residents to a far greater extent than was subsequently to be the case. Also, they were to a significant degree drawn from a social class whose traditional pattern of investment was in land, from whatever occupation the capital had been amassed (often from trade). What they sought, therefore, were permanent estates. In this their requirements differed radically from those of the Chinese, who wanted

> ". . . crops that would grow almost anywhere with a minimum of care, that gave quick returns and that required a relatively small capital investment."[14]

What the Europeans wanted was permanent title to land, enabling them to sink capital in improvements and to pass the property on to heirs. Conditions in the Malay states did not favour fulfilment of such ambitions in the last two decades of the century. Moreover, the early crops ventured by Europeans were ecologically rather ill-fitted to Malayan conditions, a disadvantage which the Chinese circumvented by practising shifting cultivation.

Naturally, frustrated European owners of capital in the Straits Settlements constituted one interest group pressing for British intervention in the Malay states. Those involved in the tin industry were clearly another. Demand for tin rose steadily throughout the 19th century, in response to developments such as the food canning industry, and the manufacture of tin-plated oil barrels and corrugated roofing.[15] In Britain consumption of the metal rose five-fold in the first half of

the century, and more than doubled again in the following thirty years. The price of common block tin per ton climbed from £69 in 1842 to £152 in 1872. Cornish tin met demand for most of the first fifty years of the century. Thereafter, developments favoured importation. The prohibitive tariff sheltering the interests of the industry in Cornwall were greatly reduced in 1842, and tin imported from British colonies in particular was given preference. In addition, tin-plate manufacturers preferred the purer alluvial tin from mines such as those in Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies to the lode ore tin from Cornwall (which, in any case, was working out).

The mining of tin in Malaya can be traced back in written records to the ninth century, but archaeological evidence suggests an even earlier origin. Demand, primarily until the second half of the 19th century from India and China, had called forth an export of over 2,400 tons a year from the Malay states *via* the Straits Settlements by the 1840s. But thereafter Western demand gradually assumed the predominant place in the tin market, with Britain playing a particularly prominent role. Whatever had been the case before, already by the end of the 18th century it was mainly Chinese miners who were extracting the ore in the Malay states – principally Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan. Actual arrangements varied in detail, but commonly in the first half of the 19th century what would happen was this: a rich Chinese merchant in one of the Straits Settlements would advance capital to a Malay chief who would, in turn, hire Chinese labourers to work mines in his domain, on conditions sufficiently lucrative to enable him to support the retainers appropriate to his status and essential for his personal security and that of his mines.

A number of Malay rulers such as Raja Juma'at in Lukut had succeeded by the 1860s in turning rich tin findings into the basis of stable, well-regulated mining settlements with flourishing populations and adequate amenities. But strife between contending Malay chiefs, each with his private army and each supported by the Chinese miners dependent upon him for livelihood and protection, broke out in a serious form in the late 1860s in Selangor and elsewhere in the tin belt. The British authorities, whatever their rhetoric, were necessarily involved from the outset, as both British and Straits Settlement Chinese interests were badly hit by the civil wars and disturbances. Malay states tin imported into the Straits Settlement, having climbed to 4,713 tons in 1871, shrank to 2,335 in 1873 as a result:

> ". . . the returns of the value of imports at Penang during the years 1872 and 1873 showed a decrease of nearly 1,000,000 dollars, owing to the cessation of the importation of tin to that island from Larut."[16]

As Yip Yat Hoong comments:

"These disturbances were used as one of the pretexts for British intervention in Perak in 1874 . . . The threat to the trade of Penang during 1872-3 provided one excuse for this change of policy."[17]

A great deal has been written about the circumstances surrounding conclusion of the Pangkor Engagement of 1874, which opened the way to eventual colonisation of the whole of Malaya by Britain.[18] Under the terms of the agreement, the putative Sultan of Perak, as we noted above, was constrained to accept a British Resident. The object of British policy, which had been preceded by much sabre-rattling and gun-boat diplomacy, was to put an end to squabbling between rival Chinese interest groups and to inter-locking and exacerbating Malay dynastic succession disputes. In this it was not immediately successful. Nonetheless, the Engagement was to provide the precedent which led successively to the incorporation of Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong (Negri Sembilan) by 1875; Pahang by 1888; Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu by 1909; and Johore by 1914. The first four of these states, which economically were the most important to Britain, were brought together as the Federated Malay States in 1896. The remaining states preferred to remain outside this grouping, and were consequently known as the Unfederated Malay States; rather than Residents, they had British "Advisers" whose powers were more narrowly circumscribed. The three states of north Borneo (Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo – now Sabah) were brought under British "protection" in 1888. Thus, albeit in a variety of constitutional forms, all that now constitutes Malaysia and Singapore was firmly under British direction by the end of the 19th century (Johore had had a close understanding with Britain from as early as 1862, and in 1895 was given a written constitution drafted by British lawyers).

The British authorities in the Straits Settlements had frequently been bombarded with petitions from the merchant community demanding more effective British action to suppress piracy and civil disorder in the Malay states. This pressure became intense as conditions deteriorated in the early 1870s. Those with investments in the peninsular states, and those whose business had particularly suffered as a result of the disruption of tin exporting, were prominent in this lobbying. In 1872 there were strong petitions from the Chambers of Commerce of Malacca and Singapore, and in 1873 248 big Chinese merchants in the Straits Settlements made another appeal. In London itself, we should note specifically the parts played by, firstly, the London agents of Paterson, Simons and Co., a firm whose partners had been active in a variety of ways in the Malay states for some time prior to 1874, and had come to realise from their own experience the necessity of political authority to back up business initiative, and,

secondly, by the Selangor Tin Company under the directorship of W.H. Read, a man of many interests focussing on the area, and well-connected in the City. Everyone, whether European or Chinese, who had risked capital in the Malay states had an interest in bringing pressure on the British to take such steps as would safeguard their monies and enterprise.[19]

It is worth digressing to make the point that the distinction often drawn in conventional historical texts between "economic" and "military" (or "strategic" or "political") motives is an invalid one. It is, whether consciously or not, conducive to blurring the imperialistic driving force behind Western expansionism in the modern era. But even seizure of a barren rock, yielding nothing in economic terms, and costly to maintain as a garrison, is undertaken, ultimately, for economic motives – for instance, the guarding of sea routes plied constantly by vessels of the occupying power and carrying profitable cargoes. This much ought really to be self-evident. But in any case the *costs* of such "uneconomic" undertakings are borne by one set of people (the generality of the occupying power's taxpayers), while the *returns*, in the form of reducing the risks of loss to cargo in transit, accrue to quite another set of people (those with portfolio or entrepreneurial stakes in the relevant undertakings); obviously, while the latter group forms a tiny minority of the population of a country like Britain, they exercise a political influence out of all proportion to their numbers, whereas the former can exert but little – if any – real influence, especially upon foreign policy decisions.

That this is not of merely theoretical or methodological interest can be shown by reference to the Malayan case. It is quite true that securing the Straits of Malacca from both piracy and the unwelcome intrusion of powerful third powers in order to protect the trade routes between the Far East and the West – routes vital, be it noted, to British prosperity – was an overriding imperative of British policy. But the Malay states were by no means barren rocks: on the contrary, their economic potential had long been evident. Purely "military-strategic" objectives might well have been attained by judicious troop and naval deployments in a few selected locations along the west coast of the Malayan peninsula in addition to the Straits Settlements. But it is clear that, in one way or another, from the 18th century onwards, the British had actively sought such economic advantage as they might from Malaya and Borneo. Now, it is quite true that there had been many failures and disappointments for European investors in the Malay states – for example Paterson, Simons & Co. in Pahang and W.T. Lewis in the Krian rice lands in the 1860s – but this is surely just the point. These setbacks had taught businessmen with local experience two painfully

acquired lessons: first that modern political administration was essential if ambitious projects with long maturation periods were to have reasonable prospects of success; and, second, that capital could only be risked in greater volume when appropriate infrastructure (roads, railways, ports, storage facilities, and the like) had been provided, and when suitable land and company law, banking and credit facilities, and so on, had been made available. These necessary tasks could only be undertaken by, or under the auspices of, western-style government.

Here again, much existing Western scholarship draws the wrong conclusion from accurate enough observations. In defence of the thesis that the principal concern of the British was restoration of law and order, it has been noted that, in fact, British economic interests gained but little ground as a result of political developments in the Malay states after 1874, at least in the first two or three decades. But this merely illustrates very cogently two significant points: one, that laying the needed physical, institutional and legal foundations took time; and, two, that even with political command over the Malay states, the British found it difficult to make economic headway against existing enterprises in Asian hands. To put the second point in another way, without British usurpation of political authority in Malaya, it would not have been possible for Britain so to hog the benefits of the rapid growth of raw material exports, stimulated by soaring demand from booming industrial countries (particularly the United States of America), from the end of the 19th century to the 1930s. The evidence suggests very strongly, as we shall see, that – left to themselves – the peoples of the peninsula would have risen to the challenge of rising world demand for their products, and would, contrary to what actually transpired, have reaped the fruits of their land and labour.

It is worth giving a few examples of precisely how British political power was deployed to achieve economic ends such as edging both Malay and Chinese out of lucrative sectors. Take, for instance, the tin industry which, for obvious reasons, the British were extremely eager to dominate. The Chinese were both well established and highly experienced in the industry, and their methods were so much better adjusted to local conditions than those favoured by the first Western companies who tried to breach their monopoly in the 1870s and 1880s that the attempts invariably and ignominiously failed. Step by step, however, the advantages enjoyed by the Chinese miners and smelters were whittled away. The British authorities first succeeded in breaking the hold of the Chinese in smelting. This they did by granting monopoly rights to the Straits Trading Company[20] and by manipulating freight rates and duties in their favour. In the actual extraction of the ore, Western companies were, by the end of the century, finally enabled

to establish a foothold through a succession of British administrative provisions. These included: British land policy which, in effect, forced Chinese and Malay title-holders to sell out to British concerns; and government action against Chinese revenue farming, control of opium, and secret societies, all of which had contributed to Chinese dominance via their effects on control of the mining labour force and on Chinese capital accumulation.[21] The British administration also blocked by fiscal and legislative means attempts by American interests to move into smelting. (This was to rankle: for decades thereafter British manipulation of the international tin industry was a standing affront to American industrialists and politicians, and helped in due course to shape Washington's attitudes to European colonialism in South East Asia.)[22]

The hand of government was no less helpful to Western, and in particular to British, interests in the plantation sector. As in tin-mining, experience in the 1870s and 1880s showed that Europeans found it difficult to compete without certain measures weighted in their favour. These were naturally forthcoming. They took a variety of forms. Special land regulations, introduced in the Federated Malay States in 1897, and indeed a major motive for formation of the Federation, operated blatantly against Chinese and other Asian planters and in the interests of big (that is, European) estates.[23] In 1905 in Selangor it was decreed that no land abutting on a Government road was ". . . to be alienated to a native without the previous sanction of the Resident." The Resident candidly revealed that he was thus ". . . attempting to concentrate native gardeners in specified areas, and to discourage the occupation by them of land which may be usefully reserved for scientific planting." How "scientific" Western methods actually were compared with those of local smallholders was shortly to be revealed, but it should be stressed that the British authorities were not interested in developing rubber production as such, but rather in developing it in European hands and for European profit – with Britain taking the largest share possible. Generous official loans were made available to European planters to assist them set up in business. And then there was the key question of labour supply.

Here, the Chinese had always unquestionably held the advantage, for a variety of reasons associated with the methods by which they recruited, shipped, organised, employed and controlled labourers from China. Again, government intervention was to prove decisive in providing an adequately numerous pool of available "free" labour. Through the Indian Immigration Committee and Fund, a massive importation of Indian labourers was organised. These formed a comparatively cheap and docile labour force in circumstances in which

Chinese and Malays remained reluctant to oblige (the Chinese because they preferred working for themselves or for their own compatriots, the Malays in part because it was British policy to keep them in the subsistence sector, in part because they were better off anyway in rice-growing, fishing or smallholding than they would have been toiling on European plantations for the going returns and in the prevailing conditions). Concurrently, the British attacked what they regarded as the abuses by which the Chinese employing class guaranteed the allegiance of their labourers. It was hardly philanthropy which determined the British authorities to assail the Chinese secret societies, to abolish the Discharge Ticket System,[24] and to replace the "farming" out to rich Chinese of collection of the opium duty by direct government collection,[25] to take but some examples; on the contrary, all such measures were aimed at adding as many Chinese "coolies" to the "industrial reserve army" of "free" labour available for employment on Western estates and in Western mines as possible, the better to hold wages down.

Some idea of conditions on the rubber plantations may be had from the death rates prevailing among coolies around 1910. For indentured labourers it was annually about 200 per 1000; at the same time and in the same areas the European death rate was less than 10 per thousand. Planters frankly recognised the true nature of the relationship binding them and their hired hands, and physical beatings were commonplace, intimidation incessant. Desperate *jacqueries* of labourers driven beyond the limits of endurance were frequent. A number of startlingly candid portraits, by planters, of day-to-day life on pioneering estates have survived to achieve publication.[26] We have, however, little in the way of written record from the side of the oppressed; that this is so is hardly surprising, but the lacuna remains as a challenge to those of us who care for the accuracy of the historical record.

Social policy, too, was in general attuned to the needs of Western enterprise. Construction of social capital on behalf of tin mines and rubber plantations had first priority in FMS expenditure: from 1900 to 1912 more than half went on such public works as roads, railways and docks.[27] A further major component of government expenditure was for military purposes – both for maintaining internal security (namely for the imposition of British rule upon a hostile Malayan population), and as a contribution to defence of the vital Straits of Malacca artery. Bureaucratic salaries took another sizeable chunk of official expenditure.[28] The needs and welfare of the inhabitants of Malaya figured rather low on the scale of priorities, except insofar as they interlocked with Britain's – as, for instance, in the training of a small Malay elite for administrative purposes.

We may gain some insight into British attitudes by citing some

revealing statements of it from official reports.[29] The first, from the Perak Annual Report of 1890, deals with the question of teaching the "natives" English:

> "The one danger to be guarded against is an attempt to teach English indiscriminately. It could not well be taught except in a very few schools, and I do not think it is at all advisable to attempt to give to the children of an agricultural population an indifferent knowledge of a language that to all but the very few would unfit them for the duties of life and make them discontented with anything like manual labour. At present, a large majority of Malay boys and girls have little or no opportunity of learning their own language, and if the Government undertakes to teach them this, the Koran, and something about figures and geography (especially of the Malay peninsula and Archipelago), this knowledge, and the habits of industry, punctuality and obedience that they will gain by regular attendance at school will be of material advantage to them, and assist them to earn a livelihood in any vocation, while they will be likely to prove better citizens and more useful members of the community than if imbued with a smattering of English ideas which they would find could not be realized."

The second, on the same theme, is from the *Perak Government Gazette* (6 July 1894), Resident Swettenham writing:

> "I am not in favour of extending the number of 'English' schools except where there is some palpable desire that English should be taught. Whilst we teach children to read and write and count in their own language, or in Malay . . . we are *safe*. Beyond that, I should like to see the boys taught useful industries and the girls weaving, embroidery and mat-making, all profitable and all practised with a high degree of excellence in different states of the Peninsula."

Finally, the views of a British Inspector of Schools in 1895:

> "Thousands of boys are taken away from idleness, and whilst learning to read and write their own language, to cipher a little, to know something of geography, to write Malay in the Roman character, and to take an active interest in physical exercise and manly sports, they at the same time acquire habits of industry, obedience, punctuality, order, neatness, cleanliness, and general good behaviour . . . After a boy has been a year or two at school he is found to be . . . more respectful and dutiful . . . and with sense enough not to entertain any ambition beyond following the humble home occupations he has been taught to respect. Our schools furnish good clerks . . . and I am of the opinion that if there is any lingering dislike of the 'white man', the school tends greatly to remove it . . . The education afforded is suited to the pupil's station in life . . . It is the mere smattering of English and English ideas that is harmful, and which in India causes the country to 'swarm with half-starved, discontented men, who consider manual labour beneath them, because they know a little English' . . . A simple vernacular education will, however, tend to make them better citizens and more useful members of the community."

This policy of consciously seeking to ossify Malay rural society was only part of the pattern. Other components included British land policy, the strengthening, or rather modification, of the position of the Malay

aristocracy, and encouragement of racial and occupational pluralism. Something should be said about each.

The land policy pursued in the FMS had two purposes: first to ensure that plantations had access on terms acceptable to them to the land best suited for their purposes and that mining enterprises were similarly accommodated (though plantation leases were in perpetuity while mining ones were, given the nature of tin-mining, of fairly short duration); and second to preserve Malay rural society by reserving to them large areas of land and by preventing them from selling existing holdings to rubber estates. These aims were accomplished by introduction of the 'Torrens' system of registered title to land to the Malay states in the 1880s, and by a series of government measures, such as the Malay Reservation Act of 1913 and the Rice Lands Enactment of 1917.

Before British intervention, the real focus of local power was the district chief, drawn from a distended aristocracy. In many cases the Sultan's writ ran but feebly through the state he nominally ruled, power resting with the territorial chiefs among whom it was divided. Succession struggles were frequent, with intermittent civil wars, and because there were fewer positions affording access to the revenues levied from the peasantry than there were members of the ruling class, there never lacked for discontented outsiders bidding for power, giving rise to a chronically unstable situation. The villages themselves were clusters of peasant families headed by a *penghulu* drawn from one of the leading families; the *penghulu* spoke for the village in its dealings with the world beyond its confines.[36] The British made drastic changes in this structure, changes with such fundamental consequences that their impact is being worked out to this day.

The most important of these changes were as follows. Under the 'Torrens' system, all rights in and over land were vested in the Sultans until granted by them to landholders, and all land dealings had to be recorded in the state Land Offices. This was at once a great extension in their nominal authority. In addition, each Sultan was provided by the British with state-wide modern administrations which saw to it that state revenues were efficiently raised. As, at the same time, new enterprises were booming and population was streaming into the FMS, it was possible to guarantee to the Sultans and their ever-increasing families and retinues assured incomes of a reliability and magnitude unknown in the past. On top of all this, the British fostered pomp and pageantry on a lavish scale, endowing the Sultans with a majesty that had not hitherto attached either to their persons or their office. Threats from rivals were virtually eliminated by British pacification followed by elaboration of effective police forces: in addition to a constabulary

staffed by Malays and dispersed throughout each state down to village level, there was a force consisting largely of Indians, especially Sikhs, detailed to keep order in the cities and to act as a reserve in time of need. A Special Branch, headed by British officers, was entrusted with detecting and weeding out "subversive" elements in society. The village headmen (*penghulus*) ceased to be representatives of the settlements in which they exercised their jurisdiction, and became instead appointees of the British, often strangers to the communities to which they were posted. Finally, a privileged class of Malay administrators, drawn from the traditional ruling families, and educated at the "Malay Eton" – an English-style Public School established in 1905 as the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, Perak – came to dominate all aspects of government and later, too, of politics; the British were sowing the seeds of subsequent neo-colonialism, as, indeed, they were perfectly conscious of doing, as this admission by the Inspector of Malay Schools for the FMS from 1903 to 1906 makes clear:

> "We are, at best, creating an Asiatic governing class rather than Asiatic races capable of self-government."[31]

It is worth underlining the great manipulative importance to Britain of promoting and fostering the myth of "preserving" the Malay "feudal" structure. By enhancing the formal status of the Malay Sultans (and enriching them); by co-opting much of the Malay aristocracy; by recruiting large numbers of ordinary Malays into the repressive police force; and by restricting the bulk of the Malay population to the rural areas and rural subsistence occupations (and by attempting to restrict their mental horizons to deference and basket-weaving), the British consciously sought to secure and ensure socio-political hegemony and some kind of minimally plausible ideological under-pinning for it. In the mythology, Britain (the *de facto* colonial power, and principal economic gainer from the arrangement) was simply "advising" (in the exercise of a beneficient trusteeship), the "traditional" Malay rulers, and helping them safeguard the (mystified) Malay society and culture in the rush of economic development. We shall have occasion to observe the functioning and durability of the resulting symbiosis between British colonialism and economic interests and the Malay upper classes, through all their variations, in succeeding chapters.

At the same time we should see behind the facade inspired by British imperial interests. In the first place, the Sultans had been politically and economically neutered, for they had been forced to surrender the rights of raising their own private armies and of collecting revenues in their own rights and for their own selves and purposes. In their stead, they were treated by the British to a cycle of ceremonial and recreational

diversions (such as the "fish drives, water sports, amateur theatricals, picnics at waterfalls, displays of fireworks and other forms of entertainment" laid on for them at the first Durbar in 1897). In the second place, British hegemony relegated the once-powerful chiefs to purely symbolic roles, shorn of their military and fiscal rights, and more or less reduced to ritual attendance at refurbished traditional functions (such as the installation of the ruler) or newly-introduced "traditional" functions sponsored by the British such as the Durbars. Once recalcitrant chiefs had been put down (hung, forced to flee the country, or exiled to some remote spot such as the Seychelles), the more compliant remainder were compensated for their loss of pride and independence by the grant of "royal pensions", and the British had a free hand for both the collection of revenue and the enforcement of "law and order" (a *British* law and order, which inevitably ran counter to *Malay* practices), and the imposition of British colonial rule.

Increasingly, moreover, as British policy pulled together the states of the peninsula, "states rights" resistance was tempered by realization that national perspectives, inevitably reminiscent of the "golden era" of the Malacca Sultanate before European interference, were opening up. British administrators, therefore, had to tread very warily in achievement of their objectives, encouraging in every way open to them the impression that British and Malay (read upper and middle-class Malay) ultimate objectives were in harmony, while at the same time working to establish a more efficient centralised modern bureaucratic administration in which anachronistic Malay pre-capitalist encrustations were as tactfully as possible consigned to gilded display cabinets. After formation of the FMS, great restlessness ruffled the Malay community as evidence accumulated of the British desire to "rationalise" administration as far as possible throughout the peninsula. The zeal of the handful of British bureaucrats who, in effect, ruled Malaya had, on occasion, to defer to adamant resistance from the Sultans and their Malay advisers. Swettenham, talking of what he identified as "the political problem", openly stressed the importance of the British Residents *identifying* themselves with the Malays, learning their language to the point of speaking it fluently, sympathizing with their customs, showing consideration for their prejudices, consulting them about everything, making friends with them, and "getting at their hearts".[32]

It was when the limits of this kind of accommodation were being reached, which more or less coincided with the retirement of Swettenham himself (in 1904), that active steps were taken (notably establishment of the Malay College the following year) deliberately to create a "modern" cadre of hand-picked Malays, while preserving the increasingly hollow, if showily ostentatious, framework of "feudal"

Malay society. Besides, by the early 1900s, Western enterprise was at last coming into its own as a consequence of the preparatory spade-work of men like Swettenham, and "rationalisation" of administration was ever more urgent. New and more aggressive Western business interests wanted not only this, but closer involvement in the decision-making processes – decisions to be carried out by a Western-style administration incorporating Western-educated Malays – particularly with onset of the great rubber boom, which was taking off in 1905-6. As a consequence, a representative Federal Council was inaugurated in 1909. But there was to be no resolution of contradictions, as Chapter Three (below) makes clear.

Indeed how could there be? In the final analysis any socio-political-structural *gestalt* assembled by compromises, jockeying for position, and shifting alliances was basically the vehicle for British exploitation of the Malayan economy. And at the base of the pyramid upon which sat the imperialists were the Malay masses. "Indeed the achievements of the British were impressive," commented one writer, "(b)ut who were the recipients of all these benefits? The Government gave the Malay beautiful laws he did not understand, hospitals with Chinese cooks, vernacular schools with Inspectors who could neither read nor write his language, a system of surveys which required a year or longer if he wanted a grant, post offices without country deliveries, a savings bank which he probably never heard of, waterworks which supplied only the towns, State Councils and Sanitary Boards whose proceedings were conducted behind closed doors, markets where the price of foodstuffs was always increasing whilst he could not sell his own agricultural produce without first paying a tax, and a railway whose increasing fares made it difficult for him to travel."[33] Nor was this by any means the worst part of the picture, for rising population, extension of money economy, the leasing of land to plantations and mines, the working of Muslim inheritance law, and introduction of a new and alien land system all tended to increase pressures on the Malay rural masses, jeopardizing their condition and encouraging the incurrence of credit burdens and indebtedness. Spokesmen for peasant grievances arose from among the religious teachers and those who had studied in the Middle East and who lived amongst them.

British policy towards the other races was also an important element in the *gestalt*. The hundreds of thousands of poor Chinese and Indian labourers deliberately drawn into the Malay states to serve in the mines and plantations, to provide dock and railway labour, and to man a host of menial wage jobs in the modern sector, were treated in different ways according to origin, and each community was, as far as possible, isolated from the Malay masses. South Indian Tamils were largely segre-

gated in labour "lines" in the big rubber plantations. Immigrants from other parts of India fanned out into petty shop-keeping (and money-lending), clerical work, the professions (especially law), and a variety of other urban pursuits. The Chinese community was criss-crossed inside itself by divisions: long-settled Straits Chinese and recent immigrants; rich Malaya-born employers and poor China-born coolies; one dialect group and another (Cantonese, Hokkien, etc.); the English-educated and the Chinese-educated; and – latterly – supporters of the KMT (Chinese Nationalists) and of the CPC (Chinese Communists). Malays were, of course, predominantly in the rural sector (with some in the police, or in wage labour in towns or on plantations), except for the leaders drawn from the traditional ruling classes, many of whom were absorbed into administration, government and the armed forces. It was a patchwork which the British – for obvious reasons – did little to harmonise.

On the contrary, the colonial authorities were well aware of the advantages which accrued to them from fostering communal disunity. The understanding was – at official level – not quite as crudely expressed perhaps as it was in the business community. On estates, young managers entering upon their duties were quite explicitly advised by more experienced old hands to seek a properly diversified labour force – Tamils, Javanese, Chinese – in order specifically to prevent the formation of effective labour organisations.[34] Recruitment of Sikhs for both public and private police forces was another glaring example of the callous and quite conscious utilisation of racial fissures in support of the imposition of colonial social control.

It might charitably be thought that much of British policy issued from ignorance and lack of foresight. It is quite true that a common assumption in the pre-1914 period was that the great majority of Indians and Chinese at any time in Malaya were transients – working hard and saving hard in order to return eventually to their homelands. Incontrovertible evidence to the contrary did not surface until the 1920s. However, this having been said, it in no way exonerates the British from criticism of their social policies. We have seen how they viewed education of the Malays. Their attitudes to the Chinese and Indian communities were even more cavalier. It was left to the plantations themselves to do what they might about educating youngsters born to Tamil labourers; the result was accordingly very little. The consequences of such shrugging-off of responsibility are evident to this day in Malaysia in the comparatively steep hurdles facing the descendants of such families in the educational race. As for the Chinese, responsibility for any educational provision devolved, *faute de mieux*, upon, on the one hand, rich Chinese benefactors who endowed schools

for children of their rich and poor dialect-group compatriots and, on the other, Christian orders anxious to combine enlightenment with proselytization. Towards the end of the 19th century, a limited number of English language schools appeared, intended primarily for the sons of the more prominent Malays, and for a limited number of sons of Chinese, Indians and others rich enough to pay the fees. But this merely served creation of an elite drawn from all the communities, and contributed nothing to integration of the communities themselves. Indeed, these elites were to share the British desire to see the communities segregated as much as possible in the interests of social, political and economic control.

Such a socializing pot-pourri obviously militated against attainment of cross-communal cohesion and accord. Indeed, the miracle is, on reflection, that in the day-to-day transactions and shoulder-rubbings of the communities so little friction occurred, so few racial incidents flared. This remains an outstanding and enduring tribute to the commonsense and tolerance of ordinary members of all communities – even when, on occasion, some of their "betters" were (for their own political reasons) bent upon whipping up racial antagonisms. This quite remarkable steadfastness has survived innumerable challenges and snares to this day. Inevitably, though,

> "(f)or the majority of the population, the chances of communicating and interacting among themselves (were) limited, and their separation and ignorance of one another's way of life . . . led to the formation of stereotypes and prejudices. In other words, although the lower classes of the various races are in almost the same economic position, differences and racial antipathy (were) widespread among them, and these prevent(ed) the recognition of a common fate and destiny."[35]

It should be added that nothing so alarmed the British nor triggered such oppression as clear evidence that nationalist and progressive groups were organising across communal lines. The fact that the peoples of Malaya did thus succeed in building bridges and living in reasonable amity one with another ought not, however, distract our attention from the harsh fact that the British colonialists can take little credit for this outcome: indeed, insofar as their policies were positive, they contributed to ethical streaming and immurement. To this judgement, though, there is one important *caveat*: Malay aristocrat, Chinese millionaire, and Indian lawyer were only too warmly encouraged to collaborate, were given every opportunity to do so, and were sedulously cultivated as allies and ultimate legatees of British imperialism.

This is not to say, however, that even at this stratified level at the top of the Malayan pyramid starry-eyed bliss at the incomparable blessings of British rule prevailed. On the contrary, even the Sultans

themselves intrigued against British political manoeuverings, fretted against the restraining yokes of British political authority, and plotted severally and in concert against its further extension. English-educated Malay aristocrats were early espousers of nationalist currents of opinion. Chinese businessmen quickly responded to the signals of nationalism from the mainland. Indian professional men played key roles in early nationalist and industrial organisations. As we shall see in due course below, it was necessary for the British carefully to screen out and groom their own most favoured candidates for the succession even from these most privileged elites. Nor is this at all surprising, since all history teaches us two incontrovertible lessons about situations of alien occupation: the first is that, whatever the circumstances, quislings can *always* be found, ready and willing to collaborate with the invaders or intruders; and the second is that national resistance will embrace people from all walks of life and all social classes from the highest to the lowest. The Vietnamese struggle affords an outstanding illustration of both truths.

As indicated above, popular resistance – both passive and active formed a continuous backdrop to British colonial rule. In the Appendix to Chapter Two, we provide an account of some of the main manifestations. As early as 1875 the first Resident of Perak, J.W.W. Birch, was murdered, having too blatantly sought to ride rough-shod over the feelings and interests of the Malays in pursuit of British objectives. The British at once launched a military campaign of suppression which at first met with scant success. Only the sending of powerful reinforcements and exemplary judicial murder of a number of Malay leaders of the revolt succeeded in turning the situation. Professor Hall, doyen of academic historians of South East Asia, himself comments:

> "For a time there was a danger of a general Malay rising and it took several years to restore law and order."[36]

The very phrase "law and order" is unfortunately redolent of the eighty years of unctuous Western "counter-insurgency" in South East Asia that were to follow. Perak was however thus "pacified" for British capital. But this was by no means the end of the matter, as we shall see.

What Britain achieved in economic terms by occupation of the Malay states and suppression of Malay nationalism (involving execution or banishment of many of the known leaders) is too well known to require lengthy rehearsal. Tin production rose from 4,200 tons in 1874 to 51,377 in 1913, while direct British participation climbed from nil to 25 per cent, smelting and trading being firmly in British hands. Rubber exports soared from 104 tons in 1905 to 56,782 in 1915 – in value terms from $529,000 to $93,660,000, or from 0.7 per cent of total

export value to 57.7 per cent. Dividends on rubber shares during these years were fabulous, often hitting 200 per cent or even 300 per cent or more per annum. What stoked demand was rapid development of car production in the United States: America regularly took up to 75 per cent of the world's supply of rubber, and of this half to three-quarters was for tyres. Malaya accounted for about two-thirds of plantation rubber entering world markets before 1914. The role of the pneumatic rubber tyre in the 1914-18 war itself drew American attention again to the strategic importance of South East Asia and its multiple products – and to the predominant position enjoyed in the region by the European colonial powers.

While prosperity was evident in the shape of proliferating Western mining and plantation enterprises and all the necessary accompanying social capital (roads, railways, processing plant, offices, and the like) – and to a degree in the shape, too, of the successful Asian smallholder and big and small businessmen – it is by no means clear what it all brought in the way of benefit to the poor toiling Indian and Chinese workers and to the ordinary Malay peasants and fishermen. Statistics adequate enough to allow us accurately to quantify their tribulations do not exist, but one thing stands out: from 1870 to 1914 the rise in per capita production far out-stripped the rise in per capita consumption of those responsible for actually producing the wealth. Indeed, it seems evident from a variety of sources that – whatever the rewards of Malay aristocrat and Chinese *towkay* – Tamil tapper, Chinese coolie, and Malay poor peasant suffered rather than gained from the process of "development". Nor need this come as any great surprise, since depressing the consumption of producers while at the same time greatly elevating output is of the essence of exploitative capitalism, not least in its colonialist expression. We do know that basic malnutrition haunted the working classes throughout this period, exposing them to the ravages of beri-beri, malaria, dysentery, cholera and smallpox.[37]

By thus prising wide open the two blades of the economic scissors – local production going up and local consumption going down – the colonial power, Britain, ensured a dramatic rise in the economic surplus at her disposal.[38] The decisions upon what to do with this greatly enhanced surplus naturally rested with British nationals, and were based upon such opportunities as offered. The choices were endless, but all ultimately rested upon the crucial factors of control and open-ended options, such as inhered in the exercise of imperial prerogatives founded upon possession of power and willingness to use it, world-wide. Depending upon circumstances, investible funds accruing from domination in Malaya might be re-invested locally (to improve servicing social capital); remitted to the metropolitan motherland to support families there, to

provide for retirement, to direct into British industry, or otherwise to help the "old country"; or simply evacuated for investment elsewhere in the world where chances beckoned. To describe this process as one of "development" of Malaya is an obvious circumlocution, deliberately confusing, on the one hand, concentration of an admittedly greatly increased volume of fixed and variable capital in the hands, principally, of aliens, and, on the other, the welfare of the indigenous peoples. Such circumlocution has – in the case of Malaya – been perpetuated by the majority of its white historians (and their most promising and ambitious local students) down to this day.

FOOTNOTES

1. For the early history of Malaya see Paul Wheatley: *The Golden Khersonese*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, 1961; R.O. Winstedt: *A History of Malaya*, Singapore, 1962; and the histories of the individual states which appeared in various numbers of the *Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society* between 1934 and 1949. For a useful bibliography see J. Bastin and R.W. Winks: *Malaysia – Selected Historical Readings*, London, 1966. The argument for an underlying continuity in British policy towards the Malay states in the 19th century – suggesting that governors of the Straits Settlement consciously pursued a policy of seeking an influence in the peninsula for decades before 1874 (and thus disputing the view that "the British authorities in Singapore were drawn into the affairs of the Peninsula", as argued by Prof. C.D. Cowan in the source cited in fn.18 below) – is put foward by N. Tarling: "Intervention and Non-intervention in Malaya", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.XXI, no.4, 1962.
2. The so-called "Culture System" by which the Dutch exploited Indonesian land and labour was more or less confined to Java, and even on Java there were numerous loopholes and exceptions: see C. Day: *The Dutch in Java*, London, 1966; G.J. Resink: *Indonesia's History Between the Myths*, The Hague, 1968; J.J. van Klaveren: *The Dutch Colonial System in the East Indies*, Rotterdam, 1953.
3. D.S. Landes: *The Unbound Prometheus*, Cambridge, 1969, pp.229-30; see also the tables on pp.194, 215 and 221 showing the higher rate of growth in Germany as compared with Britain over the second half of the century in such crucial sectors as railways, cotton spindlage, steam-power capacity, and coal and iron output. Steamship registration (net tons) moved as follows:

	U.K.	Germany
1850	168,000	–
1870	1,113,000	82,000
1890	5,043,000	724,000
1910	10,443,000	2,257,000

(Source: H. Heaton: *Economic History of Europe*, New York, 1948, p.541).

4. A. Birnie: *An Economic History of the British Isles*, London, 1948, p.299; Phyllis Deane and W.A. Cole: *British Economic Growth 1688-1959*, Cambridge, 1967, p.29.
5. See C.N. Parkinson: *East and West*, London, 1963; he notes that Britain failed to secure her position on the Malayan peninsula by annexing the southern (Malay-speaking and Muslim) states of Thailand – an omission with grave consequences for the future.

6 See Khoo Kay Kim: *The Western Malay States 1850-1873 – The Effects of Commercial Development on Malay Politics*, London, 1972; J.C. Jackson: *Planters and Speculators*, Singapore, 1968.

7. Readers are referred to the interesting discussion of the period in the early chapters of Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism*, London, 1975.

8. C.H. Turnbull: *The Straits Settlements 1826-67*, London, 1972, p.180.

9. D.J.M. Tate: *The Making of Modern South-East Asia*, Vol.I, London, 1971, p.325.

10. "In the quinquennium 1880-4 total (British) imports reached their peak value of about 36 per cent of national income . . . " (P. Deane and W.A. Cole: *op.cit.*, p.311). Cf. "The shipbuilding industry appears to have reached the peak of its relative importance in the decade 1875-84 when the estimated value of new ships built in the United Kingdom exceeded 1.6 per cent of the national income." (*ibid*, p.235). Trade, transport, and incomes from abroad, as a percentage of total British national income rose from 20.7 per cent in 1851 to 29.8 per cent in 1891 (*ibid*, p.291), while net foreign investment as a percentage of total disposition of gross national product at market prices varied as follows:

1862	1.4 per cent	
1872	7.4 per cent	
1882	4.3 per cent	
1892	3.8 per cent	
1902	1.6 per cent	
1912	7.9 per cent	(*ibid*, pp.332-3)

11. Achinese leaders did try to interest foreign powers – including Turkey, Egypt and Japan – in their struggle. In particular, they were heartened by the victories of Japan over the European power Russia in the war of 1904-5, and tried to engage in secret contacts with the Japanese. A writer noted that:

> "In 1904, when many Mohamedans set all manner of hopes upon the Russo-Japanese war, the speedy expulsion of the Dutch from Sumatra was the topic of eager conversation among the Mohamedan Bataks on the East coast of Sumatra . . . At that time people otherwise quite ignorant of politics asked questions about the state of things in Japan." (cited in Deliar Noer: *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-42*, London, 1973, p.29).

12. The reasons which impelled the Dutch to abandon monopoly, mercantilism and exclusivism were basically these: the underdevelopment of Dutch capitalism and the urgent need to open up the "Outer Islands" of Indonesia to capitalist enterprise under Dutch political authority before some stronger imperialist power intervened. Existing sources give an inadequate analysis of this; the present writer and co-author, Ernst Utrecht: *Indonesia since 1800 – An Alternative History*, Sydney, 1977, try to remedy this.

13. J.C. Jackson: *op.cit.*, p.17 *et passim*.

14. *ibid.*, p.89.

15. Exhaustive accounts of the Malayan tin industry are to be found in: Wong Lin Ken: *The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914*, Tucson, Arizona, 1965; and Yip Yat Hoong: *The Development of the Tin Mining Industry of Malaya*, Singapore, 1969.

16. L. Wray: "Some Account of the Tin Mines and Mining Industries of Perak", Perak Museum Notes, no.3, Taiping, 1894, p.3, cited in Yip Yat Hoong: *op.cit.*, p.59. Larut is in northern Perak.

17. Yip Yat Hoong: *op.cit.*, p.59.

18. Among standard works dealing with British intervention see the following: C.D. Cowan: *Nineteenth Century Malaya*, London, 1961; C.N. Parkinson: *British Intervention in Malaya, 1867-1877*, Singapore, 1960; Khoo Kay Kim: "The Origin of British Administration in Malaya", *JMBRAS*, Vol.39,

part 1, 1966; D. MacIntyre: "Britain's Intervention in Malaya: The Origin of Lord Kimberley's Instructions to Sir Andrew Clarke in 1873", *JSEAH*, Vol.2, no.3, 1961.

19. See Khoo Kay Kim: *The Western Malay States 1850-1873*, London, 1972, chapter four.

20. Herman Muhlinghaus, a partner of Brandt & Co., a Singapore agency house, had joined forces with James Sword, a partner of Gilfillan Wood & Co., to form a smelting company, called Sword & Muhlinghaus, in 1886; it went public as the Straits Trading Co.Ltd., the following year. It should be noted that the big Singapore agency houses had immense influence with government.

21. See Wong Lin Ken: *op.cit., passim*. The duty on tin was the mainstay of the revenue which the British needed to lay down the infrastructure without which successful Western investment could not take place and therefore Chinese tin-mining was actively encouraged until Western firms were in a position to move in successfully and take over (*ibid.*, pp.53 *et seq.*). Sir Frank Swettenham, long a prominent British proconsul in Malaya, put the point succinctly thus in 1894: "In the administration of a Malay State, revenue and prosperity follow the liberal but prudently directed expenditure of public funds, especially when they are invested in high-class roads, in railways, telegraphs, waterworks and everything likely to encourage trade and private enterprise . . . The Government cannot do the mining and the agriculture, but it can make it profitable for others to embark in such speculations by giving them every reasonable facility, and that we have tried to do." (cited Chai Hon-chan: *op.cit.*, p.22).

22. See this author's "South-East Asia – Thirty Years On", *Social Scientist*, no.38, September, 1975, and the references therein cited.

23. J.C. Jackson: *op.cit.*, pp.234-5, 237 and 240. For discussion of formation of the FMS in 1896 see Philip Loh Fook Seng: *The Malay States, 1877-95*, Kuala Lumpur, 1969; Chai Hon-chan: *op.cit.*, pp.43-83. Imposition of Federation in 1896 was preceded by the Pahang War, which lasted nearly four years. "The rebel (sic) chief (the Orang Kaya Pahlawan) had a strong force of men from his own villages and a considerable number of aborigines. In the guerrilla war that ensued in the Pahang jungle, the rebels initially proved superior. Although the Government forces finally broke the back of the rebellion (sic), they failed in their main object – the capture of the rebels, who were able to escpae into Trengganu . . . the psychological effect of the rebellion (sic) was . . . serious; it appeared as if British rule was discredited, for there was 'a general feeling of insecurity and distrust . . . in every class of the community, both within and beyond the limits of the state'." (*ibid*, p.29).

24. For a discussion of the Discharge Ticket System see Wong Lin Ken: *op.cit.*, pp.95-98. The attentive reader will gather, quite correctly, from this scholarly description – by intelligent reading between the lines – that labour conditions were brutal and oppressive in the extreme and that the labourers themselves were mere pawns in the tooth and claw economic warfare between rich Chinese employers and their European rivals.

25. Drugs and imperialism yet again: on opium in Malaya see Wong Lin Ken: *op.cit.*, pp.191-94. Much radical scholarship remains to be done in this field.

26. See, for example, L. Ainsworth: *The Confessions of a Planter in Malaya*, London, 1933.

27. P.P. Courtenay: *A Geography of Trade and Development in Malaya*, London, 1972, discusses how investment decisions in the colonial period, taken with the prosperity of Britain mainly in mind, have had seriously distorting consequences for Malaya to this day.

28. W.R. Roff, in his *The Origins of Malay Nationalism, 1877-1895*, Kuala Lumpur, 1969, points out that the FMS by the end of the 19th century had twice as many European administrative officers as had Ceylon, which

had five times the population. There were also a considerable number of European employees in specialist and professional services – such as the Departments of Agriculture and Mines, whose work proved so beneficial to the Western plantations and mines (p.22).

29. See Philip Loh Fook Seng: *op.cit.*, pp.167, 169 and 172. It is true that widespread dissemination of the colonialists' language has deleterious consequences for indigenous culture: see the excellent discussion of this point in Renato Constantino's "The Mis-Education of the Filipino", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol.1, no.1, 1970. Roff, in the work cited in footnote 28, above, also refers to the decline in Malay literary instincts as a result of European administration of Malay education.
30. See J.M. Gullick: *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya*, London, 1958; R.W. Firth: *Malay Fishermen – Their Peasant Economy*, London, 1946; M.G. Swift: *Malay Peasant Society in Jelebu*, London, 1965.
31. Parliamentary Paper, Cd. 835, 1902, p.694, cited W.R. Roff: *op.cit.*, p.28, Fn.82.
32. Chai Hon-chan: *op.cit.*, p.51, citing F.W. Swettenham: *British Malaya*, London, 1907, p.293.
33. Chai Hon-chan: *op.cit.*, pp.61-2.
34. "To secure your independence work with Javanese and Tamils, and, if you have sufficient experience, also with Malays and Chinese; you can then always play the one against the other . . . In case of a strike, you will never be left without labour, and the coolies of one nationality will think twice before they make their terms, if you know that you are in a position that you can do without them." (*Selangor Journal*, Vol.IV, 1895, p.438).
35. S. Husin Ali: *Malay Peasant Society and Leadership*, OUP, London, 1975, p.25.
36. D.G.E. Hall: *A History of South-East Asia*, 2nd ed., London, 1964, p.526. Some idea of the attitudes lying behind the official British mystique of the Malay way of life may be gauged from Birch's remark in a letter to the Governor: "It concerns us little what were the old customs of the country, nor do I think they are worthy of our considerations." (cited Chai Hon-chan: *op.cit.*, p.10).
37. J.M. Gullick: *Malaysia*, London, 1969, p.76.
38. For the whole concept of economic surplus, the reader is referred to: P. Baran: *The Political Economy of Growth*, New York, 1957; P. Baran & P. Sweezy: *Monopoly Capitalism*, New York, 1969.

War, Boom and Depression

Malcolm Caldwell

The first world war greatly accentuated the importance of rubber to the Malayan economy. Total exports rose from 23,720 tons in 1913 to 106,453 in 1919, their percentage share in the value of all Malayan exports rising from 38.1 per cent in 1913 to 67.4 per cent in 1919. Despite the war, and the temporary loss of Germany and her allies as customers, demand continued to climb. The introduction of assembly-line techniques in American car production slashed costs and paved the way for mass marketing of the private motor-car.[1] By 1917 the US was importing nearly 180,000 tons of rubber – two-thirds of the total entering world trade. The war itself, with the accelerated development of both mechanised troop transport vehicles and war-planes, boosted rubber demand. Total cultivated rubber acreage in Asia approximately doubled from 1913 to 1919.

For planters in Malaya, the war brought two headaches. The first was fear of a near-monopsony situation arising from American predominance in purchasing. In fact, half of all North American demand was accounted for by four large corporations. Such a degree of concentration was a matter of concern to rubber growers, who professed themselves to feel by comparison under-organised and at the mercy of supply and demand (though, in truth, their organisations were influential, and were to become more so).[2] The other worry which haunted them was the spectre of "over-planting". There was little fear of absolute over-planting: what plantation interests meant by the phrase was simply the danger of rubber prices falling low enough as planting and production increased to threaten the profitability of high-cost producers, such as the big plantations. Even in the buoyant circumstances of the war there was talk about the need for restriction, and sporadic attempts were in fact made on a voluntary basis to restrain output.

Another threat to British interests arose in the form of strenuous efforts on the part of American and Japanese investors to acquire

major assets in the Malayan rubber industry through acquisition of leases for planting. This was a natural reaction to the prevailing Anglo-Dutch near-monopoly in control over the production of a raw material of growing importance to industry. The threat of vast American and Japanese estates straddling British Malaya much exercised "loyal" (British) planters. Behind their apprehensions lurked the largely unspoken fear of what American efficiency might do to costs of rubber production and thereby to prices. Government needed little prompting, and in 1917 introduced the Rubber Lands (Restriction) Enactment. This prohibited alienation of lots of rubber land over 50 acres in extent to all except the following: British nationals; subjects of the Malay rulers; corporations registered in the UK, Dominions, or Malaya; and persons resident in the peninsula for at least seven years and intending to continue such residence. As John Drabble points out, the criteria adopted by the Colonial Office in authorising this enactment were

> ". . . those of Imperial interest, reflecting a general concern that after the war Britain and the Empire should be able to make full use of the opportunities presented by the war-time exclusion of Germany from international trade, and also to ensure that countries such as the United States and Japan did not make substantial permanent gains (in Malaya)"[3]

Paradoxically, at least in view of the most frequently cited justification for British intervention, another challenge to imperial interests arose from local rubber smallholders. Asian rubber acreage in Malaya rose from 2,000 acres in 1907 (when European acreage was 168,000) to 836,000 in 1918 (by which time the European total had risen to 1,050,000). Much of the smallholder acreage was Chinese, but Malays too had shown what ought to have been regarded as a commendable readiness to plant up rubber. The British claim had always been – and was to remain – that only British enterprise could have unlocked the potential wealth of the peninsula. But it all too quickly became embarrassingly evident not only that local people were as responsive to international market forces as the European planter but also that they were, given free and equal competition, more efficient. There ensued a number of discriminatory regulations aimed at ham-stringing the smallholder, culminating in the openly vindictive and punitive enactments of 1917 and 1918, the impact of which was in effect to minimise Malay participation in rubber production.[4] Nothing could illustrate more forcibly the hollowness of the pretexts advanced at the time – and repeated to this day – for colonization of the Malay states. Far from British enterprise rescuing a richly endowed land from stagnation and galvanising a torpid population from slumber, it was British enterprise itself which had to be rescued from vigorous local competition by British political

intervention designed to nullify it. In this context, we should never forget that the apparently simple phrase "development of the Malayan economy" is, in truth, an exceedingly ambiguous one: statistics of output and export, including statistics of output and export per capita, reveal nothing of the actual distribution of return and benefit, nor can they tell us what might have been had not alien political power presided over the allocation of sectoral advantage. We may gasp at the eventual winner's achievements, but might care to recall that the other competitors were hobbled from the start.

In 1922, in view of falling prices of rubber and rising stocks,[5] and despite Dutch refusal to co-operate, the British government went ahead in her colonies with the 'Stevenson' restriction scheme. Production and export in Ceylon and Malaya were cut back. Some British planters in Indonesia agreed voluntarily to reduce production in support of the scheme. As in the later international scheme, Malay and Chinese smallholders were seriously underassessed, partly no doubt due to ignorance on the part of those Europeans involved in assessment – much smallholder rubber was well off existing footpaths, and assessment of the visible portion suffered from the universal, but mistaken, European belief that "native" rubber-growing was inefficient. But there was another reason for underassessment, a reason which was to surface more overtly in the 1930s, namely the need to safeguard the interests of the high-cost (plantation) producers.

Rubber prices now recovered, propelled by the great American boom of the 1920s. But British producers held stubbornly to their scheme. As a result, the British-controlled share of world rubber production fell from 67 per cent in 1921 to 53 per cent in 1927. Such an out-turn was obviously unacceptable, and in 1928 the British government announced abandonment of restriction. Rumours of this move had been circulating for some months before the announcement, sending tremors of apprehension through rubber circles. Its actual timing was cruelly ironic, and the consequences catastrophic. Prices proceeded to plummet; it was well understood that, as a result of restriction, there was ample slack in the Malayan rubber industry. In 1929 came the American crash, to deliver the coup de grace . The index of monthly production of motor vehicles in the United States which had reached 153 in June 1929 (average of 1923-25 = 100) sank to 16 in October 1932. Since it was above all the American auto industry which sustained the market for rubber, panic in European rubber circles accompanied the deepening recession. Complicated negotiations were set afoot; these finally led to the inter-governmental International Rubber Regulation Agreement in 1934. This scheme, with Dutch involvement, controlled 97 per cent of world cultivated rubber exports. There is a considerable

literature on the scheme,[6] so we will concentrate here on one aspect only – its strong and ill-concealed bias against the smallholder.

First and foremost, smallholders were considerably underassessed, causing them an estimated loss of income of Straits $85 million over the period 1934-41.[7] Such injustice went hand in hand with irrationality. The smallholder could tap and make satisfactory profits even when rubber prices were near rock bottom. The big plantations, however, had to have a comparatively high floor price if they were to cover their heavy costs.[8] As the scheme operated, it was profitable for plantations to buy export coupons from smallholders, who could thus earn more for *not* working than for working - a curious lesson from the white man with his rationalizing myth of the "lazy native" lacking "economic sense". In point of fact most planters realised, and some openly said, that if economic forces had been allowed to operate freely it would have been they, the white men, that would have been driven to the wall, not the Asian smallholders. As the classical economist Alfred Marshall (1842-1924) once observed:

> "In many cases the 'regulation of competition' is a misleading term, that veils the formation of a privileged class of producers who often use their combined force to frustrate the attempts of an able man to rise from a lower class than their own."

Specific injustices abounded. Representation on all administrative and consultative bodies of the scheme was one-sided: for instance, the Rubber Regulation Committee (Malaya) – described as "thoroughly representative of all interests" – had 26 or 27 big estate representatives and one smallholder representative (on occasion two); the former were high-cost producers representing about 30,000 acres apiece, while the latter represented some 1,300,000 acres.[9] The re-planting provisions were flagrantly designed to preclude smallholder re-planting, thus, in effect, foreshadowing the ultimate extinction of the smallholder sector altogether. The smallholder was inadequately informed of such rights as he enjoyed under the scheme. In any case, to apply for permission to take advantage of its provisions, or to seek redress, he had to do so in writing; but most smallholders were illiterate. The Rubber Research Institute of Malaya, partly supported by contributions from smallholders, actively helped the plantations to take advantage of innovations while offering no comparable service to the small man. Prohibition of new planting coincided with a period of acute unemployment (for example among Chinese tin workers and Indian estate labourers) when some at least of the involuntarily idle might easily have been absorbed into rubber smallholding. There would have been an additional return: smallholder rubber growing can be integrated with subsistence agriculture (in fact, four-fifths of rubber smallholders

were self-sufficient in foodstuffs). In contrast, plantations relied almost 100 per cent on imported foodstuffs. The genuineness of the stated British intention – forced out of them by the circumstances of the depression – to make Malaya more self-sufficient may be judged by their failure to put national interests before their own sectoral ones in the case of rubber.

It should be stressed in this connection that rubber was by no means peripheral at this time to British imperial interests as a whole. The first world war had violently distorted the pre-existing international economic pattern. Rubber was important to Britain because it could earn precious dollars. In order to finance the war London had incurred massive overseas debts, principally to the United States. The United States was the world's biggest buyer of rubber. British control of Malayan rubber was therefore crucial; it was the biggest single dollar earner for the re-payment of first world war loans. More broadly, US purchases of South East Asian raw materials formed one of the legs of a triangular trade essential to the health of the international capitalist system as a whole: America bought from the European colonies much more than she sold to them, but this enabled the European metropoles to finance their purchases of American exports.

The other major prop of the export sector of the Malayan economy was still tin. British political control slowly wrested dominance over the industry from the Chinese. Whereas in 1900 90 per cent of Malayan tin came from mines owned and operated by Chinese, by 1929 Europeans were responsible for 61 per cent of output – roughly the proportion that was to prevail until recently.[10] As with rubber, there was a post-war slump, the average annual price of tin metal in London falling from £330 per ton in 1918 to £160 in 1922. However, the price then recovered, parallel with the recovery of world industrial production, to around the £290 mark in 1926 and 1927; recovery was aided by operation of the "Bandung pool", by which the British and Dutch colonial administrations bought tin when prices were low, and sold off stocks as prices rose.[11] This worked so well that when, in 1925, the Bandung stocks were exhausted, it became clear that there was actually a shortage of tin measured against prevailing demand. When this situation was realised, investment and production expanded precipitatedly. But by 1927 there was unmistakable evidence of stocks accumulating again – they rose from 13,800 tons in April, 1927, to 51,700 in July, 1931 – and prices sagged by stages to £119 a ton. At this point restriction and control came firmly on to the agenda. They were not hard to achieve: 97 per cent of Indonesian tin was controlled by the Dutch colonial administration, while

British tin interests were highly integrated through cartels, inter-locking directorates, and other mature "rationalisation" devices.[12] The resulting International Tin Agreement was opposed by Chinese producers and by a group of low-cost European producers in Malaya, but it was ". . . imposed . . . by the Colonial Office under pressure from London members of the Tin Producers' Association."[13] It should be added that the innocent-sounding "Tin Producers' Association" was, in fact, a cartel controlled by the Anglo-Oriental Mining Corporation. As smelting was even more tightly integrated than mining, a significant degree of international control over the entire industry now lay in Anglo-Dutch, and more particularly in English, hands.

The details of the scheme need not detain us here.[14] Needless to say, neither the Malays nor the mass of the Chinese and Indians were as much as consulted on these lofty matters, though it was they who were to feel the adverse impact and it was Malayan tin that was being bargained over and disposed of. A point to note is that neither expansion nor contraction had beneficial consequences for the peoples of Malaya. As capital-intensive methods replaced Chinese labour-intensive methods the number of labourers shrank dramatically, despite the fact that production capacity and the trend of production were rising.[15] Employment fell from 230,000 in 1907 to 82,000 in 1922 (a slump year), rising only to 88,000 in 1937 (and receding to 58,000 in 1938); production meanwhile rose from 50,000 tons in 1907 to 75,100 in 1937. Wages, speedily slashed whenever slump threatened, hovered round bare subsistence level for those who did succeed in retaining employment:

> "Imagine . . . the suffering that was inflicted on thousands of Chinese labourers working many hundreds of miles from their homes who, even when earning, lived close to the margin of subsistence. In 1932 and 1933 serious fears were felt whether the morale of the rank and file was proof against the terrific strain of reduced production coupled with miserable wages. Said the chairman of one Malayan company: 'The mining industry throughout the world is deeply indebted to the Chinese miners in Malaya, whose fortitude and good sense at this critical juncture helped so greatly to save the situation'."[16]

The 'fortitude' consisted in putting up with near starvation and the 'good sense' in refraining from violent insurrection against the colonial authorities and the alien mine owners; other than with no doubt heartfelt words of relief and gratitute, such restraint went unrewarded. Yates notes:

> "Of ten reports of Malayan companies inspected, one, namely the Pahang Consolidated Coy. Ltd., for the year ended July 1940, makes special mention of a sum of £500 allocated for social welfare and of £88:2:10d transferred to reserve for Workmen's Compensation out of total mines profit of £268,097".[17]

In contrast to the situation prevailing with respect to wages, it was not uncommon to find a company making profits equal to three or four times its initial capital within not much more than a decade.[18] The depression, despite everything, in fact made no difference to profit levels, thanks to cartelisation and timely government intervention.

Before leaving consideration of the twin staples, it is worth stressing the point that British manipulation, in collusion with the Dutch, of rubber and tin production, export and prices, greatly exercised and antagonised the American government and business community. The United States imported most of the world's internationally-traded rubber and tin, and Anglo-Dutch restrictionism was seen not only as an "unnatural" interference with free competition but as a form of blackmail or ransom. There is abundant evidence that the outrage felt and expressed by US politicians and manufacturers about this perceived injustice exerted crucial influence on the war-time deliberations which were to shape the post-second world war international economy under American hegemony.[19] In an important sense, the British and Dutch colonialists were digging their own graves – even though they may at the time have seen them merely as essential defensive trench-works.

We may now turn to the question of wages and conditions in general for the peoples of Malaya during this period, before moving on to look specifically at the peasant sector, and finally tracing the rise of the labour and nationalist movements.

The general picture is quite clear with respect to wages: Malaya under British rule was a low-wage economy, with remuneration outside the peasant sector kept around subsistence level. The policy of employers was to pay enough to keep their labourers going physically, but to deter by all available means anything that might result in the workers improving upon this. About this they were unrepentantly explicit and articulate, and since they had the administration behind them, they were able to a large extent to impose their own conditions.

There were other factors, partly contrived, partly inherent in the situation, which strengthened the hands of the employers. First, since the labour force was largely immigrant and "alien", there was no fear of arousing in the Malay Sultans, who played a key part in the whole British colonial structure, resentment at its poverty and ill-treatment, as there might well have been had the mines and plantations relied upon Malay labour. Second, refused access to land, the Chinese and Indians had little option but to accept the going wages or leave the country; the Indians were indeed worst placed in this respect since members of the Chinese work force could – with diligence and luck – shift into the

petty trading and commercial sectors dominated by their fellows, and moreover they had the protection of their secret societies and local KMT groups. Third, there was the "loyalty" of the Malay police force, its members, like all Malays, encouraged to hold Malay supremacist views antagonistic to the other communities, whose quite legitimate labour movements and activities could always be branded as "foreign subversion" by the British. Fourth, there was the immigration-emigration "tap" by which the "flow" of labour was controlled. Thus, the power of the employers and the state was immense.

Wages fell drastically as a result of the onset of the depression. Male Indian plantation workers who had been earning in the region of 50 to 70 Malayan cents per day in 1929 had been cut back to 26 to 47 cents in 1932. It is true that prices of consumption goods were also falling – according to one calculation[20] from (1924 = 100) 91.30 in 1929 to 53.28 in 1932 – and that in general during the thirties it appears from this type of estimate that real wages did not fall. However, the picture thus presented is misleading, for there was also massive, if but defectively recorded, unemployment. We do know, however, that estate employment fell from 258,780 in 1929 to 125,600 in 1932. In many cases this meant that whereas previously two, three or more members of a household worked and earned, now unemployment might be restricted to one family member. The government Controller of Labour underlined this when he reported in 1933 that:

> "The one great thing that saved the worker was repatriation and if it had not been for that disease and semi-starvation would have been common."[21]

He might have said ". . . would have been more common than they actually were", since the testimony of contemporaries is categorical and unanimous that great suffering was caused the labouring population. Indeed, the Controller of Labour himself admitted, in a memorandum of 1935 rebuking the employers for having "ruthlessly exploited" estate labour, that

> ". . . where the labourers had become permanently domiciled and chose not to return to India, wages reduced below the minimum had caused hardship, and estate doctors had reported that labourers in such localities were undernourished. Fear of an epidemic was a constant anxiety."[22]

One estimate of the 1920s suggests that for every £109 made in profits for the British rubber industry and shareholders, the tapper himself earned about £15 in wages, and perhaps a further £10 by value in the form of the food and accommodation provided. In other words, the tapper worked 1½ hours a day on his own account, and 6½ on behalf of the foreign capitalists and rentiers.[23] The great difficulty faced by the tappers, and by those who sympathised with their plight,

was that the administration, working through the Indian Immigration Committee, could always turn on the tap and bring additional labour in when demand for it might otherwise have pushed up wages, while repatriation was ineffective in face of employer adamancy in reducing wages when the price of rubber was low. Furthermore, many employers hired Sikhs to keep discipline in the work force, and physical chastisement was common. It took an exceptional worker, in the circumstances, to struggle even for the rights registered on paper on his behalf. It was so much easier for the employers to organise than the workers that, even in times of relative labour shortage, "poaching" by competitively raising wages was discouraged – indeed many employers never abandoned their campagin to have some kind of *legal* restriction on the right of the tapper to change employer, to back up the unofficial sanctions which were quite powerful enough seriously to impede labour mobility, and thus to frustrate the possibility of labour shortage pushing up wages.

The labourers themselves were on the whole ill-educated and illiterate. Their plight was of concern to progressive Indians in India, but there was little they could effectively do to come to their aid, except by making public denunciations of Malayan estate conditions and putting pressure on the colonial administration to legislate minimum conditions *and to enforce them.* Attempts to make direct contact with the tappers on the part of educated and left-wing Indians were of course recognised by the planters generally as a potential hazard, and they used all the considerable powers they possessed to disrupt and if possible to interdict such contacts and to scotch in infancy any attempt at union organisation. We shall see below how, despite this, labour organisation *had* begun to arise by the late thirties.

Repatriation as a policy in times of hardship had the great merit from the colonial government's point of view that half the cost was borne by employers. It was also cheap, and exported the problem to the sphere of another administration – that of India – albeit another, brother, colonial administration. Official policy in the face of depression was retrenchment, and public works – while ultimately they would have had considerable long-term advantages – were by and large eschewed, in order that expenditure could be cut to match the loss of revenue precipitated by falling prices and shrinking consumption. Fewer than 12,000 labourers in all were employed in public works in the Federated Malay States in 1938 – an effort ludicrously disproportionate to humane requirements, or even to requirements calculated by full social-cost/social benefit analysis rather than by myopic accountancy. (It is, however, true that much would still have hinged upon the assumptions fed into the analysis in the first place: who was to bear the

cost and reap the benefit – the Malayan masses or the European colonialists and their local aristocratic hirelings?) It has to be borne in mind that British enterprise and British administration relied upon each other and overlapped to such an extent that when it came to the bit the administration could not and would not hamper business prospects. Members of the administration had business backgrounds, and all the way up to, and including, the High Commissioner they had direct and indirect financial stakes in the assets the profitable operation of which they were appointed to ensure by the exercise of the political authority entrusted to them. Many, on retirement, again including High Commissioners, looked to lucrative directorships and other sinecures in local (European-owned) enterprises, or (if at a lower level) to management positions in these.

Having said as much, it has to be pointed out that, as a result of the prolonged depression of the 1930s, and the vast international economic upheavals that preceded and accompanied it, rifts were beginning to appear in the fabric of British imperialism, overstretched by changed and straightened circumstances. The comparatively cosy accommodations and certainties of the pioneering days were – as was soon to be demonstrated with unwelcome brutality – over. London had more and more to think for the whole complex of inter-locking British global interests threatened by both recession and numerous specific challenges. It could no longer be taken for granted that what was good for the big planters in Malaya was good for a British industry fighting for existence in the lawless jungle of world commerce. As we shall see in the next chapter, the new tensions provoked a re-thinking of the long-term future of Malaya by those ultimately responsible for its retention as one of the most lucrative territories in the British economic sphere.

Conditions in the mines were just as bad as on plantations. Once again, no attempt was made to estimate the marginal productivity of the labourer as compared with that of the managers, but common sense alone suggests that the actual differential was not accurately reflected in their respective rewards. Wages, depending upon the system of employment, might fall in the 30 to 45 cents range, sometimes less, not often much more. In contrast, it was regarded as axiomatic in European circles that not even the humblest and most callow assistant mine manager of European extraction could live on less than about 12 to 15 dollars a day. For every dollar earned by the Chinese worker, two went to British shareholders.[24] On the largest concerns, the coolies would sleep in huge dormitories (without benefit of mattresses), but many others lived in rickety kerosene tin shacks or even leaf hovels. In addition, there was exploitation of female labour:

"A certain number of women are employed in concentrating the ore by

'dulangs' in the big sluice boxes. The dulang women have a very hard life, standing up in water all day washing for tin ore, and it is no uncommon thing to see a woman at work with a baby strapped on her back. In the evening they cut firewood, cook the food, and do the housework."[25]

Chinese migration was extremely sensitive to fluctuations in tin prices and employment. For instance there was a net efflux of 112,965 in 1931, compared with a net influx of 228,285 in 1926. Government played much less part in this than was the case with Indian labour, affecting to believe that the Chinese community could look after its own. And indeed "unemployment relief camps" were set up by wealthy Chinese mineowners in Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur during the depression years. Nonetheless, there was great bitterness that far fewer assisted repatriations were granted to Chinese than to Indians, and that so few public works were undertaken to absorb the unemployed. Two things should be noted about the Chinese community at this period: first, many who became unemployed moved out on to uncultivated jungle-fringe land to grow subsistance fruit and vegetable crops, thus laying the foundations of the post-war squatter problem; second, the influence of burgeoning nationalism and anti-imperialism in the homeland imparted a more radical character to stirring political and industrial consciousness than in the case of the Indian community in general – and there was much more movement by Malayan Chinese to and from China than there was to and from India on the part of Malayan Indians.

Conditions on the coolie boats plying between Malaya and China were universally admitted to be appalling, but government took a laissez-faire attitude. For their part, the captains sailing the boats, and those who made profit from the trade, stood to gain by cramming in as many bodies with as few facilities as possible – and this they did. Many coolies died at sea (sick-room facilities were derisory or non-existent, while sanitation was at best rudimentary, and the food quite inadequate); the packed, cramped, unhygienic quarters on board served as ideal breeding conditions for tuberculosis and other ravaging diseases. It was all part of the price the coolie had to pay for the privilege of helping to maintain tin dividends for British shareholders in Virginia Waters, Surbiton and Chislehurst.

A thought should be spared, too, for the many small Chinese mines forced out of business by the workings of Anglo-Dutch restriction. One hundred small owners were forced to shut down between 1932 and 1933 alone. Restriction was designed to shore up a price of £200 a ton or over, while most of these small mines could profitably have kept going with a price of around £80 a ton.

There is a good deal of information from official reports and contemporary sources generally on health conditions.[26] There is no doubt

that the crude death rate displayed a falling trend through the 'twenties and 'thirties, but having dropped from 33.62 per thousand in 1920 to 19.10 in 1931, it rose again in the mid-thirties depression years and did not fall as low as 19.10 again until 1938. Moreover the crude figures mask discrepancies between the communities, between urban and rural areas, and between workers in the different sectors of the economy. As far as the Malays were concerned, they were pretty much excluded from health provision. The few hospitals (some of which in any case were shut down in the 'thirties as an economy measure) catered mainly for the Chinese and Indians apart from the Europeans. We discuss Malay conditions below. The estates took precautions against malaria because they had learned to their own cost in the pioneering days what a toll the disease could take of employees if not checked. Some provided more or less rudimentary hospitals and medical care, as was intended by various provisions in labour legislation, but many did not, and many who did complied only in the barest minimal fashion. Yet again, provision of potable water by itself could bring a marked improvement in the health of the labour force, and therefore benefit to both employer and worker, and no doubt it was the cumultative impact of this kind of change which exerted a downward pressure on the overall crude death rate, though it should be remembered that officialdom was well aware that achievements in this direction were precarious and liable to be reversed by any deterioration in the general economic climate.

The Chinese community, except for that small part of it employed on European plantations (where the measures taken – inadequate though they were – to protect the health of Tamils were automatically extended to the comparatively few Chinese employees), was characteristically left more to its own devices, and government abandoned attempts even to inspect Asian-owned plantations and wage-labour-employing Asian smallholdings. The available statistics are too riddled with ambiguities to make generalisations with any degree of confidence in their accuracy, but it would appear that, despite this virtual exclusion from the benefits of the labour codes devised for the Indian estate community, the Chinese crude death rate fell *pari passu* with the Indian, incidentally throwing some light on the contribution of conscious "welfare" provision on the part of the British colonial authorities. Through the 1920s and 1930s it appears from such figures as exist that the Malay crude death rate improved least, and stood generally above that of the other two communities. The European community, and the rich of all the others, of course enjoyed health conditions which, allowing for the tropical environment, were comparable with those prevailing in the West.[27]

A word should be added on education. As we have seen above, British policy was founded on a number of key assumptions, stated or implicit. The first was that "trusteeship" involved preserving, for the vast majority of Malays, their traditional life, which called merely for a modicum of practical vernacular instruction, while "indirect rule", on the other hand, called for sections of the traditional Malay ruling class to be taught modern administrative techniques. Second, it was assumed that the Chinese would largely provide for their own education. To some extent this was warranted, in that rich members of the Chinese community were prone to endow schools for the children of locally domiciled Chinese residents. Teachers were often brought to staff these from the mainland. But arising in such a haphazard way, provision was patchy and standards of instruction variable. Moreover, by the nature of things, permitting piecemeal creation of a separate educational structure like this positively worked against integration of the Malayan Chinese into local society. The pros and cons of this from the widely different perspectives of British colonialism and of the Malayan revolution are, however, arguable: a sizeable segment of Chinese youth was removed from British indoctrination and exposed to radical nationalist currents originating in the mainland of China; on the other hand, it was an expression of British cynicism consciously to pursue a policy of "divide and rule", understanding only too well the implications of integrated *class* movements – across the communities – arising in the circumstances of Malaya.

The third assumption of British educational policy was, as we have seen, that Indian estate labour did not require education. None was therefore provided. Obviously the estates would not provide it on their initiative, so it went by default. Estate managers, despite their own intellectual limitations, were astute enough to appreciate that a little learning in the ignorant and oppressed Tamil labourers would be – from their point of view – a very dangerous thing.

Before turning to the question of the largely Malay rural sector, it is as well to air the concept of "development". The word has frequently been applied to the process which Malaya experienced under British rule. And, to be sure, if one restricts one's vision to the statistics of tin and rubber production, population, and a handful of other gross indices, what British intervention helped to engender is impressive. But the achievements, such as they were, have to be set against certain negative considerations. Leaving aside the unresolvable, but highly pertinent and interesting, question of how Malaya might have developed in the absence of British intervention, we need concern ourselves here with but a couple of these.

In the first place, it should be noted that far the major part of the

benefit of development went to non-Malays. It was, indeed, conscious British policy to "protect" Malay traditional subsistence society, and in pursuit of this aim obstacles were put in the way of Malays seeking to obtain footholds in the commercial sector (for instance by restricting the use to which they might put their land and by excluding them from the land best suited to commercial crops). It is true that the wealth and formal privileges of the traditional Malay aristocracy were vastly augmented by the British, but this was hardly to the advantage of the Malay masses – on the contrary by widening the gap between ruler and ruled, and by greatly increasing the repressive power at the disposal of the former, it handicapped the class struggle of the Malay poor.

And when one looks at the great success stories of Malayan development what does one see? In the case of the tin industry, the profits largely went out of the country to be spent elsewhere and they contributed nothing to local revenue. Wages went to Chinese immigrants, many of whom remitted money to families in China, while others took whatever they had managed to save over the years back with them when they returned there. Meanwhile, an irreplaceable capital asset – tin – was being steadily depleted: one modern tin dredger could recover in a day more casserite (from which the tin was extracted) than would be accumulated naturally through the entire peninsula in a generation. Needless to add, few of the products in which this tin was eventually incorporated elsewhere made their way back to Malaya, and those that did went to limited social groups at prices reflecting the generous value-added embodying the comparatively high wages of Western workers.

The same kind of points could be made with respect to the rubber industry and indeed to the entire modern sector. Wage labour was almost entirely non-Malay. The one real chance for Malay village youth to escape the occupations of his forefathers was to join the colonial police and armed forces – to help defend and perpetuate the alien system which oppressed him! As the economist Myint once commented:

> "Aggregates such as total national income and volume of exports are very unsatisfactory as indices of economic welfare of a 'plural society' made up of different groups of people such as that which exists in many backward countries. Here the well-known maxim of static welfare economics, that the economic welfare of a country is increased if some people can move to a better position while leaving the others exactly as they were before, must be very galling to the backward peoples who frequently happen to be those left 'exactly as they were before'."[28]

Unfortunately, the phrase 'exactly as they were before' is, in the case of the Malays, somewhat euphemistic. (And, moreover, we should not let

pass application of the pejorative epithet "backward" to the Malay people.)

We have already established strong grounds for objecting to use of the unqualified word "development" as accurately descriptive of what was happening in the Malayan economy during the British colonial period. But there are even more cogent reasons for criticising its use. We can make this clear by comparing what we all agree development entailed for the now rich industrialised countries with what is referred to as "development" in countries like Malaya. Our comparison on this occasion cannot of course be other than highly selective, but the reader may elaborate further for himself.

To begin with, we should note the quite different origins and consequences of investment in Malaya as compared with, say, the United Kingdom (and, both for convenience and because it happened to be the relevant colonial power, we may concentrate our comparisons on the UK). Take, for instance, railways. Creation of the railway network which spider-webbed the British Isles in the 19th century gave an enormous impetus to the development of all kinds of industrial activities in Britain: coal-mining; steel production; design and manufacture of rolling stock; and so on. But note that when the British colonial authorities in Malaya started building up a skeletal railway system there, in order to service the mainly British-owned mines and plantations, there were no such consequences. On the contrary, the project served but to fill the order books of flagging *British* industries, hit by completion of the indigenous network. Of course, local labourers, mainly Chinese and Indian, found employment in the actual laying down of the Malayan tracks, and when these were operative there were jobs for Asian guards, ticket-collectors and the like. But the important point is that none of the important secondary and tertiary impulses were felt in the Malayan economy, which remained basically pre-industrial, despite having acquired accessories like railways. Nineteenth century European economists, like the German Friedrich List, were quick to realise that were their own countries to rely upon Britain for manufactures and manufacturing knowhow they would never be able to follow Britain's example; they therefore proposed adoption of highly protectionist and statist policies, which – in the event – enabled them first to stave off the British economic threat and subsequently to compete on equal terms. But Britain's European neighbours were not colonies; had they been they would have had no option but to submit to British economic dominance and to the "logic" of the international division of labour, as Malaya had to do.

Next, we should contrast what happened to the English rural population and what was decided for the Malays. As we saw, it was British

policy to preserve what they affected to regard as traditional Malay society. On the other hand, the development process in Britain had had as one of its most important characteristics a dramatic transfer of agricultural population into the industrial sector. This was made possible by striking improvements in agricultural techniques, raising productivity per farm worker many times over, and by building up exports of manufactures all round the world in exchange for food and raw materials. But in Malaya under the British subsistence agricultural techniques hardly changed from the beginning of the period to the end, and it was only in the depression years, as we will see, that the colonial administration gave much thought to rice production. And though it is true that colonial Malaya built up a significant export trade, enabling it in good years to afford to import food and essential manufactures like textiles, we should note that there is a crucial distinction between what Malaya exported and what Britain exported – primary produce in the one case, manufactured goods in the other. In the period under consideration the terms of trade between the former and the latter swung decidedly in favour of the latter, a secular trend for which there are a number of explanations, but highly relevant was the fact of colonial control. It was mostly Western concerns which controlled production and export of raw materials of colonial origin and, with the collusion of colonial governments, they where able to shave costs to the barest minimum, paring wages, flooding the labour market with immigrants, and violently repressing attempts at labour organisation. On the other hand, in the imperialist metropoles by the last two or three decades of the 19th century the working classes were beginning to win real advances in their standards of living, gains which had to be registered in the prices of manufactured goods. In effect, higher productivity showed itself in different ways in the "home countries" and the colonies (or, if you like, the secondary and primary sectors) respectively: in the first, in the form of higher wages; in the second, in the form of lower prices. Malaya, like other colonies, felt the nip of these scissors.

Or, again, let us consider the matter of education. No contrast could be starker than that between the system elaborated in Great Britain – tailored to meet the requirements of modern industrial capitalism – and that devised for the Malays – tailored to preserve traditional society. We should surely at least think carefully before applying the same term "economic development" to *both* the process of which the first was an essential component *and* the process which could be reconciled with the second.

Finally, our caution should be heightened by contrasting the demographic aspects of the two processes. Natural population increase and-

the vast movement of people off the land and into the towns were accommodated in the British case by the contemporaneous rapid growth of industrial employment. But British "law and order" in Malaya, while certainly contributing to a fast and sustained growth in population (both by natural increase in Malaya and by massive immigration), gave little encouragement to the kind of development that had taken place during the industrial revolution at home. On the contrary, local industrialisation was discouraged, except to the limited extent that it had to be on the spot to service the vital plantation and mining industries.[29] This had several adverse repercussions for Malaya, both in the short and long term. In the short term, it created a situation of utter dependence upon a mere handful of primary product exports, whose prices fluctuated wildly – net exports of the FMS shrank from 338 million Straits $s in 1929 to 83 million in 1932 (rubber from 202m. to 37m., tin from 117m. to 31m.) – which meant, in turn, that the import of basic necessities (which Malaya had come to depend upon) had to be cut back abruptly. In the longer term, it bequeathed to independent Malaya a grotesquely lopsided economy, quite unlike that of a country we would think of as "developed". Again, "law and order" had the same demographic consequences in the east coast states, which were comparatively untouched by development even of the colonial style, as in the west coast states. But, given stagnant agricultural technology and a rigid social structure, this merely precipitated sub-division of land holdings, an increase in tenancy, growing rural indebtedness, and in general impoverishment for the Malay masses locked in the rural sector. After several decades of British rule, the lives of the rural Malays could be described in an official report as hovering on the "verge of safety" (a phrase interesting for its inversion and evasiveness). Compared with Chinese and Indian immigrants, Malays had a much higher incidence of malaria, unspecified fevers and convulsions. Pneumonia, hookworm and anaemia were other prevalent conditions. The hospitals built by the colonial authorities had little relevance to Malay problems, partly because they were sited in urban areas, but also in part because appreciation and experience of, and trust in, their curative possibilities had not penetrated to the neediest country areas. Infantile mortality rates – a key index of the degree of real development in an economy and society – remained stubbornly high (and actually *rose* from 1931 to 1938). In short, we would be hard put to it to equate the demographic aspects of Malayan "economic development" under British tutelage with those which had accompanied "economic development" in Britain. Should we, then, continue to apply the same appellation to both?

It took the prolonged depression of the 1930s to half-arouse the

British colonial administration to the unsoundness of its policies. The immigrant communities consumed imported rice. When export earnings fell, government naturally turned to the Malay rice sector for salvation. But now it was to pay the price for previous neglect. In the first place, the Malay peasant had little incentive to respond to exhortation, for he was oppressed by landlord and money-lender. Evidence emerged in the depression years that Malay peasants were indebted to Chinese shopkeepers and Indian chettiars to the tune of millions of dollars. Even more seriously, Malay land, both outside and inside the Malay Reservations, was being mortgaged and sold. The British recognised that the general impoverishment of the Malay peasantry was contrary to "the political well-being of the country" (in that it induced anti-British unrest among the Malays, that is, and therefore endangered continuation of British rule).[30] Moreover, since rice prices fell more steeply than prices of commercial products, insofar as he had developed some subsidiary crop for sale it still made better sense for the Malay peasant to cultivate that and to restrict rice production to family subsistence needs (or even to *buy* rice for personal consumption). In the second place, the Rice Cultivation Committee appointed in 1931 soon discovered that one of the problems was that, in the absence of water control works, returns to rice growing were too uncertain to attract the peasant. It therefore recommended that large-scale irrigation and drainage schemes undertaken by the colonial authorities – something that might have been set afoot half a century earlier, with immense benefit to the Malay masses, had Britain really ever had the intention of translating the rhetoric of "trusteeship" into practice. [31]

Achievements in the 1930s were, in the circumstances, modest. Rice acreage rose (from some 708,000 acres in the 1930-31 season to 820,000 in that of 1940-41), as too did production (from 264,200 tons of milled rice to 324,210). But population was rising, and the shift in import dependence was fractional.[32] It should be borne in mind that only 2 or 3 per cent of the total land area of Malaya was devoted to rice; of the total *cultivated* area 65% was under rubber and only 15% under rice. In noting this imbalance, we must add that Malaya is not naturally hospitable to food production, whereas rubber will grow even on the infertile lateritic soils characteristic of extensive areas of the peninsula. Even so, much more might have been made of the rural sector. The Malay peasantry had shown itself quickly responsive to economic opportunity when it offered and when they were permitted to take advantage of it (for instance, in cultivating rubber, and the oil and coconut palms). But they lacked the capital and initial experience necessary to enable them to undertake their own processing. Consequently, they had to depend upon others to prepare and realise the

products of their labour, and of course in this process they lost out badly. Government attention to this problem *might*, in theory, have made possible development of Malay processing and marketing co-operatives, but this would have cut against the grain of the finely articulated colonial economy, which needed Malay landlord and Chinese businessman much more than it needed a prosperous and independent Malay peasant-yeomanry. Let us suppose, however, that water control works on an adequate scale had been put in hand in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the Malay peasant actually helped and encouraged to diversify from a sound reliable rice base into commercial crops, *and* landlord and usurer restrained legislatively and administratively from extortion, *and* additional suitable land freed from plantation control for peasant colonisation, what, then, might have been the picture by the 1930s? But we are pursuing a chimera: colonialism was a beast of far different breed.

It might be thought that in the face of colonial injusticies, some of which we have looked at above, a radical nationalist movement would have swiftly arisen and gained popular support. In fact of course it did, but traditional Western scholarship has tended to minimise or ignore this phenomenon, appearance of which contradicts the most cherished myths of British imperialism. Where noticed, it has usually been dismissed under such disparaging labels as "religious fanaticism", "primitive revolts", "communist subversion", "alien influence", and so on. This situation of scholarly indifference and lack of sympathy is now changing, however, and a new awareness is arising of the sharpness and extensiveness of hostile reaction to the imposition of British rule and to its consequences. Here we will look briefly at developments in Malay nationalism, in the labour movement, and in the communist and revolutionary movement.

No image has survived less eroded by truth and time, at least in popular understanding, than that of the Malays passively acceding to British rule. Recent work has served to lend scholarly corroboration and documentation to the actual, and quite different, situation.[33] From the outset there was Malay resistance (see Appendix to this chapter); the problem was how this was to be co-ordinated nationally, harmonised with the needs of the other communities, and given a radical perspective. In this respect, the Indonesian nationalist movement, which was much more advanced, exercised a profound influence. From the foundation of *Sarekat Islam* in 1912, there was a genuinely *national* and generally speaking *radical* movement in Indonesia. Movement back and forward between the peninsula and the archipelago was continuous, so that developments in Indonesia soon made their impact upon Malay society across the Straits of Malacca, the more so since

many Malays were themselves immigrants from, or first or second generation descendants of immigrants from, Indonesia, retaining family ties in the mother-country. This influence was strengthened by the proliferation in the 1920s and 1930s of nationalist writing, fictional and non-fictional, in the Indonesian language *(Bahasa Indonesia)* which, being based upon Malay, was accessible to Malay speakers. Radically-inclined Malays in particular were attracted by the example of the Indonesian nationalist movement.

As elsewhere in the Muslim world, the influence of reformist Islam radiating from the Middle East also made itself felt in Malaya with human traffic between the two parts ensuring sustained interaction. Some Malays of course succeeded in making the pilgrimage to Mecca. Others went in their youth to study in the venerable universities of Egypt and its neighbours. Arab merchants frequently put in at Malayan ports, and there was a resident Arab community in the country, which further ensured contact. Reformist Islam naturally exerted most influence in the more "detached" segments of the Malay community, such as the small commercial class concentrated particularly in urban areas like Penang and Singapore, and the cosmopolitan scholars. Orthodox Islam traditionalism, as it had evolved in the Malayan context, was naturally most deeply entrenched, by contrast, in the rural areas. The clash between the two therefore had a class aspect. But it served the purpose of bringing out into the open a number of issues crucial to the evolution of political consciousness. Debate on these – attitudes towards capitalism, aliens, modern secular education, and the like – were conducted in newspapers, ephemeral periodicals, public platforms, and private discussions.

The comparatively tiny British-educated Malay elite, drawn from the traditional aristocracy, and integrated into the British colonial administrative system, was naturally enough highly conservative on the whole. In particular, they tried – with some success – to close the rural areas to politics, arguing that the Malay masses had no need of "alien" ideas. In this they were of course backed by the British authorities, who had sweeping powers of detention and deportation of "trouble-makers" at their disposal. But they were also hostile to Chinese encroachment, though well aware of what was owed in the transformation of the country to Chinese enterprise. Their posture could not but be ambivalent and vacillating, since they had come to enjoy a profitable symbiotic relationship with Chinese big businessmen while – at the same time – being conscious of the significance – indeed centrality – of fostering anti-Chinese feelings in order to dispel among the Malay masses any more radical ideas based on class identity across the communities. (The Indian population was numerically smaller, partly

Muslim, and on the whole less influential than the Chinese.)

Nevertheless, subservient as this elite was in general to British designs, it was not wholly unaware of its ambiguous position with respect to the colonial power as well. A number of the more sensitive victims of British educational indoctrination and assimilationism eventually broke with the colonialists and became eloquent in opposing them. One saw

> ". . . the relationship between the colonial bureaucracy and the Malay aristocracy as one mutually parasitic upon the Malay peasantry and Malaya's natural resources."[34]

The *Persatuan Melayu* (Malay Association), Selangor branch, conservative though it was, condemned the Malay Reservations as

> ". . . land traps, in which Malays are forced to seek a living, like sheep allowed to eat only the grass inside the pen, while non-Malays, like wild animals, are given complete freedom to take their will outside."[35]

But in the perspective of future developments, it is the origin of firmly rooted Malay radicalism that must be of primary concern. The first identifiably left-wing Malay political party, the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (Young Malay Association) was consciously modelled upon radical organisations in neighbouring Indonesia, and was Marxist in orientation. Founded in 1938, in defiance of the traditional Malay elite which, as we saw, had no desire to have political activity encouraged among the Malay masses (even if it was aimed at safeguarding their livelihoods), the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* had links with the Communist Party of Malaya (MCP) through Sutan Djenain, a Javanese by origin, who was a member of both organisations. (After the second world war he was deported by the British for anti-imperialist activities). A stumbling block to creation of a mass base for the party lay in the obstinate opposition of the feudalistic rural Malay leadership. A mere four to five per cent of Malays lived in the free urban areas, but many of these were educated and therefore *ipso facto* atypical. Nevertheless the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* was not without significance as a beginning, and it is of more than passing interest that many of its members – drawn from the radical Malay intelligentsia – were of peasant origin, having improved their situation *via* vernacular education.

When we turn to the labour movement, it was really a question of the organisation of the Indian and Chinese workers, though wherever Malays were in the wage-labour force they were just as fully involved. British policy, in both official and business circles, was to hamper union organisation. They were helped by circumstances: many of the mines and plantations were remote and isolated; racial differences certainly made problems of organisation more difficult; carefully

manipulated immigration meant that there was always a pool of unemployed labour – and potentially strike-breaking labour; and trade unions *per se* were, in any case, illegal. The British Special Branch (secret police) had a justified reputation for thoroughness and ruthlessness. In the 1920s, despite this, there were indications of what was to come in a number of determined attempts at militant organisation.[36] What gave the movement real impetus was the depression. Efforts to unionise were much intensified, and with the successful outcome of a number of strikes in 1934 and 1935 organisation went ahead apace, so that from 1936

> ". . . virtually no section of Malaya's labour force was without some kind of organisation or was free of industrial disputes."[37]

The British authorities were relentless in their suppression and employed force liberally in the breaking of strikes and demonstrations. Hundreds of striking workers were sentenced to jail or deportation for their pains. The notorious Special Branch compiled dossiers on all known "trouble-makers" – a homely British tradition zealously preserved since (neo-colonial) independence. Nevertheless, by 1937,

> ". . . the principle of organised labour and collective action was no longer completely foreign to the minds of Malayan workers and the groundwork was prepared for the subsequent development of labour unions."[38]

The beginnings of communism in Malaya were bound up, as we noted, both with development of radical Malay nationalism and with the successes of communism in China. Less important, but still worth noting, were the local operations of the Comintern. Certainly there was communist activity in at least Singapore by the mid-1920s, hampered though it was by Special Branch scrutiny and surveillance.[39] At first, organisation assumed the form of a South Seas *(Nanyang)* Communist Party and a South Seas General Labour Union, with responsibilities for all the countries of South East Asia except the Philippines. But this proved unwieldy, and after 1930 separate national parties were inaugurated, the MCP dating from that year.[40] (The Communist Party of Indonesia – PKI – had been launched ten years earlier, but after its suppression in the wake of the 1926-27 risings against the Dutch, it appears to have been for a time organisationally linked to the MCP as a kind of branch.) There was still much coming and going and interaction, however. Leading revolutionary figures such as Ho Chi Minh and Tan Malaka turn up through the 'twenties and 'thirties in a variety of places, including Singapore, whose special position at the hub of the whole region (and economically as its very heart) was generally recognised.

By the mid-1930s the MCP was well enough entrenched to play an

important role in the big strikes of these years. Although membership of the party and of its affiliated organisations was predominantly Chinese, from the start the other communities were involved. Developments in China undoubtedly accelerated revolutionary sentiment and attachment in the Chinese community, whereas the Indian and Indonesian bourgeois nationalist movements gave no such spur to the generality of the Malayan Indian and Malay communities. Nonetheless, it is of the utmost importance to grasp the reality of the MCP's deep roots in Malayan history. *By the end of the inter-war period there was not a single state in Malaya which did not have a functioning MCP section.* The war and Japanese occupation were to give added stimulus to its appeal, as we will see, while complicating its task by exacerbating for a time community differences.

Before proceeding, however, we ought perhaps to stress the particular position of Singapore.[41] Acquired by Sir Stamford Raffles for the British in 1819 (to compensate him for the "loss" of Indonesia, which he had governed during its occupation by Great Britain in the Napoleonic Wars), its unique location and natural advantages lent every assistance to its rapid growth and development. The ships of the world converged on it, picking up the produce of the entire region collected there, and dropping in return their manufactured goods for distribution back through the web-like trade network which fanned out from the island city to all points of South East and East Asia. Fortunes were made in this classical entrepot trade, and all kinds of subsidiary and servicing functions flourished. Chinese, Indians and Malays flocked in, many no doubt hoping to hit the speculative jackpot, but most destined to serve out their lives as dock workers, building labourers, shop assistants, tally clerks, and the like humble employments.

Singapore was a cosmopolitan city, at a key crossroads of the world. It naturally, therefore, was quick to feel not only business ripples but also changing political currents. This, besides the abject poverty of many of its poorest inhabitants, made it fertile ground for socialism and communism in due course. Despite police vigilance, its docks and shadowy backstreets and teeming ever-changing population made entry and exit comparatively easy even for wanted revolutionaries, and their stays comparatively anonymous and safe. For others, it offered even more secure sanctuary. And from the island itself to the Malay states there was constant intercourse, facilitating dissemination of news, advice, cadres, and assistance of all kinds from Singapore and – *via* it – from further afield.

But though Singapore became, in time, a big city, with many of the appurtenances of big cities in the industrialised countries, it remained – as did other colonial and neo-colonial Asian cities – distinctly dif-

ferent from these in a number of important respects. In the first place, it did not really develop to any significant extent manufacturing industry: it remained a trading entrepot, servicing imperialism, and in many respects best seen as an outlier of the City of London rather than as the true "primate city" of Malaya. In the second place, it was not permitted to develop autonomous and indigenous political institutions combining self-government with popular participation in electoral processes; on the contrary, it was rigidly kept a British (i.e. alien) bailiwick, with only token representation of the most conservative and compliant elites of the other communities. And, in the third place, it was totally subordinated to the defence purposes of an occupying power, the interests of which differed sharply from those of the peoples of the Malayan peninsula, as the Pacific War was quickly to reveal.

FOOTNOTES

1. American production of private motor-cars, lorries and buses rose from 573,000 units in 1914 to 1,874,000 in 1917; rubber imports over the same period rose from 62,000 tons to 179,000.
2. See J.H. Drabble: *Rubber in Malaya, 1876-1922*, Kuala Lumpur, 1973, p. 131.
3. J.H. Drabble: op.cit., pp.137-8.
4. "The F.M.S. Rice Lands Enactment of 1917 allowed Residents to prohibit any but this crop on suitable Malay land, and a 1918 amendment to the Land Enactment of 1911 proscribed alientation for any other purpose of State lands suitable for wet-rice cultivation." (J.H. Drabble: op.cit., p.150) See also his earlier discussion (pp.72 et seq., pp.101-2) of the general evolution of British policy towards land and the Malays in the context of the rubber boom, a policy which ultimately engineered the passing of control over the best and best-situated rubber land into the hands of European companies.
5. The maximum price in 1916 was 4s.3½d. and the minimum in 1922 6¼d.; stocks rose from 119,062 tons in 1919 to 222,882 tons in 1922.
6. See P.T. Bauer: *The Rubber Industry*, Cambridge, 1948; P.T. Bauer: "The economics of planting density in rubber growing", *Economica*, Vol. XIII, No.50, May, 1946; P.T. Bauer: "The working of rubber regulation", *Economic Journal*, Vol. LVI, No.223, September 1946; P.T. Bauer: *Report on a visit to the rubber growing smallholdings of Malaya, July-September 1946*, London, 1948. For an assessment of Bauer's views and role see George Lee: "Commodity Production and Reproduction amongst the Malayan Peasantry", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol.3, No.4, 1973; Mr Lee's reasoned hypothesis that Bauer, in effect, represented British manufacturing industry (which stood to gain from lower rubber prices) and Whitehall's concern for the restoration of "stability" in a turbulent Malaya (smallholders were better "integrated" into colonial society than poorly paid and unionised plantation labourers) has since been confirmed to me by people concerned with events at the time.
7. P.T. Bauer: "The Working of Rubber Regulation" in T. H. Silcock (ed.): *Readings in Malayan Economics*, Singapore, 1961, pp.243 et seq. Underassessment deprived smallholders of entitlement to put a considerable part of their potential tap on the market. But even smallholders with coupons entitling them to export a given quantity of rubber could – paradoxically – be better off by selling the coupon to a plantation which,

by thus increasing its export entitlement, could thereby lower unit cost of production by spreading overheads. For a full account of the anomalies see references in fn. 6, above.

8. According to the official IRRC view, a London price of 8d. a lb. was the bare minimum needed to furnish a "reasonable return to efficient growers" – yet "native" growers at the same time (1936) could export 150,000 tons with an f.o.b. price of about 1d. a lb.! (P.T. Bauer: op. cit., p.252).
9. P.T. Bauer: *The Rubber Industry*, p. 89.
10. Yip Yat Hoong: *The Development of the Tin Mining Industry of Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur, 1969, p.347: major changes are, however, now under way *(see Financial Times*, 12 June 1976).
11. Yip Yat Hoong: op.cit., pp.153 et seq.
12. Yip Yat Hoong: op.cit., pp.181 et seq. et passim.
13. Yip Yat Hoong: op.cit., p.186; by 1940 about 14 people effectively controlled world smelting – and by imposition of a prohibitive export tax on ores from Malaya and Nigeria going to non-Imperial countries, smelting was in practice restricted to the great smelting plants in England and the Straits Settlements – a reality bitterly resented by the United States.
14. See J.K. Eastham: "Rationalisation in the Tin Industry", *Review of Economic Studies*, Vol. IV, 1936-37; W.Y. Elliott (ed.): *International Control in the Non-Ferrous Metals*, New York, 1937; L.L. Fermor: *Report upon the Mining Industry of Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur, 1939; K.E. Knorr: *Tin Under Control*, California, 1945.
15. The number of labourers per £1,000 value of tin output fell from 4.39 in 1912 to 2.56 in 1920; see William P. Kihney: *Aspects of the Economic Development of Malaya, 1900-40*, Ph.D. Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1975.
16. P.L. Yates: *Commodity Control*, London, 1943.
17. P.L. Yates: op.cit., p.137, fn.
18. P.L. Yates: op.cit., table p.142.
19. See my article "South East Asia – Thirty Years On," *Social Scientist*, No. 38, September, 1975.
20. See W.P. Kinney: op.cit. Between the wars, the Malayan or Straits dollar = 2/4 (two shillings and four pence sterling).
21. Cited J. Norman Parmer: *Colonial Labour Policy and Adminstration*, New York, 1960, p.203.
22. J. Norman Parmer: op.cit., p.205.
23. Labour Research Department: *British Imperialism in Malaya*, London, 1926, p.35.
24. Labour Research Department: op.cit., pp.23-25, 27.
25. P.L.Yates: op.cit., p.136.
26. See *Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into Certain Matters Affecting the Health of Estates in the FMS, Singapore*, 1924: J.H. Strahan and W.J. Vickers: *A Health Survey of the State of Kedah*, Kuala Lumpur, 1935-36; V.S. Srinivasa Sastri: *Report on the Conditions of Indian Labour in Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur, 1937.
27. The European population in Malaya was, of course, skewed in that most were healthy men and women in the prime years of their lives.
28. *The Economics of Underdevelopment*, 1961, p.117.
29. The Colonial Office Report for 1932 noted that ". . . the easy wealth that has accrued in the past from tin and rubber induced a concentration of vision and effort on these two commodities to the exclusion of others with the result that the Peninsula imports much that it might itself produce." In the same year, the Colonial Secretary, Sir Phillip Cunliffe-Lister, noted in a letter to the Governor of the Straits Settlements: ". . . I do not think that . . . industrialisation will ever get very far and there is no doubt that the main business of the Colonial Empire for many years to come will be primary production, and that is what makes it such a valuable market for the more advanced parts of the Empire for nearly the whole of its

production (and it) will remain complementary to that of those parts." (PRO CO 273 583: Cunliffe-Lister to Clementi, 1932). The report of the Straits Settlement Trade Commission of 1933-34 commented: "An indication of the attitude of the Home Government towards local manufacture is given in the Secretary of State's despatch No.420 of 25 September 1933, dealing with the question of manufacture of cigarettes in Malaya. The view expressed is that 'the encouragement of the development of local manufactures in the Colonies by artificial means at the expense of manufactures in this country (i.e. Britain) is undesirable except where the industry can be regarded as natural to the dependency concerned. I cannot regard the manufacture of cigarettes as natural in this sense to the Straits Settlements.' The 'artifical means' in this case was a slight preference in the duty, and the implication seems to be that, whereas the importation into the United Kingdom of shoes made in Singapore may be limited for the benefit of the British manufacture, Singapore may not do anything to encourage local manufactures which may develop at the expense of British imports. As regards an industry being 'natural in the dependency' practically all our industries are on the same footing as cigarette making in that they consist of the conversion of imported materials into goods for local consumption. The notable exception is canned pineapples, and in a lesser degree rubber goods. And the conversion of imported tobacco into cigarettes for local consumption is about as 'natural' to Singapore as to Bristol or Liverpool. *The attitude if perhaps not deliberately antagonistic to the development of our industries appears at least to be unsympathetic.*" Comment is superfluous. (Emphasis added).

30. W. R. Roff: *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, London, 1967, p. 206.
31. It is true that limited irrigation works were undertaken by the British in the 1898-1906 period, and other, even more modest, schemes thereafter from time to time, but on the whole nothing much was done until the crisis came in the 1930s (see Chai Hon-chan: op.cit., pp.62-63 and pp. 146 et seq.). One should note, too, that the motive was less altruism and a sense of responsibility towards the Malays than the need to produce more rice locally for the many wage labourers in the mines and plantations of Perak, in the case of the Krian scheme, and elsewhere. European sugar production was also borne in mind.
32. From 66.6 per cent in 1930 to 62.5 per cent in 1941.
33. See, for example, W.R. Roff: op.cit., passim. Peasant discontent and actual resistance was virtually *always* rumbling somewhere in Malaya throughout the British period – something that requires research and documentation.
34. W.R. Roff: ibid., p.228.
35. W.R.Roff: ibid., p.240.
36. See C. Gamba: *Origins of Trade Unionism in Malaya*, Singapore, 1962; J.N. Parmer: "Chinese Estate Workers' Strikes in Malaya in March, 1937", in C.D. Cowan (ed.): *The Economic Development of South-East Asia*, London, 1964; M.R. Stenson: *Industrial Conflict in Malaya*, London, 1970: Virginia Thompson: *Labour Problems in South-east Asia*, New Haven, 1947; W.L. Blythe: "Historical Sketch of Chinese Labour in Malaya", *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XX, June 1947.
37. J.N. Parmer: op.cit., p.157; ". . . Chinese workers overwhelmingly predominated in the tin industry while Indians were most numerous on the rubber plantations. Although in other industries the Chinese generally were predominant, in a number of significant sectors it can be said that multi-racial labour forces existed, for example, the railways, coal mines at Batu Arang, the docks in Singapore, Port Swettenham and Penang, municipal workers and workers employed by the Singapore Traction Company." (Michael Williams: *Politics of the Labour Movement in Malaya*, unpublished paper).

38. L.W. Pye: *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya*, Princeton, N.J. 1965, p.61.
39. See J.H. Brimmell: *Communism in Southeast Asia*, London, 1959; Virginia Thompson and R. Adloff: *The Left Wing in Southeast Asia*, New York, 1950; R.H.de S. Onraet: *Singapore – A Police Background*, London, 1947; G.Z. Hanrahan: *Communist Struggle in Malaya*, New York, 1954; C.B. McLane: *Soviet Strategies in South-east Asia*, Princeton, N.J. 1966.
40. Most sources, including MCP statements (see, e.g. "New Year's Day Message of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Malaya for 1976", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. VI, No.3, 1976), accept this dating; S. Husin Ali: op. cit., p.28, gives 1927 as the founding date.
41. See Iain Buchanan: *Singapore in Southeast Asia*, London, 1972: see also footnote 29, above.

APPENDIX

British 'Intervention' and Malay Resistance

Mohamed Amin

The history of armed Malay resistance to colonialism has yet to be written. Orthodox historians have treated the phenomena of both actual Malay armed resistance, and the threat of it, to British colonial rule in a most trivial manner and have distorted its significance. The studies of the major Malay uprisings by these historians are based chiefly on accounts by colonial administrators and are totally biased in support of the contention that the Malays welcomed British colonialism to 'set their troubled houses in order'. The uprisings which did flare up have been dismissed as the work of chiefs and feudal leaders disgruntled by the loss of privileges; the aspiration of the people for independence from British rule as a cause of Malay resistance has accordingly been denied by these historians. Since it is impossible to deny the central role peasants played in these rebellions they are deemed to be backward, misled by agitators.

Though the subject will have to be considered in some depth in future, it may be instructive to consider, very briefly, some of the more glaring inconsistencies and contradictions which are to be found in the orthodox historian's perspective of Malay resistance.

Major Malay Uprisings: The Post-1875 Period

The Malay population lived in settlements along the coasts and rivers and were predominantly engaged in agricultural activities. Food and other produce were moved up and down the country along these waterways, which constituted the main lines of communication and trade. This made them highly vulnerable to the sea-power of British imperialism. In fact all the lines of communications within the Malay Peninsula were controlled by the British navy; warships dominated the Straits while gunboats were to be found in the estuaries and launches

could penetrate into the deeper interior of the country via the network of rivers and creeks. Besides these advantages Britain also enjoyed an overwhelming military superiority over the Malays. All the most up-to-date weapons of death and destruction were the sole monopoly of Britain. These factors would seem to make Malay resistance unthinkable. And yet, against such overwhelming odds, Malay resistance did erupt in different parts of the Malay Peninsula at different intervals throughout the whole period of British colonial rule.

Malay armed resistance occurred at the very outset when Britain established its regime in Perak. The British Resident, J.W.W. Birch, was executed by Malay patriots, under the leadership of the patriotic chief Maharajah Lela, on 2 November 1875. Thus began the Perak War. The British sent for reinforcements from India and Hong Kong and soon put down the rebellion to be followed by some 'punitive' expeditions in which villages of sympathisers of the rebels were burnt down. The leaders were eventually caught and hanged in January 1877, some imprisoned for life and others exiled. At the same time a general revolt which was being prepared in Selangor was also put down.

The Negri Sembilan War too occurred at the end of 1875. A considerable military superiority was built up by the British with reinforcements of Gurkha and Arab troops supplied with heavy artillery, ammunition and back-up supplies. With some 500 well-armed men, the British defeated the Negri Sembilan rebels, led by Yam Tuan Antah. The Malays had a smaller force who were armed chiefly with flintlock muskets which fired bullets of tin. They also suffered a severe shortage of both ammunition and supplies. At the last major encounter at Paroi, the casualties on both sides were quite even: the British had 37 killed and wounded, the Malays 35 killed and a large number wounded.

The British established by their response to these rebellions that they were prepared, if need be, to muster the whole strength of the British Empire to impose the new British regime. At the conclusion of the Negri Sembilan War, the British officials in charge of the campaign were satisfied that they had taught the Malays 'such a lesson as will effectually satisfy other native States of our supremacy'.[1]

Despite establishing this supremacy the British were to face an even more serious rebellion which erupted in Pahang soon after the Residential System was extended there. The Pahang Rebellion was led by Bahman, a peasant who was famous for his bravery, fighting prowess and leadership. These qualities earned him the title 'Pahlawan' (hero) in the Selangor War and he later became Chief of Semantan District. He was very proud of the fact that he did not submit to the British Government and in late 1891 mounted a campaign of disobedience, inciting his people to defy all State regulations. In December 1891, Bahman 'openly proclaimed his intention to resist the Government by force of arms'.[2] He attacked and put to flight a British expedition sent to reinforce the police force in his District. He and his fol-

lowers then overran the Lubok Trua police station. The Pahang Rebellion lasted for four years and in the course of the struggle Bahman was joined by other patriotic leaders, notably To' Gajah and Mat Kilau. They conducted a classical guerrilla campaign against the British forces. Though the British succeeded in first containing and then suppressing the rebellion, they never managed to capture the principal leaders who were given sanctuary by the people of Kelantan and Trengganu.

The next major rebellion occurred in Kelantan in 1915, at that time containing the largest Malay population in the Peninsula. The Kelantan Rising, 1915[3] , was led by Haji Mat Hassan, popularly known at To' Janggut because he sported a heavy beard. He was a popular figure, a commoner, and was believed to be gifted with 'kebal' (invulnerability). The first outbreak of rebellion occurred in Pasir Puteh district on the 29 April. Here an anti-land-tax movement developed to oppose a recently introduced land-tax which replaced the produce-tax which had hitherto been in operation.

The police were sent to arrest To' Janggut, who knifed one of them to death. A large crowd then went on to sack the office of the District Officer, symbol of alien rule. The bungalows and property of European planters were also the object of burning and looting by the crowd.

The British Adviser wired Singapore for troops fearing that the rebellion would spread throughout Kelantan. In early May 200 soldiers arrived. HMS "Cadmus"fired shells along the coast and its sailors, who were despatched along Pasir Panjang road, according to the then Chief Police Officer, Hamilton, 'were a little (sic) barbarous and killed some innocent 'Klings' (Indians) whom they took to be mutineers'.[4] On their way to Pasir Puteh, the troops encountered armed Malays who were led by To' Janggut; Engku Besar, the only leader of the Kelantan Rising who had aristocratic ties, the rest of the leaders being commoners; Penghulu Adam; Che Isakak and Haji Said. In this battle To' Janggut was killed and his supporters became demoralised. The British went on to recapture Pasir Puteh and later 'acknowledged the extreme bravery shown in the battle by To' Janggut.'[5] Penghulu Adam gave himself up while others fled to Ulu Kelantan, Trengganu and Siam. The early death of To' Janggut resulted in aborting a much bigger uprising planned for late May.[6]

The body of To' Janggut was then hung upside down and put on display at the Kota Bahru town padang (green) for several days as a deterrent to would-be rebels. Violence had of course not been confined only to Pasir Puteh district. There had been disturbances in Pasir Mas and Ulu Kelantan as well at that time. In Kuala Krai, some 300 men threatened the District Officer, Adams, with a revolt. The Kelantan Rising was in fact the culmination of opposition to British rule following the Anglo-Siamese Convention of 1909, supplemented by the Anglo-Kelantan Treaty 1910, which extended the British regime to that state.

Thirteen years later another To' Janggut, probably inspired by his Kelantanese namesake, appeared on the scene to lead the Trengganu

Rebellion in 1928. Another leader of the Rebellion was Haji Abdul Rahman who 'proclaimed wholehearted disapproval of the Sultan's acceptance of British control. . .'[7] Opposition to British rule in various parts of the state had been reported at Kuala Trengganu for more than a year. Then at the end of April 1928, peasants in several areas were reported to be arming themselves and openly defying the authorities. H.P. Bryson, a colonial administrator, reported that a senior police officer, 'a member of the Royal Family of Pahang, said to me once that unless firm action was taken fairly quickly all the Europeans in Kuala Trengganu might be murdered'.[8] When Bryson went to investigate disturbances in Kuala Brang he met 'some twenty or thirty of the most aggressive-looking Malays I had ever met. They were dressed for war; their heads were tightly bound with cloth; in their short sarong – so short as to be almost like belts – were parang panjang, the vicious long knives'.[9]

In Kuala Brang, the peasants numbering nearly two thousand attacked the District Officer, Wan Mohamed. When he and his staff were put to flight the peasants hoisted their flag over the Government buildings. The peasants then set out to attack the newly opened police station at Kuala Telemong to acquire arms.

At Kuala Trengganu a party of armed police opened fire on the peasants who were chiefly armed with krises and parangs, killing eleven and wounding many others. One of the eleven killed was To'Janggut and the rebellion collapsed. Meantime, reinforcements from Kuala Lumpur had arrived and British authority was re-established.

Malay Resistance: The Need for a Re-Appraisal

These uprisings do constitute a formidable manifestation of opposition by the Malays against British colonialism. The fact that the British were able to suppress them quickly and hence prevent them from spreading does not in any way diminish their significance. By developing a better understanding of Malay resistance we can draw certain implications for the anti-imperialist struggle of the Malayan people in general:

a. Armed Malay resistance gives the lie to the view, very effectively used by British imperialism, that the anti-imperialist struggle in Malaya was confined solely to the non-Malay, i.e. mainly Chinese, population. In fact the national liberation struggle of the 1940s and early 1950s can be seen as a continuation of the armed struggle first launched against British colonialism by the patriotic Malay forces. The struggle being waged in the post-independence or neo-colonial phase by the Malayan workers and peasants is thus part of an on-going process, albeit of different qualitative levels. The content of Malay resistance was anti-imperialist, but it was characterised chiefly by spontaneity. With the development of the capitalist economy and the birth of the working class, the anti-imperialist struggle was gradually transformed into conscious struggle. The working class developed its own organisation

and leadership, guided by scientific theory with the birth of the MCP.

b. Another aspect of the Malay resistance which is underrated by academic apologists of colonialism and neo-colonialism is the hatred for British colonial rule and the aspiration for independence which inspired the various rebellions. In fact this constitutes the main thread linking the rebellions. This is not to deny that there were other grievances present which helped spark off the rebellions.

The issue of the land-tax has usually been cited as the cause of the Kelantan Rising. Yet, even some of the colonial administrators who helped put down the rebellion believed that this had merely been 'seized upon as a pretext'.[10] Furthermore, To' Janggut had from the very start declared his intention to 'drive out all Europeans' as well as non-Kelantanese Malays brought in by the British to occupy certain important posts in the administration.[11]

The Trengganu Rebellion, Sheppard asserts, was 'a symptom of the clash between the Red Flag and the White Flag Malay Secret Societies'[12] and peasant grievances were seized on as a cover. Bryson, on the other hand, stresses opposition to cash payments for land rents as one of the causes, though he admits that there might have been others, including the desire on the part of the agitators 'to drive out the infidels'.

Haji Abdul Rahman, the leader of the Trengganu Rebellion, as we pointed out, wholeheartedly disapproved of the Sultan's acceptance of British control. In fact as early as 1895 Engku Saiyid, a holy man, had helped to arm and recruit over a hundred men in Trengganu and Kelantan to join the ranks of the Pahang rebels. He preached 'a holy war against the infidel, assuring them that if they fought they would be invulnerable and victorious'.[13] He presented the recruits each with a sword with which to go to war against the British and later assisted the Pahang rebels to escape the pursuing British expedition.

As for the earlier uprisings, the hatred for British colonialism and pro-independence sentiments were present throughout. In Perak when Birch wrote to the patriotic Chief Maharajah Lela, warning him to desist from building stockades, he replied through an interpreter: 'You can go back and tell Mr Birch to get all the troops he can from England and India and I will fight.'[14] On another occasion when Birch sent his interpreter to tell the Maharajah Lela that he wanted to see him, Maharajah Lela replied, 'Why should we go and see him? This is not his country or village. It is ours.'[15] On the same day Birch was speared to death.

In the Negri Sembilan War, Daly, a surveyor, with his armed escort was surrounded by Malays at Terachi. After interrogating him briefly at gunpoint, the Malays asked him for the whereabouts of Tunku Sulong, the pro-British Dato Klana's eldest son, who was with Daly's party. The Malays said that they 'would cut off his head if they caught him, for bringing white men into the country'.[16] In another report, one of the colonial administrators revealed that 'the Malays are much en-

couraged by the affairs in Perak . . . They say that they will make the white men into white curry'.[17]

Official accounts stress the inadequate Government allowance paid to Bahman as the cause of his disaffection with the Government and the Pahang Rebellion. This, however, does not stand up to closer examination. In one of his reports, the Resident noted that 'Pahang Malays, above all others, resent the interference of strangers'.[18] Bahman was merely the most uncompromising upholder of this attitude. Despite the various conciliatory statements which he made from time to time, and which is seized upon as evidence, his whole pattern of behaviour indicates that these were merely for tactical considerations. He was totally committed to an uncompromising struggle for the overthrow of the British. He regarded the other Chiefs of Pahang, who submitted to the British, as traitors and took great pride in the fact that he resisted the British.

The 1894 negotiations may be cited as an instance of his dual tactics. Bahman, To' Gajah and Mat Kilau conducted negotiations with the Government for several months. They sounded very conciliatory and indicated that they were ready to return to Pahang to surrender themselves to the authorities. At the same time they were preparing for another attack which took place in the second week of June 1894. They kept up the negotiations for surrender with envoys from the Government until the very eve of this attack. When the rebel forces went on their journey upstream, 'they were feted as heroes by the people'.[19] After capturing some enemy positions and on arrival near Pulau Tawar the rebels sent messages to the Chiefs 'asking them to take up arms against the infidels'.[20]

There can be no doubt that the Pahang Rebellion was a popular anti-British struggle.

c. Many of the counter-insurgency methods perfected by British Imperialism against the Malayan national liberation movement during the so-called Emergency were first employed against the Malay patriots in the earlier risings.

The rounding up of the rural population into concentration camps, euphemistically called new villages, to deny guerrillas food was used during the Pahang Rebellion in 1895. In the last stage of the rebellion when a British expedition was pursuing Mat Kilau and his comrades, Clifford 'concentrated the people and rice supplies in a few villages in order to deprive the rebels of food and harbourage. These methods were successful in driving the fugitives out of Ulu Kelantan, into Trengganu'.[21]

At a more general level, naval control of rivers prevented food and supplies reaching any large assembly of forces opposing British Imperialism. In the Perak War, a blockade was used to prevent food reaching Maharajah Lela who had a force of 300 men. Major Dunlop reported that the blockade was having its effect: 'one thing is very certain,

rice is becoming scarce, and this in my opinion will do more towards weakening our enemies than anything else'.[22]

The razing of villages whose inhabitants were suspected of being sympathetic to the guerrillas, such as Jendaram in 1951, too, had its precursors during the Malay resistance. In the Perak War, the whole of Pasir Salak and Kampong Gaja were burnt down. Major Dunlop's report of 16 November 1875 reads:

> 'Yesterday morning we made a combined land and water attack on the enemy. After a long day's fighting, the enemy making an obstinate and prolonged resistance, we took and destroyed four stockades, including the Maharajah Lela's house and campong (village), the Datu Sagor's house and campong, in fact all Pasir Salak and Campong Gaja.'[23]

In the Pahang Rebellion the peasants who supported Bahman's capture of the Lubok Trua police station had their villages, Champaka and Bolo, burnt to the ground in March 1892.

d. Another myth that is prevalent in the orthodox interpretation is the military prowess attributed to the British, in contrast to its absence on the part of the Malays. Parkinson's typically patronising assertion that the Malays 'proved quite unmilitary in character'[24] partly accounts for the way Malay resistance has been trivialized.

The Malays in certain parts of the Peninsula had developed quite sophisticated methods of guerrilla warfare for that time. The Naning Malays, to cite an even earlier example, had put up fierce resistance against both the Dutch and the British in the pre-1875 period. In 1831-32, during the Naning War, the Malays proved that the Dutch fear of the 'traitorous and merciless Menangkabows'[25] i.e. traitorous and merciless to the colonialists, had sound justification. In July 1831, an expedition of 150 sepoys and two six-pounders were sent from Malacca to Tabok, capital of Naning, to bring to book the Penghulu who 'refused all terms short of actual independence.[26] On their way to Tabok the British expedition was attacked by Malay guerrillas. Using official sources, Mills writes:

> "The Malays followed *their usual tactics* of refusing a pitched battle; but harassed the column from ambush, and finally cut the line of communications. Supplies ran short, and the troops retreated to Malacca. The Malays attacked the retreating column, felling great trees across the path, and the two guns had to be spiked and abandoned."[27]

Clearly containing some of the germ of Mao's guerrilla tactics:

> "The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy halts, we harass; the enemy withdraws, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue",

which was written with scientific rigour about a century later.

In March 1832 a larger expedition of about 1400 men was sent by the British. The Naning forces never exceeded several hundred. They applied the same tactics, rarely making a stand, 'contenting themselves with harassing the covering parties who were sent into the jungle to

protect the pioneers and convicts engaged in cutting the road'.[28] It was, ironically, a Malay force from Rembau with whom Britain did a deal, who were also adept at guerrilla warfare, who helped transform the situation in a matter of weeks in Britain's favour. Britain's divide-and-rule tactics, and not the lack of military skill or determination on the part of the Malays, made it possible for Britain to defeat the Naning Malays. The divide-and-conquer tactics were used by the British in all their other encounters with the Malays.

The tradition of guerrilla warfare was not confined to this part of the Peninsula alone. As we mentioned earlier, the Pahang rebels conducted a classical guerrilla campaign. In a report to the Governor, the Resident of Pahang wrote as follows in 1891:

> "The Sultan of Pahang is admittedly a proficient in Malay warfare, and I was much impressed by the manner in which he arranged his scouting and attacking parties, by the facility of organising transport and commissariat services for Malays, and *by the excellence of his men as guerrilla soldiers, when fighting in dense jungle.*"[29]

It was localised agricultural economy giving rise to feudal factionalism which made it possible for British imperialism to take advantage of the conflict between these factions and pit one against the other. In all the rebellions, the British recruited certain chiefs or Sultans to help them suppress the rebellions. When the Royal families showed some ambivalence it was usually for opportunistic reasons; they were afraid that the rebellions might succeed and wished to keep their options open. The Sultan of Pahang was covertly sympathetic to the rebels in the early stages of the rebellion, partly on the prompting of his wife. When the patriotic chiefs were deposed, the British usually installed their own clients, many of whom were contemptuously regarded as imbeciles. It is thus misleading to attribute Britain's conquest of Malaya to the 'unmilitary character' of the Malay when in fact the reverse was true.

FOOTNOTES

1. C. Northcote Parkinson, *British Intervention in Malaya 1867-1877*, University of Malaya Press, 1964, p.288.
2. W. Linehan, "A History of Pahang", *Journal Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society, (JMBRAS)* Vol.XIV, Part II, June 1936, p.141.
3. J. de V. Allen, "The Kelantan Rising of 1915", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol.IX, No.2, 1968. This study is a departure from that of the orthodox historian's interpretation of Malay resistance. Allen asserts that Malay resistance may have played a bigger role than hitherto recognised by members of his profession. The Left in Malaya, Malay and non-Malay alike, have always considered Malay resistance a source of inspiration for the anti-imperialist tradition of the Malayan people as a whole.
4. See "Toh Janggut" in *Malaysia*, The Journal of the British Association of Malaysia, April 1968, p.14.
5. J. de V. Allen, op.cit., p.247.
6. Ibid., p.248.

7. M. Sheppard, "A Short History of Trengganu". *JMBRAS*, Vol.XXII, Part III 1949, p.64. Sheppard manages to dispose of this event in less than two pages. Other studies of Trengganu do not find the Rebellion worthy of even a mention.
8. H.P. Bryson, "KEBAL – Invulnerability" in *Malaysia*, March 1968, p.20.
9. Ibid., p.20.
10. J. de V. Allen, op.cit., p.248.
11. Ibid., p.246.
12. M. Sheppard, op.cit., p.66.
13. W. Linehan, op.cit., p.161.
14. C. Northcote Parkinson, op.cit., p.236.
15. Ibid., p.237.
16. J.M. Gullick, "The War with Yam Tuan Antah", *JMBRAS*, Vol.27, Part I, May 1954, p.7.
17. Ibid., p.15.
18. W. Linehan, op.cit., p.144.
19. Ibid., p.162.
20. Ibid., p.162.
21. Ibid., p.167.
22. C. Northcote Parkinson, op.cit., p.259.
23. Ibid., p.258.
24. Ibid., p.XVII.
25. Lennox Mills, "A History of British Malaya", *JMBRAS*, Vol.III, Part 2, 1925, p.116.
26. Ibid., p.124.
27. Ibid., p.124, emphasis added.
28. Ibid., p.126.
29. W. Linehan, op.cit., p.143, emphasis added.

Contradictions in Pre-war Colonalism, 1930-41

Daud Latiff

The depression exposed cracks in the colonial structure, which were to widen into open breach in the constitutional crisis after the second world war. On the one side was the colonial "old guard" whose interests lay in preserving the *status quo*. The arguments deployed from this camp rested almost entirely upon Britain's sacred duty to preserve Malay "rights" and "traditions" – rights and traditions which were seen and interpreted through British eyes, where indeed they were not largely outright British creations or rationalising myths. On the other were those, both in Malaya and in Whitehall, who saw clearly that accommodation to a changing world, in which British economic hegemony had evaporated and the long expansionary momentum of the 19th and early 20th centuries had expired, was essential. Such accommodation would require, at a minimum, recognition that Malaya had become a plural society, with large permanently resident Indian and Chinese communities who could not be excluded from social and political development, and that this, coupled with unavoidable change in the Malay rural sector, would inevitably make it imperative to replace rule via the Sultans with something more "modern" and responsive. Moreover the world-wide economic crisis, accompanied by defensive and protective reactions issuing from all the imperial capitals, compelled those responsible for the supervision of the British economy to take a much more positive and cohesive approach to the role of the Commonwealth and Empire, summed up in the system of Imperial Preference adopted at the Ottowa conference in 1932. *Laissez-faire* was dead, and in the new circumstances it could not be taken for granted that the interests of the old colonialists were identical with the best interests of British industry and the world-wide interacting network of British trade and commerce as a whole.

The old colonialists made great play of Britain's obligation to protect the "autonomy" of the Malay people, and attempts to rationa-

lise the complex constitutional structure of the country were invariably met with cries about "respecting the power of the Malay Sultans". The least indication of trying to grant non-Malays access to padi-fields to cultivate rice – something patently sensible in the circumstances of the depression-induced unemployment – provoked howls about "giving Malaya away to the foreigner". The most pernicious part of the reactionary ideology, however, lay in the general stress that the colonialists put upon the "traditional" nature of Malay society.

The Malays, being located mainly in the rural areas, were pictured as living tranquil and idyllic lives, under the benevolent paternalism of "their" Sultans (whose powers, in fact, had been massively reinforced by the British, for their own ends). The Malay Sultans were, with their reactionary and racist outlook, the very figureheads of this somewhat mock traditionalism. Perpetuation of the system, as ideally conceived by the colonial old guard, would have demanded a degree of separation between the "traditional" or "feudal" sector and the "advanced" or "westernised" sector (represented by the tin and rubber industries) quite unattainable in practice. And the depression exposed this, though it had, in fact, always been true. For the two sectors did, inevitably, interact, and the traditional part was integrated with the modern in an overall relation of exploitation. Development of the latter led to underdevelopment of the former, a process mediated by the "unequal exchange" intrinsic to a situation where there was, on the one side, economic power and freedom to define the conditions of its employment, and, on the other, economic impotence and dependence upon what, to the Malay villagers, were virtually monopolistic sellers and monopsonistic buyers.

The contraditions inherent in the system emerged with clarity in the 1930s when it became desirable to raise rice production. The dilemma was this. If the Malays were given incentives to increase production, incentives which – at a minimum – would have to improve their standards of living substantially, this would inevitably prompt them actively to seek further ameliorations in their condition. But this, in turn, would undermine the socio-political structure so painstakingly elaborated by the British, for a passive and docile Malay community had hitherto been taken for granted by the colonialists and the Sultans (and their numerous parasitic dependents) alike. Moreover, extensive works of modernisation – road construction, introduction and expansion of water control systems, up-grading of cultivation techniques, and the like – could not but set afoot in the rural areas social changes which it would be impossible to limit and control. Not unexpectedly, the old colonialists therefore embraced a policy which combined the outlook of "letting sleeping dogs lie" with that of "what

the Malay peasants don't see, their hearts won't grieve over". In essence, they were incapable of seeing – or perhaps fearful of the consequences of contemplating (far less promoting) – any alternative to the Malay Sultans as the most reliable mechanism for perpetuating reasonably smooth operation of the colonial economy.

To that extent, the British were saddled with the Sultans. The need to rationalise the economic and social structure of the country, however, made their removal or rather demotion imperative. It was only the emergence of a Malay nationalism based upon the English-educated Malay bureaucrats and functionaries which ultimately assured the continuation of British hegemony (for a time) in "independent" Malaya, though the switch was not accomplished without considerable difficulty and at times delicate, at times brutal, British promptings, initiatives, and interventions, as we shall see.

Crucial changes were also going on during the 'thirties with respect to the wage labour force. By the mid-1930s, the period of large-scale repatriation had come to an end, and – with the recovery of the rubber and tin markets – demand for labour increased again. But the situation which had prevailed in the past stubbornly refused to be reconstituted, for the old mechanisms regulating the labour supply for the benefit of capital no longer functioned as automatically nor adequately as before: most notably, the government of British India imposed a ban on assisted emigration of Indians to Malaya in 1938. In the late 1930s and early 1940s indeed, labour shortages were experienced, forcing employers and authorities to think about "releasing" some Malays from their rural thraldom – an impious thought, in old guard eyes, and one fraught with all kinds of dangers to the stability of the old order. At a stroke, many of the time-honoured colonial artifices became redundant, assumed a retrograde appearance, and emerged as obstacles to the introduction of structures of exploitation and control more appropriate to the new circumstances. The rise of working-class militancy in the 1930s merely served to underline the seriousness of the crisis which faced British planners, compelling them to think long and hard about the alternatives now open to them, granted the obsolescence of the complex disposition which had served so well in the past.

Obviously, central to achievement of an acceptable successor regime was transfer of effective control over policy decisions from the colony to London itself. This change was one which was spread over some years, starting even before onset of the depression. It was – needless to say – resented by the old guard colonialists, who correctly sensed that it was relegating them to the status of mere agents of an imperialism over the direction of which they were no longer to have any substantial say of their own. The change was most clearly revealed in the

divergence which developed between the administration in Malaya and the older-style colonialists.

Historically, the Malayan Civil Service could trace its ancestry back to the civil employees of the East India Company when it was operating in South East Asia at the end of the 18th and the first part of the 19th centuries, opening up the entrepot trade of the Straits Settlements.[1] From such a position of almost total integration of administrative and business functions, the successor colonial administration in Malaya, when responsibility passed to the Crown, if anything strengthened its ties and identity with British enterprise, and initially was nothing better than a more or less direct tool of organisations and representatives of its local interests and activities. However, with the redundancy of the *laissez-faire* system (as a result of the international capitalist economic crisis), the colonial administration gradually ceased to be the bureaucratic arm of the British colonialists in Malaya, and became more the agency in Malaya of British imperial strategy as a whole.

Roland Braddell, one of the colonialists who witnessed this transition, and was in point of fact highly critical of it, described it in 1944 as

> ". . . the new conception of the Colonial Office which turned the Colonial Empire into a bureaucratic octopus with its head in Downing Street and its tentacles consisting of the various unified colonial services. This might all have made for bureaucratic efficiency . . . but it ensured a divorce of Government from the people".[2]

The rest of his article, which appeared in *British Malaya* (the colonialists' mouthpiece), makes clear that by the "people" he means "those British subjects who are property owners and rate payers", and he takes the standard colonial position that "universal suffrage is impossible" – thus precluding all non-British sections of the population from having any but a subordinate and patron-client relationship with the administration. In the same article Bradell complains – logically enough – about the parallel shift which had been simultaneously taking place in the non-state segment of the colonial apparatus:

> "In unofficial life the shift of business headquarters from Malaya to London . . . caused Malaya to be treated, as it were, as a London Branch business and forced the eyes of employees to be turned to London and away from Malaya."

One of the first areas in which this divergence became clear was in the controversy over the plan of the Clementi administration to rationalise the hitherto fragmented constitutional patchwork of Malaya. Before the second world war Malaya was split into three different kinds of constitutional unit: the *Straits Settlements* (Penang, Singapore and

Malacca); the *Federated Malay States* (Pahang, Negri Sembilan, Selangor and Perak); and the *Unfederated Malay States* (Kelantan, Kedah, Perlis, Johore and Trengganu). The Straits Settlements were administered as Crown Colonies, having a Governor who was also coincidentally High Commissioner of the Federated Malay States (FMS). The FMS had been shaped by Britain out of those states possessing the tin riches she was anxious to exploit, and centralised control was extensive enough to make extraction of the metal as efficient as possible. Beyond the FMS lay the Unfederated Malay States (UMS), which were supposed to have a greater degree of autonomy, but which, in fact, felt British pressure, exercised by euphemistically-named "Advisers" (one attached to each Sultan), to almost the same degree, though to begin with at least interest in assimilating them to the FMS in terms of uniformity and central control was less precisely because they were judged to have less in the way of natural resources attractive to British capitalism. But in any case, the Sultans, whether in the FMS or in the UMS, never posed much of a problem to the British on their own account, because – as a British administrator remarked at the time of the constitution of the FMS – "those unhappy dummies will of course agree to anything they are told to accept".[3]

By the beginning of the 1930s the economic rationale for this fragmented system had disappeared. Johore, one of the UMS, had developed into the largest rubber producer in the country. Kelantan, another UMS, had also emerged as a major rubber producer, as well as having one of the biggest rice outputs in the country. Indeed, Kelantan and Perlis (again an UMS), as the largest producers of rice, grew increasingly important as self-sufficiency in rice production became an urgent issue. "This fragmentation," comments Allen,

> "and more especially the different levels of British control in the different areas made the system far from satisfactory. It was not well geared to the efficient working of the all-important tin and rubber industries whose welfare was so vital not only for Malaya but for the whole British Empire."[4]

Sir Cecil Clementi, who was High Commissioner and Governor of the Straits Settlements from 1929 to 1934, proposed a scheme that would integrate Malaya into one constitutional unit. It involved a process of decentralisation to the states, followed by what would have been, in effect, recentralisation into a single unit. This particular scheme did not make much progress as it was violently opposed by various British parties who were unwilling to allow any decentralisation, even if it was to be followed by recentralisation. Implementation of the project would clearly have disrupted the functioning of the economy and this automatically made it unacceptable.

What was significant about this attempt to rationalise the situation

was that it was done within the framework of accepting the importance of retaining the Malay Sultans as figureheads, which was the reason for the initial decentralisation. Clementi no doubt felt that simply to centralise the administration without paying lip service to the treaties and the 'autonomy' of the Sultans of the UMS, which was the proposed purpose of the first stage decentralisation, would have left Britain in an untenable position, unable formally to legitimise its continuing presence. The failure of the proposal, therefore, sharply illustrated the difficult position in which the British found themselves in trying to make any changes in the old colonial structure. Clementi was trapped between the need to rationalise the system on the one hand, and the absence of any acceptable alternative to the Malay Sultans, who represented all that was dysfunctional in old-style colonialism. Technocratic reforms were impossible unless they could be located within a specific part of the colonial class structure. Before the war there was no such base: the colonialists and their puppet Sultans refused to accept changes which would lead to their position being undermined.

The divergence that occurred between the colonialists and the administration was, therefore, at this time of a restricted kind. It arose from the inability of the old colonial structures to ensure the perpetuation of British hegemony under the changed conditions of the 1930s, but at the same time it was limited by the fact that the British had as yet no other class base in Malayan society that they could recruit for their purposes in place of the classes necessarily most opposed to them. This whole complex of interacting political, economic and social considerations which conspired to produce the crisis of British colonialism in the 1930s in Malaya can best be understood by taking a very specific aspect of the situation – rice production and the need for greater self-sufficiency.

In the rapidly changing world economic situation of the 1930s, Malaya – a net importer of rice throughout the colonial period – could no longer rely upon the proceeds of her exports to cover all her imported food needs, the more so since the rice market itself was badly disrupted by recession and its ramifications. The question of self-sufficiency became from this point onwards more than simply a disirable aim – it became vital.

It had been seen as desirable for a long time. Sir Frank Swettenham, Resident General of the FMS, had said as early as 1897 that he would like to see

> ". . . vastly increased areas under a well devised system of irrigation, yielding a rice crop sufficient not only for the people of the Malay States, but also for the large native population of the neighbouring colony."[5]

Despite this aspiration, however, even by 1928 domestic rice production

accounted for only 28 per cent of total consumption and even this figure had fallen by 1930 to 21 per cent.[6] There were several reasons for this. For the self-sufficiency aim to be approached would have required a considerable expenditure on irrigation and drainage. This was undoubtedly seen by the colonialists as "unnecessary" expenditure as long as imported rice was still readily available. This attitude was reinforced by the fact that most of the outlays would have had to be in the UMS, since practically all land suitable for rice cultivation in the FMS had already been taken up for rubber growing and the planters had not the slightest intention of yielding a single acre of the land they had under rubber to padi cultivation, the more so since rice was a far less profitable cash crop than rubber. Moreover, in keeping with their idea of the "traditional" or "backward" nature of the UMS, the colonialists were distinctly unsympathetic to colonial state expenditures there, fearing disruption of a system that had kept the Malays "contented". It was for these reasons, then, that,

> ". . . except during times of crisis . . . government did not take active measures to promote the rice industry, because its attention was dominated by other economic activities in Malaya such as the phenomenal growth of the country's rubber . . . tin. . . (and) communications system".[8]

The 1930s constituted just such a crisis. In 1929 Dr H.A. Tempany, who was the technical head of the FMS Department of Agriculture, advocated a change in official rice policy. He argued that instead of depending upon the extension of staple export production to provide the wherewithal to pay for imported rice, the government should expand domestic production by extension of the padi area through irrigation works and improvements in rice cultivation techniques. Thus advised, and in the circumstances of the depression, the government appointed a Rice Cultivation Committee in 1930 under the chairmanship of Tempany. In its report submitted in 1931, the Committee made the following two important recommendations: first, that

> ". . . the problem of increasing *rice production must be tackled not in isolation by the State or Settlement Governments, but on an overall basis extending over the entire country*";[8]

and second, that a new Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) should be set up, taking responsibility for the proposed irrigation programme. The DID was, in fact, set up the same year, but – contrary to the spirit of the first recommendation – it had executive powers only in the FMS and SS, and was merely "advisory" in the UMS. So these proposals and their implementation yet again demonstrate the contradiction between the need for technical and administrative rationalisation and the political framework in which they were put forward,

for it was precisely in the UMS that the DID's proposed work was most needed.

The policy of "self-sufficiency" was applauded in principle by planters and miners, although for

> ". . . purely economic reasons they would not grow rice themselves despite persuasion by some government officials, often with impressive statistics, on the advantages of padi growing".[9]

Steps were, however, taken to "encourage" padi production in all the UMS, with the exception of Johore which was so given over to rubber trees that there was no land to spare. Some of the "encouragements" dangled illustrate the means by which the UMS were positively underdeveloped for specific socio-economic reasons. The administration deliberately held back English education from the rural Malays because, as the Raja of Perak said, English-educated Malays ". . . would not take kindly to the pursuit of their forefathers"[10] (i.e. padi growing). Enlightened, they would presumably have commonly chosen to grow more profitable cash crops such as rubber, or to migrate to the burgeoning urban areas. Both of these alternatives would make attainment of self-sufficiency even more remote, while at the same time contributing to a politically unacceptable disintegration in the fabric of Malay rural society.

More direct methods were also adopted to induce increased rice production amongst rural Malays. These included creation at various times during the 1930s of further Malay Reservations in some of the UMS. Since the extensive areas of land put under this restriction could not legally be transferred out of Malay ownership, it served as well to prevent the vast pool of unemployed non-Malays from gaining access to land – something that would have hastened change and conflict in the rural areas as well as interfering with the customary whiphand that employers had always been able to wield over their wage labour. But the "security" of tenure thus granted also discouraged – as it was intended to do – Malays from leaving their rural occupations. Needless to say, the British dressed all this up in their usual paternalistic colonial rhetoric. In 1934, A.D. Haynes, the then Secretary of Agriculture, explained the rationale behind the Reservation legislation by saying that British "trusteeship" on behalf of the Malay people demanded that the colonial authorities

> " . . . administer the country on lines consistent with their welfare and happiness, not only for today but for the future ages. That aim will be obtained rather by building up a sturdy and thrifty peasantry living on the lands they own and living by the food they grow, than by causing them to forsake the life of their fathers for the glamour of the new ways . . . (and) . . . to abandon their rice fields for new crops which they cannot themselves utilise and the

market for which depends on outside world conditions beyond their orbit".[11]

The colonial structure of Malay society was clearly starting to break down under contrary pressures. On the one hand, the need for increased domestic rice production seemed to entail preservation of the division between the 'backward' rural sector and the 'advanced' cash crop and industrial sector, if not its actual strengthening. On the other, and going against the first tendency, were the multiple objective factors tending to break the division down. Malays were no longer prepared to live in abject poverty growing rice when they could earn enough to buy more rice than they could possible grow by switching to cash crops like rubber or by drifting into wage labour as plantation or mine labourers or as police constables – or even as servants, chauffeurs, and the like, in the house employ of Europeans. Conversely, non-Malays, but more particularly the Chinese, were increasingly manifesting the desire to settle down in Malaya, with – if possible – some land of their own, and therefore a degree of independence.

The paradox – and perceived threat – in the developing situation was that if, leaving aside all other considerations, the Chinese were to be allowed land *and* on it to grow rice they were generally expected to organise its cultivation more intensively and efficiently than the Malays. While this would contribute substantially towards the stated goal of self-sufficiency it would also glaringly destabilise the *status quo* in a variety of obvious and not so obvious ways, so that what would have constituted economic rationalisation would simultaneously have undermined the colonial control mechanisms. As Tan Chen Lock said at the time, to attain the goal of self-sufficiency

". . . it would be necessary to induce Chinese and other non-Malays to . . . grow rice to feed themselves".[12]

But this logic was anathema to the colonialists who opposed the indicated course of action unremittingly.

In 1939 Sir Shenton Thomas, the High Commissioner and Governor of the Straits Settlements, decided that, nevertheless, such a head-in-the-sand attitude had – somehow – to be reversed. With the outbreak of the second world war, rice had become of transcendent strategic importance and to have Chinese and Indians producing extra quantities of it would be ". . . making a real and practical contribution to the defence of the Empire".[13] The decision was probably also influenced by the need to damp down and contain Chinese working-class militancy and to secure their "loyalty". The old guard however put up last-ditch resistance, and the *Straits Times* screamed that the administration was "giving away Malaya to the foreigners".[14] The "foreigners" were, in

point of fact, not prepared meekly to wait for the administration to "give" Malaya to them. They were actively opposing British oppression and – to that extent – *were* threatening to *take* Malaya away from the British. It was this change in the structure of the colony in the 1930s which was most noticeable, and at the political level most serious for the continuation of British exploitation of Malaya's workers and resources.

The ability of the working class to hit back rested not only upon their heightened political consciousness but also upon the changed labour supply situation whereby – as noted above – actual labour shortages had begun to emerge. Conscious that they could no longer depend upon immigration as a source of labourers, nor upon emigration as the gratifyingly cheap solution to unemployment (obviating the need for any social services whatsoever), employers quickly changed their tune. As early as 1936, the FMS Federal Secretary had observed that

> "Most rubber and Oil Palm estates are equipped and organised for Tamil labour forces which have proved efficient, economical and docile (sic) . . . a general change over to any other type of labour would be expensive and would be from more than one point of view undesirable. The problem presented by the cessation of Indian immigration consists therefore of conserving our South Indian Estate population and inducing them to remain in Malaya instead of returning to India. In a nutshell it is how to settle in and near estates the maximum number of South Indian workers in the shortest possible time".[15]

In other words, since the colonial economy could no longer have an "immigrant" labour force with all that this implied it was essential to convert what was left of it into a domestic domiciled labour force. There were important implications of such a change, not least of them the development of labour militancy among Indian workers.

As far as the Chinese were concerned, the administration had been going against the wishes of the employers by deliberately limiting immigration from the mid-thirties on. Such control was effected through application of the 1933 Aliens Ordinance, introduced originally to restrict immigration at the trough of the depression. Employers complained that this interference was creating "an artificial labour shortage", but the administration persisted with the policy. It was ". . . motivated primarily by . . . interest in maintaining law and order and ultimately British rule".[16] Events of the late 1920s and early 1930s had convinced the colonial authorities that the Chinese were quite capable of organising in effective defence of their own interests, and they were thus seen as politically dangerous.

But restriction of immigration, combined with a growing reluctance

among Chinese long resident or born in Malaya to return to a China they no longer regarded as "home", meant that both employers and administration had to face up to the implications of their being permanently resident in the country. Some employers began improving conditions and amenities for their Chinese employees, and the government proved powerless to prevent Chinese taking over small patches of land upon which to cultivate vegetables – the start of the intractable "squatter" problem of the "Emergency" a decade later. These changes, in conjunction with the locally-felt political and ideological influences of the Chinese revolution then in progress, led to the emergence of massive displays of labour militancy.

The response of both colonialists and administration to these developments was totally inadequate. It was only the coming of the second world war and the resultant change in strategy of the labour unions themselves which prevented the crisis from escalating out of control. However, it was starkly plain that British hegemony had broken down completely. Neither indiscriminate employment of brutally repressive measures, nor the blandishments of paternalistic rhetoric, had any effect. The inability of the colonial apparatus to make the essential changes which were increasingly urgently demanded by the situation meant that it had quite simply lost control. The old colonial perspectives were far too short-sighted. Those who clung to them simply could not comprehend the necessity, if Britain was to retain hegemony in the colony, of liberalising the treatment of labour and of abandoning the ideology of Malay supremacy, thus allowing a modicum of political and social rights to the Chinese, Indians and other resident non-Malays. But the authorities, however more open-eyed they were with respect to the nature of the *problems*, were for the time being no better placed to come up with effective solutions.

The task of doing so was, therefore, entrusted to a Malayan Planning Unit formed during the war to plan for Britain's future in the colony after the inevitable defeat of Japan. In 1941, however, there were few encouraging signs that Britain would, in fact, be able to extricate herself from the Malayan shambles, and concrete ideas of how this might nevertheless be accomplished were almost totally lacking. One thing could be taken as certain: a return to the structures and mechanisms of the pre-war period was totally out of the question.

FOOTNOTES

1. For a description of the bureaucratic structure of the East India Company see: Robert O. Tilman: *Bureaucratic Transition in Malaya*, Cambridge 1964, pp. 40 et seq.

2. R. Braddell: "The Reconstruction of Malaya", *British Malaya*, August, 1944.
3. B. Simandjuntak: *Malayan Federalism 1945-1963*, London, 1969, p. 9.
4. James de V. Allen: *The Malayan Union*, Yale University South East Asia Studies Monograph Series, No.10, p.4.
5. Ding Eing Tan Soo Hai: *The Rice Industry in Malaya, 1920-1940*, Department of History, University of Singapore, 1963, p. 21; the "neighbouring colony" was the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia).
6. Before this, in the period 1918 to 1927, on average 35 per cent of rice consumed in Malaya was domestically produced. For full figures up to 1934 see *Malayan Statistics*, Official FMS publication, 1934 issue.
7. Ding Eing Tan Soo Hai: ibid.
8. Ibid, p. 25; see also *Report of the Rice Cultivation Committee*, 1931, Vol. I, para 21.
9. Lim Chong-yah: *Economic Development of Modern Malaya*, London, 1967, p. 175.
10. Ibid.
11. Ding Eing Tan Soo Hai: op.cit., p.15.
12. Ibid, p.18.
13. Ibid, p.19.
14. Ibid, p.20.
15. N.J. Parmer: *Colonial Labour Policy and Administration*, New York, 1960, p.244.
16. Ibid, p.251.

Japanese Invasion and Occupation, 1942-45*

Daud Latiff

It was within the context of a crisis in British colonialism in Malaya that the Japanese invasion began late in 1941. The situation throughout South East Asia had been deteriorating for the allies for some months before the Japanese eventually entered the northern part of the Malayan peninsula. Notwithstanding the high probability that Malaya would be overrun completely within a short time, the British had been very reluctant to make preparations for any kind of "stay behind" party entrusted with the tasks of harassing the occupying forces, collecting intelligence to be relayed back to the British, and providing a strategic base for the reoccupation of the country when the time came.

There was, however, pressure put on the administration to make just such preparations. Spencer Chapman, author of a later account of all this, *The Jungle is Neutral,* had been trying to obtain permission to set up a training camp to prepare "stay behind" parties, but had met with little support. The Malayan Communist Party had also been pressing the administration to allow it to co-operate in the war effort, which they perceived as an anti-fascist struggle. Such co-operation also implied the creation of "stay behind" parties. The reluctance of the authorities to respond to these promptings cannot be ascribed simply to their distrust of "unconventional warfare".[1] It was, on the contrary, mainly a consequence of their realisation that such a move would, in effect, accord legitimacy to the MCP, and that this, in turn, would entail extending greater recognition to the role and significance of the Chinese community in the country, since it was the Chinese who, at this time, contributed by far the major part of the membership of the MCP. These implications were most uncongenial to the British colonial adminis-

*More detailed treatment of several points referred to briefly in this Chapter is to be found in the Chapter which follows.

tration, the policies of which had hitherto rested upon virulent anti-communism and an anti-Chinese perspective buttressed by the supposition that virtually every Chinaman was a migrant coolie and congenital trouble-maker.

On the other hand, there was really no option but the one urged if the British were to make anything of the idea of "stay behind" parties. The MCP was the sole organisation capable of making the project feasible – and, besides, it was the only one that had demonstrated itself to be dedicated, with its allies, to opposing Japanese imperialism with any consistency and effectiveness. Nevertheless, it was only after the Japanese had actually begun the invasion on 8 December that the administration, not, however, without spinsterly trepidation, gave the go-ahead. On the fifteenth of the month, all leftist prisoners were released from jail. From among these thus made available, the MCP leaders themselves handpicked about 165 cadres who were then sent to the hastily improvised "101 Special Training School" (101 STS).

The training "course" lasted a fortnight, more or less, and the cadres were graduated through it in batches of roughly thirty. Thereafter, they were issued with very inadequate arms and equipment (obtained mainly from police stocks), the decision having been taken that their training did not warrant provision of a higher standard of *matériel*. Following this, they were organised into a number of groups which, at a later date, were to become the cores of the various operational units of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). A few members of the training staff of 101 STS joined these groups when they went into the *ulu* (interior, jungle) on the approach of Japanese forces; they included Spencer Chapman. That the British had thus committed themselves to a liaison, however fleeting and expedient, with the MCP was to have then incalculable repercussions in the post-war period.

But this was not the only instance of crass opportunism on the part of the British in their dealings with the Chinese community and the MCP, for – during the preparations for the terminal defence of Singapore – a volunteer force consisting mainly of Chinese who had been active in anti-Japanese organisations before the invasion was recruited. It was later known as "Dalforce", its name derived from that of the British officer (John Dalley) who commanded it. There was little real attempt to arm this hastily-mustered force, and for this reason alone its effectiveness in seriously impeding Japanese progress was foredoomed to be minimal. Nonetheless, the force was deployed in the last-ditch attempt to stem the Japanese advance into Singapore from the already conquered mainland. Very few of the original 2000 volunteers survived, and the Japanese finally overran the island on 15 February 1942.

The collapse of Singapore is seen by many people as the greatest

disaster British imperialism ever suffered in its long history. This is quite probably true. Its main significance, however, lies not in the damage to the British military machine which resulted, but in the effect it had upon Britain's standing in the eyes of the Malayan people. Having stressed for nearly 50 years her role as protector of the Malay people, Britain's humiliating rout and panic-stricken flight at a stroke shattered irrevocably a key prop of her colonial ideology. As in the case of British co-operation with the MCP and the Chinese community, the effects of this did not become fully apparent until after the war.

During the year following the fall of Singapore, no contact was made by the allies with the resistance forces in peninsular Malaya. But during this time the British Military Command was organising and training a special force, later known as Force 136, which it was intended would in due course be dropped into Malaya at an appropriate time and would, thereupon, set about liaising with the resistance there. For the military command, however, there was the agonising problem of which group to liaise with. Mountbatten, who was Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia Command (SEAC), made the following analysis to a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 11 May 1943. According to this the allies had a choice of several resistance groups with which to co-operate. These were the MPAJA, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Union (the mass support organisation of the MPAJA, involved mainly in propaganda work), and the much smaller and virtually insignificant KMT resistance groups.

Mountbatten's

> "proposals were that the assistance of the first and third sections should be used for the military advantages that might thereby be obtained and that further enquiries should be made regarding the second in order that policy towards it might be formulated. *The political danger that lay in using the first section lay in the strength that this would lend to a post-war claim for equality of status in Malaya for the Chinese. He hoped that such a claim might be forestalled by the early publication of the Home Government's post-war policy, which included the offer of Malayan Union citizenship to those Chinese who had made the country their home . . .*"[2]

If this quote from the Official History of World War II reflects the situation at this time accurately then it is clear that the whole issue of the political balance in post-war Malaya was a very important determinant of military strategy. It would appear that the British had already made concrete plans to improve in some way the position of the Chinese after the war. This decision appears to have been taken as early as May 1943, before the official policy-making body responsible for post-war Malaya, the Malayan Planning Unit, had been set up.

Mountbatten's proposals were accepted, and in May of that year, the first drop of Force 136 personnel was made into Malaya. Officially

Force 136 came under the auspices of the Special Operations Executive, the branch of the military concerned with a whole range of clandestine operations throughout the world. Specifically and significantly, it was responsible, *inter alia*, for the counter-revolutionary operations in Yugoslavia and Greece towards the end of the war. Force 136 had been formed to disrupt Japanese tenure of *all* occupied countries, not just Malaya.

Force 136 headquarters was located in Colombo, Ceylon, and was under the command of Basil Goodfellow. Several of the British officers who had been involved with 101 STS were enrolled. These included John Davis, a former Malayan Civil Servant, and an ex-FMS police officer, both of whom had escaped from Singapore when it fell, reaching SEAC HQ in April 1942. The Chinese involved in Force 136 had been chosen by the KMT, and were therefore guaranteed to be unsympathetic to the ideas of the MPAJA. Undiplomatic as this might seem, it was precisely the reason for their selection. The British had no desire to disclose to the MPAJA more than was strictly necessary for operational efficiency.

On arrival in Malaya, the Force 136 detachment took a considerable time to organise a meeting with representatives of the MPAJA Command. In fact, it was not until 30 December 1943 that the first direct discussions took place, with another meeting following on 1 January 1944. During the course of the talks

> "The guerrillas agreed to co-operate with the allied armies in their operations against the Japanese and *also to co-operate fully in the maintenance of Law and Order both during (sic) and after the occupation.*"

From that point onwards plans were made to drop supplies to the MPAJA and Force 136. The first drops were made around June 1944. Before that date there had been no aircraft in the South East Asian theatre capable of making the round trip to and from Malaya with any considerable load of cargo: it was only delivery of the new Liberator bombers with a longer range that made the return flight possible.

The Malayan Planning Unit

Meantime plans were being formulated in the United Kingdom for peacetime Malaya. The Colonial Office had opened talks with the War Office in February 1943 about the possibility of forming some kind of integrated committee to look into the problems. Despite the fact that as early as November 1942 a decision had been taken in London that ". . . military administrations would be set up in reoccupied territories in the Far East," the War Office proved very slow in responding to the Colonial Office's initiative: it was " . . . otherwise preoccupied, and as

yet unaware of the complexity of planning involved". In July 1943, however, a Malayan Planning Unit was finally set up, along with other parallel planning units for such territories as Borneo, Burma, and Hong Kong.[3] These planning units were all part of the Directorate of Civil Affairs set up in February of that year, supposedly to co-ordinate 'civil affairs' in South East Asia as a whole. They were not, though, fully integrated into the functioning of the Directorate, being housed with it merely as a matter of convenience " . . . until the force commanders concerned were ready to take them into their headquarters".

The MPU, although it was financed and controlled by the War Office, worked very closely with the Colonial Office. This twin approach to the problem had been one of the difficulties that had had to be overcome in establishing the Unit. It reflected the fact that it was really involved in two quite different but equally quite inseparable projects: first, formulation of future long-term policy, officially the responsibility of the Colonial Office; and, second, establishing and equipping a military administration which would move into Malaya with the forces themselves when the Japanese were defeated, and this officially was primarily a War Office concern. But it was clear from the outset that the way in which the military administration conducted itself during the initial period would play a major part in determining the pattern of future events, despite its essentially transitional role. The MPU was, therefore, constituted as a joint organisation. Of the two aspects of the MPU's work, the development of long-term strategy is the most important to analyse at this point.

It was clear from the start to the majority of those involved in this planning that things could not go on as they had prior to the occupation. The strategy which eventually emerged from all the subsequent deliberations was, in fact, a bold attempt to effect a clear break with pre-war colonialism. To this extent, therefore, it was but completing the process of separating out the interests of the 'old guard' colonialists and the post-1920s interests of British imperialism which had been going on for the previous two decades. For this reason alone the new direction was vigorously opposed by the old guard both during and immediately after the occupation, just as it had been before it. Indeed, so effective was this opposition that certain key aspects of the new line were dropped before they had been fully implemented, thus precipitating yet another deep crisis for British colonialism. This serves to illustrate most vividly the fundamental fact that the pre-war crisis had been a crisis of confidence in direct colonialism *per se* as an effective means of exploitation and control; for because the MPU was unable to break out of the framework of colonialism as such, and was therefore restricted to introducing mere technocratic reforms to the pre-

existent structures, it was incapable of overcoming the basic contradictions which accordingly re-emerged after the war.

The MPU thus having failed to break with old-style colonialism, but having *de facto* rejected the old colonialists, was caught between two stools, for it was unable to locate or create an alternative basis for British imperialism within the class structure of Malaya. The objective need to make a clear break with the old system was recognised, but on the other hand there actually was no alternative to the old guard when it came to finding the on-the-spot agents of British imperialism. It was only with the conscious process of transition to a neo-colonial solution, which occurred during the course of the 1950s, that an alternative basis emerged: from an alliance between the British-educated middle strata of Malay bureaucrats and state functionaries and certain sections of the non-European, predominantly Malayan Chinese, capitalists.

It is highly unlikely, however, that the MPU could even have begun to conceive of such a possibility, far less actively canvass it. To the MPU planners the absence of a credible alternative to the old guard was interpreted as entailing – willy-nilly – continuation of direct colonial control. In the same vein, they analysed the pre-war crisis as a consequence of the technical inefficiency and anachronism of the system in its attitude to and handling of labour problems and racial issues. They therefore conceived of their own function as precisely that of making technocratic reforms – that is mapping out and supervising the carrying out of a process of rationalisation and streamlining, without at all altering the basic character of British imperialism in Malaya.

There was yet another compelling reason for not merely continuing but indeed *strengthening* direct British control of the situation on defeat of the Japanese. This was the overriding importance of returning the tin and rubber industries immediately to work. Their strategic importance to British imperialism was greatly heightened in the context of the rise to unchallengeable dominance of American imperialism. Therefore, again, for reasons of increasing the efficiency of the process of exploitation, at a *technical* level, reforms of the pre-war structure were urgent and of fundamental importance. Throughout the MPU's deliberations, the question of the class basis of British Colonial domination was of necessity subordinated to questions of increasing the efficiency of what was still a colonial system of direct control, and it is for this reason that the reforms proposed by the body can be dubbed "technocratic".

These points are well brought out in the following quote from Donnison:

"The desirability of creating a *more unified and stronger system* of adminis-

> tration in Malaya had long been recognised. It was desirable in order to permit social and economic development which separation had hitherto thwarted; it was desirable also because of the *strategic importance* of Malaya which demanded a *strong and efficient* administration of the area."[4]

But perhaps the most revealing quote of all consists of the comment made about the proposals of the MPU in the August 1944 issue of *British Malaya*. In an article entitled "Reconstruction of Malaya", Roland Braddell says of a document which was broadly congruent with MPU thinking:

> "It is a strange and startling (document), reading more like the minutes of a London board of directors assembled to consider how the resources of Malaya might be better exploited."[5]

Having discussed the general significance of the MPU and its proposals, it is now necessary to go into a little more detail about the way in which it operated, and the specific reasons that led it to its conclusions and consequent proposals. The person appointed head of the MPU was Major General H.R. Hone. His appointment was significant because he had no previous official connections with Malaya or with the old guard colonialists. His career had nonetheless been very varied and, in colonial terms, "distinguished". It was not, on the other hand, one that would leave him in total sympathy with the traditional outlook of the Malayan planters, mineowners, and members of the colonial Civil Service. He had occupied senior posts in the judiciary of a number of colonies including Tanganyika, Gibraltar and Uganda. He had also had previous experience of military administrations, having been Chief Political Officer for the occupied territories of Eritrea, Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland, subsequently becoming Chief Civil Affairs Officer for Eritrea and Libya – a post similar to the one he was in fact later to hold in the Malayan military administration after the war.

A significant factor influencing the membership of the MPU was, in the words of the body itself, the regrettable circumstance that

> ". . . a high proportion of the Officers of the Malayan Civil Service are in the hands of the Japanese, and when released, will need a fairly lengthy period for recuperation. Some of the best Malayan knowledge and experience will not, in consequence be available for some time after the reconquest."[6]

No doubt the MPU viewed the situation and the opportunities it presented with appropriate ambivalence.

In terms of individual personalities, importance attaches to the fact that Edward Gent was the Colonial Office secretary allocated responsibility for the MPU. He had been a junior member of the colonial service in 1932, on the staff of Sir Samuel Wilson's mission to Malaya. According to Allen, it is possible that he had then harboured sympa-

thies with the group in the Colonial Office which at that time opposed mainstream colonial thinking on Malaya, believing that the Sultans

> ". . . were a reactionary force . . . and that the future of Malaya belonged to the Chinese and Indians."[7]

The true significance of Gent's "liberal" outlook became incomparably greater, however, when he became High Commissioner in the immediately post-war civil government of Malaya.

The MPU undoubtedly conducted extensive consultations with the British-based owners of Malayan tin and rubber assets during their deliberations. Their views, in most cases, diverged from those of plantation and mine managers who had actually had experience in the field in Malaya. This discrepancy was reflected in the controversy which broke out within the ranks of the Association of British Malaya, a body which was responsible for publication of the journal referred to above (*British Malaya*). The committee of the association sent a document containing their proposals for the reconstruction of the Malayan administration to the Secretary of State in 1944. This document, as it turned out, plainly echoed the main conclusion of the MPU itself. The rank and file (if the expression is a suitable one in this case!) of the association, being composed mainly of the old guard, took strong exception to this move and

> ". . . inquired why the . . . Memorandum (had been) forwarded (by the committee) before they had received the approval of the members of the Association of British Malaya."[8]

Despite this significant opposition in the pages of *British Malaya*, in addition to correspondence in the columns of *The Times* highly critical of an article it had published that had urged that

> "When the British return to the (Malay) States the least that will be hoped for from them is a new and refreshing attitude towards their problems. A return to the old order would not be consonant with the modern trend of political thought . . . "[9]

and elsewhere, the British government persevered with and backed up the MPU.

By December 1943, the new constitutional proposals had been roughly worked out. A telegram dated 24 December 1943, from the Civil Affairs section of SEAC says:

> "Briefly the proposal under consideration is that the constitutional position of the component parts of the Federated and Unfederated Malay States and colony of the Straits Settlements should be simplified by means of fresh treaties with the Sultans and negotiated by a plenipotentiary from the Secretary of State for the Colonies during the period of the Military Administration . . . "[10]

The question of recognising the Chinese and Indian members of the population as citizens of Malaya was also dealt with; allied cooperation with the MPAJA, on top of the growing pressure for this before the war, made some such change imperative. In July 1944, the Colonial Office issued a constitutional directive, approved by the War Cabinet, to the MPU. "It was a recognition of the importance of the Chinese and Indians in the life of Malaya . . . "[11] In fact the whole of what later became known as the Malayan Union proposals had been laid before a War Cabinet Committee on Borneo and Malaya on 22 March 1944, and approved by them. They were then subsequently approved by a meeting of the War Cabinet as a whole on 31 May that year, setting the seal upon immediate post-war strategy.

Meanwhile, as the next chapter explains in detail, in Malaya itself the resistance forces had been receiving extensive air drops of equipment, one estimate putting the value of supplies dropped at over half a million pounds sterling. This build-up was in preparation for Operation Zipper, the allied plan for the reoccupation of extensive areas of Japanese held territory in South East Asia; it was scheduled for August 1945. Contrary to the attempts of post-war cold warriors to discredit the contribution that the MPAJA made to the overthrow of the Japanese, SEAC itself was counting upon it to play a crucial part in the reoccupation. The MPAJA had already provided the basis for the collection of intelligence inside Malaya, and it had stoutly supported Force 136 which would have had little chance of survival, far less of carrying out any operations, had it not had such support. Connected with this, and of great importance in the development of events after the reoccupation, was the vital and important role the MPAJU played in the struggle. In many ways, as Stenson observes, "The MPAJA and the MPAJU's significance lies not so much in their military role . . . but for their political and social organisations"; they managed to ". . . establish a rival form of authority to (that of) the Japanese".

The MPAJA did not, in the event, have an opportunity to make what would have been its most important military contribution of the war – namely taking part in the reoccupation, for Japan surrendered before Operation Zipper could be launched. In Malaya, the Japanese surrender came on 15 August, and the occupying troops offered practically no resistance to the guerrilla forces who were the only 'allied' units there at the time. The sudden and unexpected turn of events threw the allied military machine completely out of gear, and disrupted the plans of the British Military Administration. In fact for the first five weeks after the surrender there were hardly any British or other allied troops in Malaya, the MPAJA and MPAJU faithfully fulfilling the terms of their agreement with Mountbatten by moving out of the jungle

and setting up temporary structures of administration and supervision. Many of these took the form of People's Committees in the villages. Generally, therefore, the MPAJA, the MPAJU, the MCP, and the broad Chinese community were in a very strong strategic position when the British did eventually return in force in September. As time went by this stubborn fact became a major headache and problem for the British in their attempts to re-exert colonial hegemony.

FOOTNOTES

1. The British military had little interest in such unconventional operations. Throughout the war, guerrilla warfare was never regarded other than as an expedient auxiliary of conventional forces. In 1941, even the intelligence aspects of the 101 Special Training School (which gave the Chinese such training as they did receive) were not officially approved until the end of November. (S. Chapman: *The Jungle is Neutral*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1949, p.16.)
2. F.S.V. Donnison: *British Military Administration in the Far East, 1943-1946*, HMSO, London, 1956, p.281; this book forms part of the Official History of the Second World War.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p.136; the separation referred to was the increasingly anomalous pre-war division into the FMS, the UMS, and the Straits Settlements.
5. Roland Braddell: "The Reconstruction of Malaya", *British Malaya*, August 1944, p.41.
6. "Liberated Malaya: Shape of Things to Come?", *British Malaya*, May 1945, p.150.
7. James de V. Allen: *The Malayan Union*, Yale University South East Asia Studies Monograph Series, no.10, 1967, p.5.
8. "Account of 23rd Annual General Meeting of the Association of British Malaya", *British Malaya*, October 1944, p.67.
9. "A Malay Union – Reforms when Singapore is Avenged", *The Times*, 25 June 1945; re-printed in *British Malaya*, August 1945, p.184.
10. (See Introduction to footnotes for Chapter Six below for explanation of the reference that follows)

    3877 – Most Secret Telegram,

    From: CICA HQ SEAC

    To: CoS, dated 24 December 1943.
11. F.S.V. Donnison: *op.cit.*, p.137.

The MPAJA and the Revolutionary Struggle, 1939-45

Lee Tong Foong

On 8 December 1941, two hours before the Japanese attackers reached Pearl Harbour, detachments of the Japanese Army landed at Kota Bharu in North Kalimantan. Malaya found itself plunged into the front line of the "Great Oriental War" which spread from Manchuria to India. With the fall of Singapore, ten weeks later, British colonial power in Asia, in the words of Yamashita, Commander of the Nippon Army, had "collapsed in a moment as if a fan without a rivet or an umbrella without a handle".[1] One hundred and fifty six years of British presence had come to a sudden, and for the British, a devastating and humiliating end.

It must appear, especially to the British, one of the ironies of history that when their colonial regime was being systematically destroyed and overrun they had to turn for support to those who, up to then, had been their bitter enemies. In both the final futile defence of Singapore and in the following years of Japanese occupation the British relied upon and used the resources and courage of the most organised and effective section of the Malayan population – the Malayan Communist Party and its various associated and affiliated organisations; most notably during the occupation the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA).

The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was founded in 1930. Before this groups, mainly made up of Chinese militants sympathetic to the revolutionary movement in China and with links with various Soviet organisations (particularly the Comintern), had been politically active for a number of years. In 1925 the first revolutionary industrial union, the Nanyang (South Seas) General Labour Union, had been established in Singapore under the guidance of the Profintern (the International Communist Trade Union organisation).[2] Communists and other progressives were also organised within the Chinese schools. According to Stenson[3] these provided a more fertile ground than the early labour unions for the development of revolutionary anti-colonialist perspectives.

Characteristically the British responded to these developments in a

violent and repressive way. During some of the worst years of the depression, between 1928 and 1931, General Labour Unions (GLU) were almost completely dismantled by the action of the colonial police. Many of the people arrested during this period were deported under the Banishment Ordinance. Since communism was outlawed in China after 1927, any trade unionist or communist from the Malayan Chinese community who was deported there was not merely being exiled from the land of his adoption, but was in effect being given a sentence of death.

With the slow recovery of the Malayan economy in the early thirties, and the move towards the creation of an indigenous labour force the trade union movement was able to reconstitute itself, and began once more to gather strength. In this process members of the MCP played an important part. But, as discussed further in Chapter Seven, the resultant upsurge in labour militancy in the mid-thirties was more a spontaneous expression of revolt against conditions, rather than the "result of communist intrigue" as the Inspector General of Police for the FMS wanted to believe.[5] Nevertheless repressive measures were vigorously pursued especially in relation to known militants – and members of the MCP in particular. The 1928 Societies Ordinance, which outlawed the MCP as an 'unregistered organisation' was much used as was the well tried banishment weapon – euphemistically described as the "'protective removal of a visitor who had abused hospitality".[6] In 1937, for instance, twenty alleged MCP cadres were picked up and deported.[7]

As was the case in the previous decade the Chinese schools provided another focus for MCP activity. The Singapore Students' Federation was the first organisation to compete with the Chinese Nationalists for student allegiance – through the dissemination of Marxist literature, study groups and student activism. The Anti-Imperialist League was the other common front organisation advancing a Marxist perspective to a mainly Chinese constituency, though some 10 per cent of its membership was Indian.

Until 1937, however, MCP influence impinged little upon the traditional focus of the Nanyang Chinese: personal advancement in a competitive and – for the successful – a highly mobile society. The Marco Polo Bridge incident of July 1937, which served as a pretext for Japan's renewed advance into China, fanned nationalist sentiment among the Nanyang Chinese into the most persistent, popular, intensive and extensive campaign for national salvation since the first movement of 1908.

The resulting relief fund, while in part an extension of Nationalist China's overseas policy,[8] was essentially a spontaneous movement which had spread throughout South East Asia before the KMT had even begun to extend advice and guidance to it. As such it offered the MCP both a political task of supreme importance and a unique opportunity

to expand its influence among Malaya's Chinese. The Party's Anti-Enemy Backing Up Society (AEBUS) quickly became the most vocal and active organisation in the entire Chinese community. Through dramatic campaigns, and in particular those involving its youth sections, the MCP was able to advance the struggles of the Chinese people before a receptive audience. Within the umbrella organisation of the Chinese Mobilisation Council, the MCP found itself uniquely placed to effectively compete with the KMT for political kudos and political control of cells of the movement. It was the only body with a mass organisation capable of carrying out the plans of the Council, and since these often involved the employment of illegal as well as legal means, its militancy on demonstrations, picketing and in confrontations of the boycott campaign was seen as a positive and patriotic asset.[9]

While the numerical strength and geographical dispersal of the MCP's membership on the outbreak of war remains a matter of conjecture,[10] one thing is certain: the AEBUS campaigns greatly fortified it and gave it unprecedented public standing. Since the patriotic associations were organised on a trade and occupational basis they effectively complemented the all-industry district-by-district organisation of the GLU's. AEBUS sub-committees at times acted as spokesmen for the workers in industrial disputes and encouraged the workers to form unions if none existed.[11] Patriotism and class struggle fed each other to the general advancement of the MCP and its mass base.

Following the signing of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact in August 1939, the Comintern called for an all-out disruption of the British war effort. As a result the Party stepped up its anti-British agitation[12] throwing its whole weight, including that of AEBUS and its 40,000 members, into militant anti-British propaganda and action. This campaign of disruption was assisted by a sharp rise in the cost of living, following the start of the war, which brought a far wider group of workers into struggle than ever before. Strikes and industrial action became widespread reaching a peak in December 1939 and January 1940 which effectively paralysed the local war effort for several months.

Some sections of the Chinese community, however, led by the "King's Chinese" of the Straits Settlements remained "loyal", providing the largest subscriptions to a war fund which remitted £375,000 for the relief of distress in London, and to the Malayan Bomber fund.[13] The Junior Civil Servants Association, which had always treated any militant action of the labour movement with protestations of undying loyalty, put aside its own campaign for improved conditions. The Malays were also conspicuously "loyal"; within the first week of the outbreak of war, six measures of active support for the government were adopted by one of the largest Malay public meetings ever held in

Kuala Lumpur.[14]

By the middle of 1940 the AEBUS anti-British campaign had reached a peak of disruptive intensity. On several occasions demonstrators and strikers had to arm themselves with changkol handles and similar weapons to defend themselves from the police attacks. In the third quarter of 1940, however, apparently at the urging of the Chinese party, MCP policy altered sharply from one of sabotaging the British war effort to total preoccupation with the organisation of the anti-Japanese fight.[15] When the likelihood of Japan extending its war to the western allies increased, the MCP announced the terms on which it was prepared to cooperate with the British. Initially the British Colonial authorities showed little interest in this initiative. It was only in the very mouth of the cannon, as the Japanese advance proceeded apace, that the Commander-in-Chief of the British Military Forces in Malaya gave his – no doubt reluctant – agreement to the training and arming of a limited number of Chinese, selected by and supplied from the ranks of the MCP. Hence there arose a clandestine conference on 18 December 1941 in a small upstairs room in the back streets of Singapore, at which the terms of cooperation were concluded between two MCP representatives and their traditional adversaries, officers of the Special Branch.

Even at this late juncture, the Malays were given neither arms nor training to resist the Japanese invaders. Imperial policy-makers at no time as much as contemplated the inclusion of the local population among the combatants, with the exception of the small fraction organised and trained in peace time in the Malay Regiment, the Johore Military Forces and the multi-racial Volunteers.[16] Those who did ask for training were quite simply refused. Both the Malay Regiment and the Malay Volunteers on the other hand fought well against the oncoming Japanese. Malay Volunteer units were, notwithstanding, disbanded as the territories from which they were drawn were successively abandoned to the enemy. The authorities were no doubt sceptical whether Malay combativeness would survive the obvious intention of the Malay aristocratic leadership to collaborate with the Japanese; in any case their attitude towards encouraging guerrilla warfare among the rural Malays could not be ambivalent. As already emphasised, it is ironic that the only subject people who could be relied upon to resist the enemy were not just 'aliens', but dangerous 'communists' as well (many of them released from British detention precisely for this purpose).

Late in December 1941, the Chinese Mobilisation Council of Singapore was formed to rally AEBUS forces, labour in particular, to meet the inminent invasion. Quarry workers were organised for the demolition of the Singapore causeway while dockers worked tirelessly through-

out bombing raids even on the waterfront itself.

It is clear that the intransigence of the British colonial authorities to the organisation of effective popular forces of defence and resistance prior to the Japanese invasion resulted in a greater loss of life, in the futile defence of the country (and Singapore in particular) and in the early stages of the resistance to the occupying forces, than was either inevitable or necessary. The hastily raised Dalforce of about one thousand people[17] (referred to in the previous chapter) – most of whom lost their lives when, armed with little more than knives and sticks, they tried to halt the inexorable Japanese advance into Singapore – is one of the grimmest and most obvious examples of this. Even the stay-behind parties, organised by the British at the last minute, were equipped only for a short campaign[18] – reflecting not simply the incompetence of the authorities, but also their overall unwillingness to accept that the fall of Singapore was anything other than a temporary tactical withdrawal. But as D.A. Somerville ruefully reported: the cry of *Orang puteh lari* (the white men are running) was to be heard everywhere – "even the ignorant native could see little difference between a precipitate retreat and a 'tactical withdrawal'."[19]

It is important to emphasise that during the Japanese invasion the British in Malaya were not outnumbered: on the contrary, as far as the military forces opposed to each other were concerned, the Japanese were numerically in the minority. About 60,000 Japanese front-line troops succeeded in taking prisoner on Singapore and in Malaya over 130,000 British troops, composed of some 35,000 Englishmen and Scots, 15,000 Australians, 65,000 Indians and 15,000 assorted reservists, mostly Malays.

Shortly after the British capitulation on 15 February the advanced formations of General Yamashita's army arrived on the island. Sectors of Singapore were allocated to each of the four formations under his command. On his orders the Chinese population was to be assembled in concentration areas and 'screened' – the task to be completed by 23 February.[20] This was to be the prelude to the vast systematic massacres referred to as the Sook Ching. Between 17 February and 3 March in excess of 5,000 Chinese were killed.[21]

The 'screening' was in name only. No questions other than name and address were asked. Hooded informers indicated victims to the Kempei Tai (military police). The precise criteria on which they were 'screened' were arbitrary and varied from sector to sector, but the overall Japanese priorities were clear. 'Communists' headed the list. It was apparently assumed that high school students, harbour workers, and Hainanese were invariably communists. All who had been associated with the China Relief funds and other anti-Japanese activities

came next. Newspapermen, school teachers and the owners of property valued in excess of $50,000 were singled out for assumed anti-Japanese activities and opinions. Members of secret societies (in effect anyone displaying a tattoo), Government servants, recent arrivals from China, and anyone who for occupational or other reasons could be suspected of pro-British sympathies were also picked out.[22] In this process the Japanese were assisted by British police and Special Branch records and the cooperation of detectives who had worked for the British.[23] Suspects identified by this means as Triad (secret society) members were often tortured and released on surety or on undertaking to work as an undercover agent for the Japanese.[24]

The actual killings were supervised by the Kempei Tai. Some victims died from ill treatment, torture and exposure at the detention centres. The majority met their death before machine guns on the beaches, or outside the city; others were forced overboard from lighters in the harbour or at sea and shot as they struggled in the water.

These massacres were intended as an object lesson to the population. As Yamashita declared:

> ". . . the recent arrests of hostile and rebellious Chinese have drastically been carried out in order to establish the prompt restoration of the peace of 'Syonan-Ko' (Port of Syonan) and also to establish the bright Malaya . . . Now, as soon as 'Syonan-Ko' has easily fallen into the hands of the Nippon army, a part of Chinese (sic) have run away and it becomes very clear that another part of them disguising themselves as good citizens, appear to try to have a chance of wriggling . . . Thus it is the most important thing to sweep away these treacherous Chinese elements and to establish the peace and welfare of the populace . . . anyone who disturbs this great idea is the common enemy of the human race and shall severely be punished without any exception . . . anyone who supports the establishment of the new order after repenting of his past deeds, no matter whether Chinese or not, shall indiscriminately be treated under the divine protection of Imperial Glory." [*Syonan Times* 23 February 1942; during the occupation this newspaper was published at the *Straits Times* office; 'Syonan' – Bright South – was the Japanese name for Singapore, symbolising the new order.]

Official vengeance coincided with other circumstances.[25] Many of the front line Japanese troops were veterans of the Manchurian campaigns in which they had been mercilessly harried and harassed by communist guerrillas. Japanese craving for revenge, spawned in the bloody conflicts in China itself, was unwittingly to transform the nationalism of the Nanyang Chinese it sought to extirpate. Washed in Chinese blood, Chinese nationalism, the symbolic rallying point of the Nanyang Chinese, was to become for many a matter of life and death in the ensuing armed struggle, and no longer simply the symbol of a remote conflict. It is important to remember, however, that despite the importance of nationalist fervour in involving many sections of the Malayan

Chinese community, the overall perspectives of the leading sections of the anti-Japanese struggle involved the creation of a free Malayan nation by, and on behalf of, *all* its communities. The successful pursuit of this objective would contribute to the ultimate defeat of Japan, and thereby to the ultimate salvation of China itself – but would also necessarily involve the furtherance of the national and social revolution in and for Malaya and all its peoples.

Let us now return, however, to the specific details of the organisation of the anti-Japanese resistance. Despite the attitude of the British colonialists, the MCP had pressed ahead with organising its own forces in readiness for the almost certain Japanese attack and possible occupation. By 21 December 1941 the central committee had endorsed the principles of cooperation with the British, and had outlined a four-point programme for a united armed resistance front, under the leadership of the MCP, the terms of which were as follows:

1. Unite the peoples of Malaya in the resistance effort and assist the British in the defence of Malaya against the Japanese;
2. Arm all party members and the masses, and wage an all-out war of resistance;
3. Wipe out all fifth columnists, all enemy agents and traitors;
4. Resist the Japanese occupation through the formation of clandestine guerrilla bands and planned terror.[26]

By the end of January four nucleus groups of guerrillas (to become in due course the first four Independence Forces of the MPAJA) had been established in northern Selangor, along the Negri Sembilan-Malacca border, and in northern and southern Johore respectively. The members of these groups, 165 in all, had received ten days training at the British 101 Special Training School (STS). With recruits who had been supplied by the state committees of the MCP and arms and ammunition obtained from retreating British units, to supplement the bare minimum supplied by 101 STS itself (arming the Chinese was given low priority by the British), the various groups following their brief stay at 101 STS set about establishing their base camps.

For the first eighteen months of its existence the MPAJA was to pay the price of its hasty formation in the chaos of British flight. Early operations resulted in heavy casualties with little to show for them. But the value of even a little training and/or experience was reflected in the fact that the initial sorties of spontaneously organised guerrillas in Kedah, Trengganu and Perak were even more disastrous. Following their initial adventurous behind-the-lines raids, the original units of the MPAJA found themselves without any organised supply lines or safe rear areas, with no prospects of relief, and with Japanese troops hot on

their tracks. The central military command of the MCP is meant to have estimated that, in all, one third of the total guerrilla force was lost in the first eighteen months of combat.[27]

The task of building an underground mass base was soon seen as being of top priority. By the Battle of the Midway, in June 1942, the Anti-Japanese Union (AJU later MPAJU) had been launched in the "period of political struggle". Organised by the MCP state committees to function at town and town-sector levels, the material task of the AJU was the collection of funds, food and clothing (usually purchased on the open market) for the guerrillas. Of central importance, however, was the Union's task of carrying out political work and building the mass base capable of supporting the armed struggle, through the dissemination of propaganda, the distribution of underground newspapers and so on. In addition the MPAJU played a valuable role in supplying the guerrillas with intelligence of Japanese movements and providing them with couriers and guides. Assisted partly by the people's reaction against the widespread massacres perpetrated by the occupying forces and the brutality and terror they brought with them into town and countryside alike, the MPAJU's propaganda and general political work gradually bore fruit. Its size and effectiveness grew steadily, so that by the end of the occupation it is estimated that its supporters numbered some half of the total Malayan Chinese population.[28]

The Japanese policy, instituted in early 1942, of despatching Chinese refugees, who had fled to Singapore ahead of the Japanese advance, back to the countryside to assist in the food self-sufficiency programme[29] unwittingly assisted the guerrilla's own self-sufficiency programme. Squatters with Japanese permits to establish vegetable gardens were located right up to the perimeter of the jungle in many guerrilla zones. Their numbers steadily increased as more and more Chinese chose to flee Japanese harassment and supervision in the towns. At state level, Peoples' Representative Congresses were set up to facilitate MPAJA-MPAJU liaison. In each state recruiting for the guerrilla and other military organisational tasks were undertaken by a military affairs committee.

Just how effective the clandestine MPAJA organisation was is now hard to establish with any clarity. Communications among the various Independent Forces and – more significantly – between these and the Central Military Committee were unreliable, vulnerable and slow. In the absence of radios the guerrillas relied entirely upon couriers and liaison officers to relay orders and information.[30] Travel was by foot and sometimes bicycle, and in the difficult terrain instructions and messages often took weeks or even months to reach their destinations. It was Chapman's impression that the control wielded by the guerrilla HQ

was absolute and all embracing – which would inevitably have inhibited the local initiative necessary for the individual units to operate most effectively. Chapman's assessment of the degree of centralised control operating, as on other issues, should be carefully scrutinised.[31] Despite his advocacy of 'unconventional warfare', he nevertheless found it difficult to imagine the organisation of an effective fighting force which did not have a rigid hierarchy of control. His conventional military background never admitted the necessity in many circumstances for local initiatives to be of central importance in a war. (This strategic myopia has a more recent instance, when during the Vietnam war many of the key military strategists on the American side were convinced that there existed some mythical Vietcong underground equivalent of the Pentagon, from which the whole war of national liberation was directed.) In reality each Independent Force commander (of whom there might be from two to five per force) was free to conduct operations according to his own judgement of terrain, local conditions, mass consciousness and enemy strength.

The majority of the guerrillas were former rural workers, rubber-tappers, mine-labourers, and squatter gardeners. Some had come from town employment; however, most of those coming from the cities had been active in the MCP before the war. Conventional accounts depict the MPAJA as being almost entirely Chinese in ethnic compositon – and this was certainly Chapman's impression. But this was not the case. Both Indians and Malays were to be found in the ranks; moreover the Indian National Army (though raised under Japanese auspices) was sympathetic to the resistance. There were links with, amongst others, armed Malay anti-Japanese resistance units such as *Ashkar Melayu Setia* (Loyal Malay Army) in Perak and the *Wataniah* in Pahang.[32] More research is required into the status and magnitude of the small KMT guerrilla units with which the British also established contacts.

On the question of the fighting effectiveness and morale of the MPAJA, there seems to be little disagreement. Extremely high morale and discipline were noted features of the guerrilla camps, despite constant danger and hardship. Such resilience and spirit, however, did not themselves guarantee a ready adaption to some of the *military* necessities of guerrilla life. Chapman found the Chinese – at least those with whom he came into contact – curiously unadaptable in such matters as effective camouflage (they insisted for example upon jungle parade grounds and large regularly-sown vegetable gardens that were easily visible from the air), contingency plans to meet surprise attacks, and even in the mastery of basic weapon skills. These three years of occupation, however, served to teach by experience these basic principles of military technique, tactics, and strategy, which provided the

primary foundations upon which the emergence over the past four decades of the present-day MCP, as a highly effective politico-military force, has been based.

In all the MPAJA is said to have mounted some 340 individual operations, of which 200 or so were considered to be major operations. The Japanese admit to only 2,300 casualties (killed and wounded) during the whole duration of the occupation, which would give, according to Hanrahan, a ratio of three to every one suffered by the MPAJA. Other sources, however, give a much higher Japanese casualty figure – with a Russian assertion that 10,000 occupation troops were killed.[33] Whatever the truth, the scale of MPAJA operations, set against the measure of the decisive battles of the war – must be relegated to comparative military insignificance. However, if it had not been for the sudden Japanese surrender in August 1945, the MPAJA might have played a decisive part in the full-scale military operation the allies had prepared for the reoccupation of large sections of occupied territory throughout the region. Judgements of the MPAJA's capabilities in purely military terms must, therefore, remain inconclusive. But as discussed further below Lord Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander South-East Asia, for one, saw the MPAJA as a promising military investment as shown by the fact that he counted on them to play an important part in the allied reoccupation plan.[34]

According to Japanese military occupation reports the MPAJA was not much more than a minor irritant, and certainly posed no serious strategic threat to the occupation forces.[35] While this is probably true in military terms, the persistency of Japanese measures aimed at countering MPAJA activities – and the constant lack of success these efforts encountered – strongly suggest that the guerrilla impact on the Japanese resource mobilisation programmes, and their attempts to impose rigid controls at all levels on the mass of the population, may have been much more considerable than was admitted. It is fair to speculate that more Japanese troops were tied down minimising the threat, or potential threat, of large-scale MPAJA actions, than was either popular or desirable from the Japanese point of view.

The public assassination of a Japanese Military Police Detective on the (Japanese) Anniversary of the Greater East Asia War (8 December 1942) resulted in the proclamation of the "30-metre-responsibility" rule.[36] By its terms, any person happening to be within 30 metres of an anti-Japanese incident when it occurred would automatically be deemed to be responsible for it by the authorities. This measure backfired on the Japanese, for as the first shot rang out in subsequent assassination attempts, general tumult ensued as people, mindful of the proclamation, took to their heels – which greatly facilitated the

guerrilla escape. This unexpected result prompted the creation of the *Jikeidan* (Voluntary Vigilance Corps for Self-Preservation and Self-Protection), an organisation which effectively obliged all male town-dwellers to take part in compulsory rostered night patrol duty.[37] When it became clear that this in turn had failed – following the disclosure of widespread *Jikeidan*-MPAJA cooperation and collaboration – the Japanese authorities resorted to offering an amnesty and rewards as inducements for guerrillas to surrender.[38]

The escalation of MPAJA activities from persistent and embarrassing jabs at the occupying forces, was hampered by the constraints already observed: poor guerrilla communications, and the complete absence of any external communications or supplies until the tentative contacts with Force 136 in May 1943.[39] To these difficulties must be added the repercussions of the First September Incident in 1942. A well-laid Japanese ambush resulted in the slaughter of over 100 of the top MPAJA cadres who had convened near Batu Caves in Selangor – among them guerrilla commanders, members of state committees, political commissars and members of the Central Committee itself. This loss, at one fell swoop, of so many leaders might have been expected to lead to a demoralisation in the ranks – and a shortage of able substitute leaders – sufficient to have set the struggle back by many months, if not years. That this was not so is a striking testimony to the strength of both the party and of the organisations in which it was embedded. Recovery was swift and the fight was pressed home more vigorously than before.

There was one spectre, however, which remained to haunt the MCP: had they been betrayed? If so, by whom? By a curious coincidence, the Party's Secretary General, Lai Teck (Loi Tec), had failed to turn up for this supposedly key meeting. Ever since there has been speculation that he may in fact have betrayed his comrades. What is certain is that he was subsequently unmasked as a British agent, but whether he was in addition a double agent acting for the Japanese as well, is less firmly established – though it seems more than likely on the available evidence.[40]

Despite their problems and early set-backs, there is evidence that the MPAJA forces in numerous instances approached the threshold of local 'tactical advantage' – upon which numerically inferior and less 'professional' forces depend when faced with front-line troops. For example a force of some 250 well-armed guerrillas, who became the 7th Independent Force, operating on the Pahang Coast in the Kuantan and Sungei Lembing areas, though out of touch with the guerrilla high command for three years, had grown so powerful that it dominated the local Japanese puppet government in Kuantan. They frequently

engaged and defeated the Japanese in fairly large-scale skirmishes, and succeeded in securing – in the vastnesses of the eastern Pahang jungle – a liberated base area in which they grew sufficient rice and vegetables to be self-supporting.[41] Again, the Chinese inhabitants of a valley on the border of Pahang and Kelantan fought several pitched battles with the Japanese to such effect that troops did not dare to enter the valley on foot, the Japanese ultimately having to resort to the use of aircraft in a final attempt to dislodge the guerrillas.

Even if these instances were exceptional, particularly in the first eighteen months of the war, it must be recalled that the MPAJA exhibited (and acted upon) a clear practical appreciation of the duality of the political and the military facets of its struggles. Periods of defensive consolidation, recruitment and propaganda drives were seen as being just as essential to the eventual outcome of the struggle as the launching of combat operations. The Pahang-based guerrillas, with up to 100 comparatively well-armed men, lived for at least a year from November 1942 without the slightest attempt at sabotage or combat, concentrating instead upon political and propaganda work and the establishment of links between the guerrilla and their supporters squatting at the edge of the jungle – who were able to supply food to them having the necessary permits from the Japanese to start gardens and hence grow the vegetables.

The success of the MPAJA-MPAJU in consolidating a mass-based information and supply organisation was such that it came to constitute a rival authority to that of the Japanese; which was more important in many ways than the fact that there was never a decisive *military* show-down between the two. The MPAJA issued instructions, levied taxes, settled disputes, dealt with traitors and informers and generally maintained the 'traditional' political functions which provided the ideological and moral underpinning of its authority. Chapman reported that as the guerrillas passed through the outlying *kampongs* in the valley of the Sungei Pertang the Chinese brought all their legal and domestic problems for the 20-year old guerrilla leader, Whu Bing, to settle: "The guerrillas," he wrote, "stood for them as the one representative of law and order in Japanese occupied Malaya."[42]

In the absence of *de jure* authority the enforcement of their *de facto* authority by 'terror' (or rather instant salutory retaliation) was basic to guerrilla strategy. The systematic and ruthless elimination of traitors, informers, spies and police was a task undertaken with grim enthusiasm and considerable expertise and efficiency by each of the Independent Forces. The Fifth Independent Force was created primarily for this purpose, and succeeded in despatching well over a thousand enemies of the people: Chinese, Sikhs, Malays, Japanese and Tamils in

that numerical order, according to Chapman whose estimate is not necessarily accurate. In all the MPAJA is said to have claimed 2,500 such assassinations.[43] Such a policy was necessary as a counter to the ruthless control of the population by the *Kempetei*, but in any case such enforcement was by no means foreign to the culture of the Nanyang Chinese. Pre-war trade unions, and in fact most Chinese associations – other than those mainly involving Western-educated Chinese – exercised in some cases their own code of sanctions, which were strictly speaking outside the 'law'. AEBUS groups, immediate predecessors of the MPAJA-MPAJU complex, in particular seem to have retained some of the characteristic features of the Chinese guilds – secrecy, clannishness, authoritarianism and 'enforcement'.[44]

The continuity of such sanctions during the occupation, apart from the tactical imperative of the need to counter the organised Japanese terror, was ensured by the continuity of the traditional context of enforcement – inter-society rivalry. The Japanese, particularly in the Triad-controlled areas of the coast of north Perak, endeavoured to make use of Triad members.[45] Because of their intelligence value as coast watchers and as members of the Triads, Chinese fishermen were of particular interest to the Japanese: the interest of the fishermen were cemented by common participation in the traditional smuggling of opium and the now enormously lucrative and expanded black marketeering in goods and foodstuffs of all kinds in a contraband trade which stretched to Sumatra, Thailand and beyond. While many of these traders were careful to keep the right side of the guerrillas, by giving them financial and material support, there was always a risk that the guerrillas would conclude that the avarice of the fishermen or their Japanese patrons had overcome their patriotic scruples. This fear of retribution increased as rumours of the impending Japanese surrender in the late summer of 1945 became widespread. In fact secret Japanese permission is said to have been granted to the fishermen and traders of the area in August 1945 to form organisations based on Triad elements in the interests of self-defence, under the Ang Bin Hoey (Society of the Ang or 'hung' people). From then until the establishment of an effective British Military Administration in late September 1945 (following the Japanese surrender) fighting was widespread in many regions between the MPAJA and these groups. They were assisted in these skirmishes with the MPAJA by the OCAJA (Overseas Anti-Japanese Army, a small KMT-led guerrilla) and some hundred Malays (said to have been sworn in on the Koran for the purpose of "protection from invasion by the communists"). By the end of September, however, in most regions the MPAJA had prevailed.[46]

While excesses and injustices may have occured – as they almost

certainly did on a number of occasions – there is no evidence that guerrilla enforcement alienated popular support. On the contrary, despite Japanese reprisals on the vulnerable population in the train of guerrilla acts, the people retained their allegiance to the MPAJA. As Chapman reports:

> "I listened to frightful accounts of the innumerable cold-blooded massacres of Chinese perpetrated by the Japs, especially in areas where the guerrillas were known to be active, and I was astonished – though it was so universal that I ceased to wonder at it later – that these old men showed absolutely no reluctance to help us, although it would have been certain death for them had they been caught. It seemed that the Chinese throughout Malaya, especially in the country districts, were filled with a most bitter hatred of the Japanese and yet felt themselves completely impotent to do anything about it – except to support the guerrillas, which they were prepared to do to the limit."[47]

Chin Kee Onn, by no means a communist, writing of MPAJA enforcement immediately after the occupation wrote:

> "The 'communists' in Malaya were therefore a hidden force of moral power. The public looked up to them as the invisible army which held in check the oppressors of the people. It is openly admitted that but for the 'communists' the police would have made life impossible, and the informers and the blackmailers would have turned life into a nightmare."[48]

Rather than alienating popular support, enforcement was a familiar traditional weapon of 'people's justice' that maintained throughout the moral authority of the MPAJA.

Early in 1943 the MCP central Executive Committee had drawn up a nine-point long-term programme which foreshadowed the creation of a Malayan Republic to be governed by representatives universally elected from the different communities.[49] Beyond the "harmonious and felicitous life" enunciated in a rather ad hoc list of suggested reforms, and an "alliance with Russia and China in support of the struggles of the oppressed peoples in the Far East", the character of this republic and the means by which it was to be established were left to the future. To the guerrilla command, the military power prerequisite to the attainment of any such programme must have then seemed rather remote. (This programme served as official MCP policy until 1945.)

Allied military interest in Malaya at this time was also (with the exception of Force 136) relegated to the realm of forward planning, to a time when the general military tide would have turned decisively in their favour. The Malayan section of Force 136 (F136) had been instituted in July 1942 and quickly moved to recruit and train trusted KMT Chinese to act as agents and interpreters when the force was active in Malaya. As described in the previous chapter, by early 1943,

F136 groups were being infiltrated into Malaya; where in due course they made contact with the guerrilla (with whom, it should be pointed out, some British officers and men had always been attached – a few belonging to the 'stay-behind' parties, but most consisting of stragglers stranded behind the lines by the rapid Japanese advance). But it was not until late 1943 that arrangements could be concluded for a meeting between British officers and the supreme guerrilla command.

This meeting took place on 30 December 1943 and 1 January 1944. On these dates Major Davis and Captain Broome – as military representatives of the Supreme Allied Command – and Chang Hong and another officer from MPAJA headquarters held discussions which led to an agreement that the guerrilla would ". . : follow the instructions of the Allied Commander-in-Chief in so far as military operations in Malaya are concerned", this cooperation to continue so long as the military authorities were responsible for peace and good order in Malaya.[50] In return, the British side undertook to send arms, ammunition and medical supplies by all possible means.

Political matters were excluded from discussion, the British taking the line that as military officers they were not authorised to discuss political questions; however, the guerrilla representatives made no attempt to demur from this.[51] Deeply distrusting the British, for obvious reasons, quite probably they would have regarded any 'assurance' on political questions as worth as much as no assurance at all.[52]

From January 1944 to 1 December 1945, when the MPAJA was officially stood down and disbanded, the over-riding concern of MCP leaders was the question of determining the most appropriate tactics in the constantly altering circumstances. Commentators hostile to the party, such as Hanrahan,[53] portray a movement handicapped by "faulty and indecisive . . . leadership" oscillating between "two diametrically opposed strategic plans" and lacking the support of the "rank and file of MPAJA guerrillas". With this analysis as a point of departure, the conclusion is then drawn that the MCP missed an opportunity to seize power at the end of the war because of indecisions, vacillation and lack of consensus among the leadership – and between them and the rank and file. Without having been privy to the inner debates of the party during this period, it is possible however to draw quite a different conclusion. (With McLane,[54] we here discount the authenticity of documents cited by the Malayan government purporting to "prove" that the MCP had committed itself to "bitter and bloody struggle" with the British from as early as January 1945; it appears to us that this is nothing more than a rewriting of history the real purpose of which is to put the blame for the 'Emergency' on the MCP – a party allegedly dedicated to the seizure of power by exclusively violent means. Both

Kuala Lumpur and Singapore sedulously foster the myth to this day using it as "justification" for keeping hundreds of political critics in prison indefinitely without trial.) Let us then attempt a more objective assessment of the situation facing the MCP in 1944-45, and of the conclusions they drew with respect to the most appropriate course of action open to them.*

When one looks at prevailing circumstances in this period, arguments for continuing armed struggle into the post-war period seem remarkably weak and unconvincing. (Arguments for keeping a dormant capacity for guerrilla warfare in moth balls, so to speak, ready to be reactivated when required or felt appropriate, are quite another matter.)[55] In the first place the MPAJA had succeeded in building up an impressive base in popular support and respect. It has to be remembered that although the MCP unquestionably headed and led the MPAJA, in fact Party members constituted but a fraction of the organisation, whose ranks stretched from those in broad agreement with the objectives of the Party although not members of it, to others united at least in desiring a self-governing democratic Malayan republic, and on to yet others recruited mainly, or even solely, on the basis of their hostility to the occupying Japanese (or to the collaborating Malay and Sikh police force). Beyond the MPAJA itself, the MPAJU rallied an enormous number of supporters of an even more diverse socio-political complexion, albeit again headed and led by MCP cadres. To maintain and enlarge this kind of broad support dictated adoption of tactics and aims likely to have the widest possible appeal. Protracting war into the post-Japanese surrender period on these grounds alone simply did not make sense.

Besides, there was every indication that the mass base responsive to the national and democratic appeal of the Party could be extended even further and consolidated if, in peacetime, there were to be opportunities for above ground political manoeuvre. Although it is true that there were bound, at least initially, to be antagonism between the MCP and the Malays who had actively collaborated with and informed for the Japanese – and the immediate post-war weeks were to witness a swift settling of old scores – at the same time the war years had seen a distinct development of cross-communal cooperation. There were sufficient Malays in the MPAJA to warrant construction of mosques in guerrilla base areas,[56] and there were links with the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (KMM), whose leader, Inche Ibrahim Bin Yaacob, had become Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese-sponsored PETA (Pembela Tanah Ayer – defenders or avengers of the country – an auxiliary military force), but who, like other Malay members of the organisation, sympa-

*British intentions and British planning for the post-occupation period are the subject of the next chapter.

thised with the resistance.[57] The Japanese-encouraged Indian National Army (INA), led by ex-Indian Congress leader Subhas Chandra Bose, also maintained secret contacts with the MPAJA, and many Indians not associated with the INA joined the guerrilla. In short, the MCP had good grounds for supposing that post-war political activity promised them the prospect of consolidating and advancing their all-Malayan appeal. That they had succeeded in becoming, in their resistance role, the first ever *Malayan* and *national* movement, no one – not least the British – could deny. Indeed, time was to show that, had there not been savage military suppression by the British, the MCP's expectations of participating in, and helping to shape and direct, a broad national democratic anti-imperialist movement destined to inherit responsibility for governing an independent republic of Malaya were both realistic and attainable. To throw everything away, to risk the hard won gains and organisation, in a *putsch*-ist and adventurist gamble would, in the circumstances, have been madness – totally unjustified by rational consideration of the prevailing odds.

The international context must also be borne in mind. There is no reason to suppose that the MCP was in any way mechanically responsive to, or obliged to follow the guidance of, either the Soviet "line" or that of the Communist Party of China. Even supposing that there had been – and there is no evidence that there was – some form of signal or 'instructions' from Moscow or Yenan why should we assume armed struggle would have been called for? As far as Moscow is concerned, we know that, as a result of the Yalta and Potsdam and other Allied discussions in the closing stages of the war, Stalin had accepted the general idea of spheres of influence, and that he was pledged to exert such international influence as he had to caution communist parties in the western sphere to co-operate in post-war reconstruction and recovery and not to challenge the existing authorities;[58] to the best of our knowledge he kept to his word, so that insofar as there might have been any hints from the Russian party to the MCP these would most certainly have enjoined a policy much like that actually adopted (independently of such hints, as far as we know).

Turning to Yenan, the war-time base of the Chinese communists, such advice as might have percolated through to the jungles of Malaya is most unlikely to have encouraged plans for insurrection in the post-war period. Leaving aside the unanswerable question of whether there was or was not advice from this quarter, we may safely surmise that it would have taken the form of advocating pursuit of the broadest possible democratic anti-imperialist united front. After all, Mao Tse-tung himself was at this time seeking to patch up relations with Chiang Kai-shek in the hope of avoiding all-out civil war once the Japanese

had been defeated.[59] It should incidentally be borne in mind that Malaya had by a considerable margin the largest proletariat in South East Asia – some 30 per cent of the population, including families, according to MCP estimates[60] – so that there were excellent and compelling reasons for minimising the relevance of the Maoist model (of surrounding the cities from the countryside) if an opportunity offered (as it was assumed it would) to pursue above ground political work among the urban mining and plantation masses – a mode of work familiar and congenial to the MCP leaders.

Account should be taken, too, of the British political situation. The British Conservatives had suffered humiliating defeat in the general election of July 1945, in what was generally regarded as a rebuke and rejection for the sufferings of the inter-war depression followed by the debacle which had overtaken the British empire in Asia. The Labour Party had made quite clear its commitment to granting independence to those colonies considered 'ripe' for it, and in particular was committed to moving quickly towards independence for India. MCP leaders were entitled to see the coming to power of a Labour Government in London as a most hopeful development, buttressing all the other factors pointing to adoption of a peaceful constitutional course. It should be remembered in this respect that if the MCP at that time took the Labour Party at face value as an 'anti-imperialist' party, and underestimated the extent to which Britain would have to bow to American pressures in what they did, they can hardly be blamed for doing so, since they were merely mirroring the confusions prevalent not only among members of the Labour Party and other socialists but also among members of the British Communist Party (CPGB). And as far as the CPGB is concerned, it should be further noted that it faithfully followed the Russian line of the time in lending such weight as it had, behind the encouragement of reconstruction and production. The Chinese CP, it appears, felt that the MCP should limit its demands as long as the Labour Party was in power, and that it should look to the CPGB for guidance – a guidance that could only be restraining, given the British party's own commitment to British economy recovery (in which Malayan rubber and tin were crucial).[61]

Finally, we may speculate upon the influence of Loi Tek, Secretary-General of the MCP right through the key war-time and immediate post-war years, until his exposure in 1947 as almost certainly a double agent of the Japanese and the British.[62] Allowing for the fact that the Party by that time may well have sought to pin every tactical error that had been made in the past on this convenient scapegoat, it does seem plausible to assume that whatever influence he had been able to wield would have been thrown in favour of 'moderate' policies – policies

least likely to cause the British, who paid him, undue headaches and complications. However, we would be mistaken in putting more than subsidiary emphasis on the treachery and trickery of one individual, exalted though his Party position was: the MCP and the MPAJA must be credited with having thoroughly mulled over and weighed up all the factors with a bearing upon their strengths and prospects before concluding that the indicated course was the one it would be wisest in practice to adopt. That it was to have consequences utterly unforeseen, and in the short term disastrous for the Party, is beside the point.

No revolutionary movement in history has avoided set-backs or has even expected to avoid them. In this context we may recall that the Vietnamese Communists, too, hoped for a peaceful winning of power and independence after the war;[64] nor should it be forgotten that it took them – the greatest revolutionaries of our time – 30 years to achieve their objectives.

In the event, the MCP's known pronouncements during this period indicate their official line clearly enough. An eight-point programme issued in the spring or summer of 1945

> ". . . listed goals not likely to offend even the most determined British colonial. The programme directed Malayan Communists 'to uphold the alliance of Russia, China, Great Britain and the United States and to support the United Nations'."[64]

Later statements echo this kind of conciliatory position. And though later developments show that not all weapons in the hands of the MPAJA were surrendered to the British authorities when it was disbanded,[65] we may surely accept that this was merely prudent and provident (as, indeed, events were very shortly to prove), not to say realistic, taking into account the British record in Malaya. Nor need we concede to orthodox Western scholars (and successive Malayan governments) that it indicated duplicity, conspiracy, and hypocrisy on the part of MCP leaders: their first choice of tactics *was* to pursue constitutional means of advance (for the reasons sketched above), but it would have been incredible and an unforgivable folly not to have kept open an alternative option for such time as that tactic might be denied them.

The decision having been taken to seek political advance and advantage by constitutional means, the events of the period leading up to disbandment in December 1945, follow naturally. Both South East Asia Command and the MPAJA had assumed that there would be a final showdown with the Japanese. Allied preparations involving the MPAJA, had been made for this showdown, which included a planned British amphibious assault on the west coast of Malaya, synchronised with

guerrilla harassment of Japanese lines of supply and communications. This projected joint operation known as Operation Zipper was conceived of as part of the general plan to reoccupy strategic Japanese-held areas throughout the region. The British placed a high value on the role that the MPAJA had been designated to play, but – consonant with their deviousness – they were also determined to make the most of such Malay resistance as existed independent of it or could be conjured into being. It was for this reason that F136 personnel were sent to persuade the Sultan of Pahang to put himself at the head of the Ashkar Melayu Setia (Loyal Malay Army) as Colonel-in-Chief of this small Malay guerrilla organised by F136 in northern Perak and in Kedah.[66]

Operation Zipper was short-circuited by the sudden Japanese surrender in August, 1945. The MPAJA, in part acting upon an authorisation forced from SEAC by the unexpected circumstances,[67] in part acting in accordance with the *de facto* status and authority it had earned in resisting the Japanese and in representing and nurturing the aspirations of the Malayan people, moved rapidly to take over control of the peninsula. There were a number of clashes with the Japanese, although these were of little significance.

Public trials of those who had aided the Japanese in their suppression of the national resistance and cruel treatment of the people were staged, to the accompaniment of spontaneous public acclaim and enthusiasm rooted in hatred of the Japanese – further boosting the high regard in which the guerrilla were held. Triumphal processions and demonstrations were conducted in towns throughout the peninsula. People's Committees were set up to exercise local authority and control in the interregnum prior to the arrival of the British in force.[68] These measures were generally greeted by the people with obvious expressions of genuine enthusiasm and active measures of support. Furthermore it is not surprising that in the circumstances, it was the MPAJA, and *not* the British who were popularly regarded (particularly – though by no means exclusively – by the Chinese) as the real liberators of Malaya from the Japanese tyranny.

As we shall see in the next Chapter, the British were well aware of these realities.[69] But they also knew that it was imperative for them to regain control of the country, its labour force and resources, either with or without popular approval. There was no question of granting autonomy, let alone independence, to the peoples of Malaya.

FOOTNOTES

1. As reported in the 21 February 1942 issue of the *Syonan Times*.
2. The trade union aspect is dealt with further in Chapter Seven, below.
3. M.R. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya*, OUP, London, 1970, p.9.

4. The *Straits Times*, 28 October 1929, reported for example, that eleven teachers and a number of trade union officials banished from Singapore were shot on their arrival in China.
5. Stenson: op.cit., p.14.
6. T.H. Silcock and U.A. Aziz: *Nationalism in Malaya*, IPR, NY, 1950, p.12; the naturalisation regulations were designed to ensure that Malaya's cheap labour force remained transitory.
7. Virginia Thompson and R. Adloff: *The Left Wing in South East Asia*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1955, p.128.
8. In 1937, one quarter of China's expenditure was financed by the Nanyang Chinese. The overseas programme was as essential to the Chinese Government's budget as it was to its political interest to woo the Nanyang Chinese (see Yoji Akashi: *Nanyang Chinese National Salvation Movement 1937-41*, University Press of Kansas, 1970, pp.159-61).
9. The remarkable intensity and achievement of the campaign is registered in both the volume of remittances to China and the impact of the boycotts on the level of Japanese exports to Malaya. Between 1937 and 1941, an estimated 5 billion yuan was remitted to China from South East Asia (Akashi: ibid, p.161). The boycott achieved a reduction in the volume of Japanese exports to Malaya in the first six months of 1938 and 1939 to one quarter of that in the corresponding period in 1937 (ibid, p.147).
10. Van Der Kroef (Justus M., *Communism in Malaysia and Singapore: A Contemporary Survey*, Martinus Nijhoff, the Hague, 1967, p.22) estimates a total membership including youth groups "and other fronts" of 30,000 in 1939. Hanrahan (Gene Z., *The Communist Struggle in Malaya*, IPR, NY, 1954, pp.25-26) has party membership at "no more than 5,000 members at the most" at this time and depicts the MCP as "stretching its organisational tentacles throughout the entire Malayan peninsula". Miller (Harry, *The Communist Menace in Malaya*, Harrap, London, 1954, pp.31-32) has a detailed breakdown of membership with totals: "Singapore led with 18,820 members and adherents. The rest grouped strangely enough in only four other areas – Selangor with 9880, Penang with 4410, the Batu Pahat district in North Johore with 1570, and the Muar District, just north of this, with 2530". A comparison of the latter pair is instructive: information about the clandestine party organisation of the immediate pre-war and occupation years is predictably sparse and unreliable to the point where even the cold warriors, united as they are by their ideological fervour and their mutual confidants in the Special Branch, are still quite unable to see eye to eye.
11. In July 1938, a meeting of 1,000 Chinese builders' labourers in Singapore decided to form a Singapore Chinese Building Labourers' Association. For entertainment, a patriotic play was performed and money was then collected for the Chinese 8th Route Army (i.e. the most famous unit of the Chinese Red Army).
12. The MCP had in fact never completely dropped its anti-British activities in favour of the official Comintern "united front" strategy. See C.B. McLane: *Soviet Strategies in South East Asia*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1966, pp.237 et seq.
13. F.S.V. Donnison: *British Military Administration in the Far East 1943-46*, HMSO, London, 1956, p.377.
14. Virginia Thompson: *Postmortem on Malaya*, Macmillan, New York, 1943, p.301; declarations of loyalty and denunciations of Nazi race creeds from Malay leaders "became more spontaneous after Turkey appeared to be moving closer to the Allies in October 1939".
15. C.B. McLane: op.cit., pp.237 et seq., seems to have much the most balanced and well informed account of the shifts in MCP policy. But compare his view with the following: L.W. Pye: *Guerilla Communism in Malaya*, Princeton University Press, 1956; Miller: op.cit.; Donnison: op.cit.; Van Der Kroef: op.cit.; Victor Purcell: *Malaya: Communist or Free?*, Victor

Gollancz, London, 1954; and A. Short: *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948-60*, Frederick Muller, London, 1975.

16. S.W. Jones: *Public Administration in Malaya*, OUP, London, pp.128-9.
17. Tan Kah-kee, Chairman of the Mobilisation Council, refers to this number (*Straits Times*, 11 October 1945), while Donnison (op.cit., p.378) refers to a force of 5,000. The British called the force Dalforce (after Dalley), while the Chinese knew it as the Chinese Volunteer Anti-Japanese Corps.
18. Donnison: op.cit., pp.379-80.
19. D.A. Somerville: *Notes on the Malayan Debacle*, unpublished manuscript, April, 1942, p.3; in the Creech-Jones collection.
20. Lord Russell of Liverpool: *The Knights of Bushido*, Cassel & Co., London, 1958, p.243.
21. 5,000 was the Japanese figure. It is believed to be conservative. At the war crimes trials in Singapore in March, 1947, Lt.Col. Hishakari Takafumi testified that he was told at first that 50,000 Chinese were to be killed, but later, this being found impossible, he was told that after half that number had been killed an order had been received to "stop the massacre". The way the massacres were carried out renders it unlikely that the Japanese had any accurate notion of the actual numbers of their victims.
22. See Purcell: op.cit., p.45; Lord Russell of Liverpool: op.cit., p.245.
23. Yoji Akashi: "Japanese Policy Towards the Malayan Chinese 1941-45", *Journal of South East Asian Studies*, Vol.1, no.2, September 1970, pp. 61-89, esp. p.68.
24. Wilfred Blythe: *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya. A Historical Study*, OUP, London, 1969, p.327.
25. Col. Masanobu Tsuji: *Singapore, The Japanese Version*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1960, p.162. The savagery of their anti-Chinese and anti-communist sentiments was not likely to have been moderated by the written briefing given to all Japanese troops after embarkation for Malaya (written by Tsuji as Chief of Operations and Planning for the 25th Army). The overseas Chinese were depicted in a crude stereotype as "colonialists" contributing military funds to Chungking, "by a variety of clever schemes concerted with the European administrators and are steadily extorting money from the native population". The Chinese were allegedly hated by the "natives", and had "no racial or national consciousness, and no enthusiasm outside the making of money". This information was in section 5 of the briefing; section 4 was entitled "Destroy the genuine enemy – but show compassion to those who have no guilt" (ibid, pp.307-9).
26. Tsutsui, (Chijin): *Nampo gunsei-ron* (Military Government in the Southern Regions), Tokyo, February 1944, pp.156-7, as cited in Hanrahan: op.cit., p.32.
27. Central Military Committee, MCP, *Ma-Lai-ya jen min K'ang – jih ehun chanchi* (the Combat Record of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army), in *War and the Overseas Chinese of the South*, in Chinese, Singapore, January 1947, pp.28-29, as cited in Hanrahan: op.cit., p.35. But cf. A. Short: op.cit., p.22: "It has been argued, somewhat unconvincingly, that a third of the entire guerrilla force was lost in the first eighteen months of the Japanese occupation . . . "
28. F. Spencer Chapman: *The Jungle is Neutral*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1949, p.248. Chapman's information about the composition of the MPAJU membership is contradictory. While he complains of limited contacts among the artisans, shopkeepers and wealthier merchants (p.249) he also reports being informed in mid-1942 by two young towkays of the MPAJU that the wealthier Chinese, though in some cases initially pro-Japanese, were now prepared to support and subsidise the guerrillas, without necessarily agreeing with their politics (p.143). It should always be recalled that, just as the British had no intention of imparting any information to the MPAJA beyond the minimum needed to meet British objectives, so the MCP were under no obligation to reveal to Chapman – or to any of the

other outside contacts – any more than they cared to, or to permit him – or them – any opportunity to undertake independent intelligence.

29. *The Syonan Times*, 3 March 1942.
30. Chen Ping (Chin Peng, Chen Peng), MCP Secretary-General at the time of the 1948 revolt, served as a liaison officer between the Perak forces and the Selangor General HQ of the MPAJA (Chapman, pp.350-51).
31. Ibid., pp.157-58; as noted above, Chapman – as a British agent – was justifiably mistrusted by the guerrillas and kept as uniformed and misinformed of organisational matters as was consistent with his tasks. He complains bitterly of "deceitful behaviour" on the part of the guerrillas, some of whom made it a matter of policy never to tell him the truth about anything (p.245). His repeated complaints of communication difficulties and an overcentralised command may, therefore, have been overstated or just plain wrong.
32. Short: op.cit., p.24, reports a "belated but rapid development of armed Malay units" in the MPAJA itself, and – as he notes later – there was proof of this in later-discovered mosques in old MPAJA camps (fn.3 p.103).
33. See Hanrahan: op.cit., p.44; C.B. McLane: op.cit., p.305.
34. Earl Mountbatten: *South East Asia 1943-45: Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff*, HMSO, London, 1951, para.569, p.165. Had 'Operation Zipper' eventuated (which would have involved the establishment of a bridgehead on the Malayan peninsula in the Port Swettenham/Port Dickson area prior to the advance on Singapore) the Japanese would have had to follow hundreds of miles of road and railway along the foot of the Main Ridge, where the MPAJA were waiting in readiness, to move their defences from Kedah to Port Dickson. See Chapman: op.cit., pp.422-23.
35. Japanese Military Administration Documents, *The Occupation of Malaya*, Section IV-2, as cited in Hanrahan: op.cit., p.44.
36. Quoted in Chin Kee Onn: *Malaya Upside Down*, Jitts & Co., Singapore, 1946, pp.113-4.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. On 24 May 1943, the first F136 operation on Malayan soil – the landing of a reconnaissance party of six – took place. But it was not until 1 January 1944, that agreement between the guerrilla command and F136 personnel representing South East Asia Command was reached, providing for the parachuting in of arms, finance, and training and medical facilities. A year later with the establishment of the first radio link with SEAC the agreement was broadcast, and in November 1944, following small-scale test drops during the previous months, the main air supply effort started building up (see Chapman: op.cit., pp.235 et seq., 248, 412-3; Hanrahan: op.cit., p.43).
40. According to Clutterbuck (Richard: *Riot and Revolution in Singapore and Malaya, 1945-1963*, Faber and Faber, London 1973, p.37), "(I)t is now generally accepted that he was originally planted by the British Special Branch, though his subsequent loyalties are more doubtful". Clutterbuck claims personal confirmation of this from Alan Blades, one-time director of the Special Branch. Chen Ping's enquiries into Lai Tek's irregularities began "several months" prior to December 1946, according to McLane (op.cit., p.314), though they are often reported to have begun only after Lai Tek's disappearance in March 1947, with substantial party funds. But, in fact, he had been denounced as early as September 1945, as a Japanese agent by another MCP traitor who had worked for the Kempeitai (A.Short: op.cit., pp.38-39), and it appears that his whole career had been in intelligence – first with the French Securite in Indochina, then, by the mid-1930s, with the British Special Branch in Malaya, then with the Japanese and finally (until his cover was at last comprehensively blown by the Chen Ping investigation) with the British again. During the Japanese occupation

he probably worked as a double agent, in touch with both the Japanese (who let him move freely about the country betraying his comrades) and the British (no doubt anxious to know as much as they could about what faced them in the reimposition of colonial authority on a roused country). (See McLane: op.cit., pp.241, 303-5, 308-13, 316, 386; Short: op.cit., pp.22, 39-42, 44, 50, 53, 79.)

41. Chapman: op.cit., p.213.
42. Ibid., p.216.
43. According, that is, to Hai Shang-ou: as cited by Hanrahan: op.cit., p.40; it is useful at this point to recall that Hanrahan is an anti-communist, who denigrates, belittles and smears the MCP and the MPAJA.
44. The extermination of traitors, the investigation of complaints, and the issuing of warnings in connection with the organisation of boycotts of Japanese goods were allegedly the responsibility of a "special affairs" section of the standing committee of AEBUS, as it functioned in 1938 – see Stenson: op.cit., p.22, quoting the September 1938 issue of *Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs*.
45. Blythe: op.cit., pp.328-9; pre-war Triad membership, as noted above, rendered one especially vulnerable to Japanese wrath and therefore to coercion to work for the Japanese in some capacity.
46. Ibid., pp.331-3.
47. Chapman: op.cit., p.136.
48. Chin Kee Onn: op.cit., p.15; his italicized 'communists' is intended to signify the Japanese epithet disdainfully cast at all guerrillas, whether MCP members or not – in fact, only a handful of actual MCP members were found to be in each unit.
49. Miller: op.cit., p.43; McLane: op.cit., p.304.
50. Donnison: op.cit., p.380; it was further agreed that the only action immediately possible was to keep anti-Japanese feeling alive, to forment labour trouble, and to carry out acts of sabotage, particularly against shipping.
51. According to Chapman (op.cit., pp.248-9), the demeanour of the guerrillas at the conference was, by his account, sincere and meticulous in getting a clear-cut decision on every question, though with a very understandable "air of cautiousness and even cynicism" (p.375). See also Hanrahan's typically jaundiced comments (op.cit., p.42).
52. Why the guerrilla command did not attempt to secure some political commitments from the British at this point is a matter of contention. Since they had suffered from a lack of communication with the outside world since the fall of Singapore, it is conceivable that they did not expect an early British return. Clutterbuck (op.cit., p.45) speculates that the MPAJA had hoped that the Japanese army, weakened and over-extended by the Americans and the British, would find itself strangled by a popular rising' in China, enabling the MPAJA to lead a similar rising by the Chinese in Malaya.
53. Op.cit., pp.49-50.
54. Op.cit., p.306.
55. Not to have had contingency plans for armed self-defence would, in the circumstances, have been lunacy, however sincere the commitment to constitutional progress as the chosen first priority option; it is useful in this context to compare the respective fates of the PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia) in 1965-6, and of the Cambodian Left in 1970-75 (see M. Caldwell [ed.]: *Ten Years' Military Terror in Indonesia*, Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 1975; and M. Caldwell & Lek Tan: *Cambodia in the Southeast Asian War*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1973).
56. A. Short: op.cit., fn.3, p.103.
57. See R. Soenarno: "Malay Nationalism, 1896-1945", *Journal of South East Asian History*, Vol.1, No.1, 1960, pp.19-21; see also J.M. Gullick: *Malaysia*, Ernest Benn, London, 1969, pp.94-95, and J. Pluvier: *South East Asia from Colonialism to Independence*, OUP, London, 1974, p.299. Associated

with PETA was an organisation called KRIS (*Kesatuan Ra'ayat Indonesia Semenanjong* – People's Association of Peninsular Indonesia); faced with defeat, the Japanese promised to grant independence to both Malaya and Indonesia – a promise which turned out hollow, but far more so in the case of Malaya than in the case of Indonesia. See, *inter alia*, G. McT.Kahin: *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1952; J. Silverstein (ed.): *South East Asia in World War II*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1966; H. Benda: *The Crescent and the Rising Sun*, The Hague, 1958; W.R. Roff: *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1967.

58. See G. Kolko: *The Politics of War*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1969, *passim*.

59. While, of course, preserving intact the capacity to fight if necessary (see footnote 55 above); it would be pointless to attempt here even a summary of the enormous and constantly expanding bibliography of this period of Chinese revolutionary history.

60. Which appear reasonably accurate; Hanrahan's source (op.cit., p.50) is given as Mai-lai-ya kung-ch'an-tang (MCP): *Ma-lai-ya ko-ming chan-cheng ti chan-lueh wen-ti* (Strategic Problems of the Malayan Revolutionary War), N.P., December 1948, p.3.

61. McLane: op.cit., pp.313-4; in point of fact he shows from CPGB sources its ready acquiescence in MCP policies of accommodation: "A (CPGB) commentary on a Parliamentary debate on colonial policy at the end of 1942 did not go beyond the demands for 'self-government' in Malaya. A fuller treatment of the colonial question by the CPGB later in the war reaffirmed 'self-government', not independence, as the present objective in most of England's colonies, including Malaya, and stated that the MCP's policies should be directed toward social and economic reforms and a unification of the three racial communities *prior to* independence." (p.314; emphasis in the original). McLane's sources for this are: "Colonial Policy", *World News and Views*, 12 December 1942, p.477, and *The Colonies: The Way Forward: a Memorandum issued by the Executive Committee of the CPGB*, November 1944, pp.49-58.

62. See footnote 41 above.

63. One of the best sources now available is Nguyen Khac Vien's *The Long Resistance 1858-1975*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi, 1975.

64. McLane: op.cit., pp.306-7. It is an interesting point that when, in November 1945, the MCP issued another statement, it called for an end to British Military intervention against the independence movements of Indochina and Indonesia, but did *not* specifically call for Malayan independence.

65. The MPAJA according to one source (*The Accomplishments of Air Power in the Malayan Emergency* p.4, Air University, Alabama, May 1963-Aerospace Studies Institute, Project No.AU-411-62-ASI, Insurgency and Counter Insurgency Studies) "unwillingly returned some 6,800 guns to the British".

66. Chapman: op.cit., p.419; Hanrahan: op.cit., p.50.

67. Authorizing the inevitable was the only means of maintaining the increasingly tenuous and largely fictitious F136 'control' of guerrilla patrols; Donnison: op.cit., p.384.

68. The parallel with the Korean situation at the same time is instructive: see Joyce and Gabriel Kolko: *The Limits of Power*, Harper and Row, New York, 1972, pp.277 et seq.; and F. Baldwin (ed.): *Without Parallel*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1974.

69. Gullick (op.cit., p.98) tacitly admits as much when he concludes his chapter on the Japanese occupation with these words: "The constraint of the Malayans was due to uncertainty as to what was going to happen next and to a feeling that there could be no simple going back to the old scheme of things. It was perhaps most significant of all that the British referred to the 'liberation' of Malaya but the Malayans quietly persisted in calling it the 'reoccupation'."

The British Military Administration, September 1945 to April 1946

Daud Latiff

The British Military Administration (BMA) was given the task of re-establishing British hegemony in Malaya after the Japanese occupation. Its task was to construct the framework of a new colonial state apparatus, and in so doing provide the basis for post-war exploitation and control of the country. Its attempts, however, at introducing various reforms in this process were met with opposition and resistance from several different directions, including both the Malay middle strata and the Malay aristocracy, *and* the colonial 'old guard'. At the same time, the bankruptcy of these reforms, insofar as they failed to improve the living conditions and economic prospects of the vast majority of the people of Malaya, resulted in an upsurge of labour militancy and demonstrations. For the British to have yielded to the demands of the masses would have meant the end of British control of Malaya; the people, therefore, had to be opposed – and this increasingly required the ruthless employment of state repression and violence. Similarly, to have pushed forward with the reforms in the face of widespread opposition would have left the administration in a hopelessly untenable position: it would have had no support for its policies within the Malayan class structure, and would thus have been, in the long run, powerless to implement its policies. A return to pre-war policies was also, however, out of the question. The obsolescence of these policies had been conclusively demonstrated in the previous era. Simply going back to the former dispensation was not a desirable course of action in any case because, as the administration was acutely aware, such a step would be regarded in 'the eyes of the world' (in practice, in the eyes of Washington) as an extremely reactionary and 'backward' step.

The final orientation of the administration, therefore, represented an unstable compromise between the need to retain the support of allies in the Malay middle strata, in the Malay aristocracy, and in the colonial old guard, on the one hand, and the need to modernise the

colonial economy (in order for it to remain competitive on world markets) on the other. This compromise was formalised in the creation of the Federation of Malaya in 1948, replacing the still-born Malayan Union project (see below). The Federation solution ensured both continuation of Malay supremacist policies and introduction of at least a degree of rationalisation into the economic and administrative structure of the country. The instability of this compromise lay in the fact that it failed to overcome the basic contradictions inherent in what was still, fundamentally, a colonial system – that is a system based upon direct control and exploitation of the country and its population, something which, in turn, called for the complete subordination and passivity of all strata and classes within the society. These irresolvable contradictions between the interests of British imperialism and those of the workers and peasants of Malaya eventually came to a head with the declaration of a State of Emergency in June 1948, whereupon they assumed the form of naked and open armed struggle.

The following sections attempt to show in some detail the way in which the BMA functioned, and the various stages through which it went as its original plans were progressively undermined and changed in the process of coming to terms with the balance of class forces within Malaya – something that the Malayan Planning Unit, responsible for their initial strategy, had itself been unable to do.

September 1945 to mid-January 1946 – the Liberal Facade of 'progressive, helpful and liberal policies'

After the Japanese surrender, there was little evidence of any intent on the part of the occupying forces in Malaya to oppose a British return. Despite this, British troops were still very slow in reaching the country. By 5 September, however, the first army units had arrived in Singapore and on the Malayan mainland. During the next ten days, allied "control" of the country (if it warranted the description) was divided between the GOC 34th Corps, responsible for the peninsula, and the GOC 15th Corps, responsible for Singapore. On 15 September these two commands were unified when the 14th Army Command took over complete responsibility for the whole country. With this, the British Military Administration came into being, with headquarters in Singapore and under the direct command of Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia Command. Major General H.R. Hone, previously head of the Malayan Planning Unit, was appointed head of the BMA, occupying the post of Chief Civil Affairs Officer. The BMA was split at a lower level, however, so that – in effect – there were two separate but closely interrelated administrations, one concerned with Singapore and the other with the rest of the country.

The BMA was faced with a series of unexpected problems. It had been designed on the assumption that it would be operating for most of its useful life in a situation where extensive military operations were going on. The surrender of the Japanese meant that this *raison d'etre* had evaporated; with the exception of the military operations in Indonesia (for which Singapore served as base), there were practically no major military operations, as such, during the entire term of the BMA. In consequence, control had been established much sooner than had originally been expected; this had a disruptive effect upon the plans that had been prepared before the surrender, especially with respect to the supply of food and other vital materials necessary for the complete rehabilitation of the country. The main problems that the administration had to deal with were – contrary to what had previously been assumed – social and economic rather than military. As Mountbatten had said in July, just before the re-occupation, the ". . . setting up of the military administration is based on military exigency";[1] it had not been designed, nor had it the capacity, to cope adequately with the kind and scope of non-military problems with which it was confronted. A Planning Directive of the MPU, dated 29 November 1943, makes this quite clear: it says that ". . . the form of the administration machinery . . . during the period of military administration must depend primarily upon military needs".[2] In fact, the MPU had worked on the assumption that there would be two distinct phases in the BMA's operations during the first six months of its existence; in the first three months it was ". . . confidently assumed that chaos will reign", and it was therefore taken for granted that only in the second quarter, when things were a little more settled, would the Military Government ". . . be able to extend its responsibilities to more detailed matters of administration".[3]

In practice, it was these very "detailed matters" which – almost immediately – became of first concern. Overall, the impact of this disruption to original plans is aptly summed up in the following extract from some briefing notes prepared for a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff, dated 3 December 1945:

> "The economic situation in Malaya is extremely disquieting. Three factors have increased the difficulty of the BMA (M). (a) Firstly, the war ended earlier than was expected. The operational and post-operational phases which would have lead to the gradual reconquest of Malaya never occurred. Malaya was given up in a day and consequently plans were dislocated. These plans had been made in London on the assumption that no considerable quantity of supplies would be needed in Malaya until January or February 1946. YWP estimates* on which all imports are based were worked out on the basis that the

*YWP – Young Working Party – estimates were arrived at by a working party headed by Sir Hubert Young, as an "impartial assessment" of the MPU's estimates of the likely food situation.

British would return to Malaya after the rice harvest, that is in February or March 1946, and that we could reasonably expect to find internal stocks of some 200,000 tons of rice. This has proved completely unfounded."[4]

The YWP estimates had been worked out precisely so that, *if* the recommended amounts of food and supplies could be brought into the country ". . . during the first six months of its liberation, disease and unrest amongst the civil population would not occur".[5] In the BMA Monthly Report for December 1945, the supply situation up to that point is reviewed and compared to the YWP estimates for that period:

"The Young Working Party estimates postulated imports amounting to approximately 80,000 tons a month, of which 34,000 tons were to have consisted of rice and 6,000 tons of other foodstuffs. In fact from 5 September to 31 December only one-fourth of the tonnage estimated on the austerity Young Working Party Plans had been delivered and the outlook for the months of January and February is no brighter."[6]

True to the YWP predictions, this acute shortage of supplies did lead to increasing unrest and civil disorder. But during the first few months of its existence the BMA seemed reasonably confident that it would be able to contain the situation. This attitude is reflected in the relatively liberal analysis that it put forward at the time to explain the unrest. A report entitled *Strikes and Disturbances in Malaya* (dated 8 November 1945) says:

". . . the main cause of the recent disturbances is the lack of rice. The food situation is not yet satisfactory and rice stocks are not large. In some areas there is widespread malnutrition. Coupled with this is the fact that in many areas the labour situation is bad. There is both an actual shortage of labour and a difficulty regarding wages, which are still low in many areas."[7]

Acutely aware however of the potentially explosive nature of the situation, the BMA took steps to try to minimise the seriousness of the supply position. In the BMA Monthly Report for December 1945, it is made clear that plans for distributing the available rice had to be based rather upon expediency than justice.

"When our allotment of rice for December and January was substantially reduced, we found ourselves in a serious predicament. To have distributed the rice equitably throughout the whole country would have entailed a substantial reduction of the ration in Singapore as well as throughout the Mainland. From every point of view, however, we had to safeguard the position in Singapore. The political repercussions of such an announcement would we knew be serious, and our problem was to redistribute rice on such a basis as would mimimise the unrest and disorder which it was only reasonable to expect would follow the new announcement . . . Singapore mishandled could paralyse the whole country, and . . . could seriously hamper our military operations in Java."

On this basis, having established that Singapore had to have priority

treatment, the Report continues:

> ". . . we decided that the most serious risk of disorder would arise in the urban areas of the mainland, and that it was therefore necessary to maintain a reasonable ration in the towns. Before liberation the people in the rural areas had received very little rice during the Japanese period and our revised distribution forced us to put them back in much the same position as they were under the Japanese . . . It was realised, however, that in certain rural areas there were bound to be particularly sore spots (sic) where some ad hoc remedial measures would be necessary."

Similarly a little later on in the report the same pragmatic approach is reiterated:

> "In making our allocations we had also to take into consideration the importance of giving extra rice to heavy workers, whether in rural or urban areas, if the efficiency of the labour force employed on essential military and civil work was not to be seriously impaired."[8]

This liberal approach to the strikes and disturbances, and the corresponding strategy adopted, was closely tied to the BMA's initial estimation of the threat the MCP and MPAJA, both legal and working openly, posed to the British presence. At that time the MCP was in fact felt to be only incidentally involved in strikes and disturbances, which were therefore not seen purely as the product of 'communist subversion'. The demands the MCP were putting forward at this time seemed to confirm the view that they were only concerned with 'economic' matters and not 'political' ones, a concern that merely reflected the basic struggle that the mass of people were waging to exist in the face of the acute food shortages, vast unemployment and low wages. Some sections of the administration seemed to accept this state of affairs, despite the fact that they disapproved of it. Victor Purcell, the BMA's Chief Adviser on Chinese Affairs, in the internal bulletin he produced for the BMA called *Malaya's Political Climate* said:

> "when the minimum cost of living is far greater than the wages received by the ordinary labourers . . . strikes are inevitable."[9]

In line with this acknowledgement of the generalised and widespread nature of the disturbances, the following comments are made in another section of the above cited *Report on Strikes and Disturbances in Malaya*:

> "As regards the strikes it is the view of Malaya Command that there is not at present any central control working, and until such a control exists there will be no more than local strikes in the country."

The Report then assesses the role of the MCP:

> "In assessing the part played by the MCP in these disturbances, it must be

> remembered that the party is a largely Chinese-sponsored organisation, and by no means represents the masses of Malaya . . . 14th Army consider that the immediate aim of the communists is to establish their position as a force in the country and so obtain food and better wages. 14th Army also point out that many of the recent incidents have been the work of hot-headed youth elements who are acting with more impetuosity than older men would advise."[10]

This whole liberal perspective is summed up best perhaps in the following extract from the BMA Monthly Report for December:

> "On account of the political situation existing in neighbouring countries it was always possible that the strikes would take a 'political' turn and it is even surprising in retrospect, that considerations of this kind played such a comparatively small part. *As to the economic grounds for the strikes there was never any doubt.* The cost of living has risen out of all proportion to the level of wages so much so that the strikers' demands were first and foremost for an increased rice ration and only secondly for increased pay. *The causes of unrest are thus primarily economic.*"[11] [My italics, D.L.]

Until January, therefore, the overall situation in Malaya was one in which strikes and disturbances were treated as the inevitable product of a 'war ravaged' country, without sufficient food or supplies to keep the majority of the population above the level of starvation and totally wretched conditions. The 'solution' to these troubles, in the long term, was seen to lie in rectifying the supply situation – and not as occurred later, in fighting the 'political subversion' of the MCP and its allies. The MCP, in fact, was viewed as a relatively weak political force, and what headway it was making was seen to be the result of its 'cashing in' on the general tide of unrest and discontent, rather than its managing to win support amongst the mass of people for its programme. This perspective is made clear in the following extract from the Monthly BMA Report for November. In one section it deals with 'Political Chinese Affairs' in Singapore and makes reference to the rivalry that existed there between the MCP and the KMT. According to the report the MCP

> "began with everything in its favour. It was the undisputed heir and successor of the Anti-Japanese Army. It was comparatively well organised. It stood for a political programme which – whatever its real merits – has won over millions of people in Asia to its side. The KMT on the other hand was ill organised, considered somewhat reactionary, and made the grave error of welcoming into its ranks new members whose subsequent behaviour discredited the party. But through sheer political maladroitness the Communist Party has already lost many of its initial advantages. It backed the GLU which mismanaged the strike. It sponsored subsidiary political parties which are known by the public to be little better than thieves and gangsters . . . But what is not forgiven, but is in fact greatly resented, is the blatent and unmistakeably *Russian* stamp of the party programme which should, if it is to have a real chance of success, be popular and international in character."[12]

In another part of the same report the conclusion is that

> "throughout the peninsula . . . the CP has lost ground during the month [i.e. November]. The atmosphere is calmer and the leaders of the CF and the People's Committees* are displaying a somewhat more cooperative spirit . . . The CP appears to recognise that it had overplayed its hand at present, and a massacre of 42 Chinese in N. Sembilan on 6 November obviously had a sobering effect upon the Party and Chinese population generally."[13]

British Policy and the MPAJA

One of the causes of this initial liberal approach can be accurately described as pragmatic. Until December 1945, the MPAJA remained as an active, disciplined and effective fighting force, under the overall command of the MCP. As discussed in the previous chapter, the MCP after the Japanese surrender had decided to discontinue the armed struggle and to switch instead to a 'peaceful' popular front strategy in opposition to the re-establishment of British colonialism. As shown in Michael Morgan's chapter the main vehicles of the struggle then became the General Labour Unions, the All Malayan Council of Joint Action and other non-military organisations.

But despite the change in strategy, which the British undoubtedly knew about, the BMA clearly understood that the MPAJA was still a *potential* military threat to the British presence. This therefore imposed limitations upon the way the British could deal with any threats to 'internal security', for fear of provoking a head-on collision with the MPAJA. During the first four months, or more, it is very likely that in the event of such a confrontation it would have been the British who would have come off worse. With the exception of the main urban areas, until the Spring of 1946 much of Malaya was not being effectively administered or policed by the British. It was the People's Committees, until they were shut down, that played the main part in the administration of these areas. Even in the urban areas such as Singapore, whose security was vital for the British presence, there were severe problems in policing. Much of the normal police work was done by the Army in the urban as well as rural areas. In fact as late as March 1946, in a telegram from SACSEA to the Cabinet Offices, it was made clear that "since the civil police will not be in a position for some time to undertake their complete responsibilities . . . it will be necessary for the service police to give them assistance. . . "[14] Police training was found to be a difficulty, although in the December issue of the Monthly BMA Report it was noted that since the reoccupation about 1,240

* People's Committees were set up by the MCP/MPAJA immediately after the Japanese surrender, and as explained later played an important part in developing the political consciousness and organisation of the masses.

Malays and 272 Indians had completed refresher courses at the Kuala Lumpur Police Depot. Overall police strength at this time was probably under 3,000, the majority of whom were inadequately equipped, without proper training, demoralised and paid very low wages. On top of this was the acute shortage of 'experienced officers' – a combination of factors meaning that the police force could hardly be considered as a force capable of operating in an effective and disciplined way against a concerted guerrilla movement, whose numercial strength was almost double that of the police.[15] But, despite the fact that the police were very extensively supported by the army, the *total* security force strength was still inadequate to deal with extensive armed insurgency. This point becomes very clear when it is remembered that during the Malayan Emergency, a guerrilla force of comparable size to the MPAJA at that time, managed to occupy a security apparatus in total numbering well over 300,000 men.

But the MPAJA did not just constitute a military threat. On their return to Malaya the British were disturbed, and some even naively surprised, to find that it was the MPAJA and not the British themselves who were treated as the real liberators of the people. To most of the workers and peasants of Malaya the British withdrawal from Singapore in 1942 had shattered or at least severely shaken the ideology of British colonial omnipotence and paternalism. In the following three and a half years it was obvious to those who continued to live in Malaya, that it was the MPAJA and not the British, who were fighting against the Japanese aggressors and for the people. The MPAJA was therefore a political and ideological thorn in the flesh of the British administration. Furthermore it served as an effective base around which to organise the masses politically, and to create alternative social and political structures outside the narrow colonial framework – of which the People's Committees were the main example.

These various factors are brought out well in the following extract from the Monthly BMA Report for December, which gives a brief account of the history of the relationship between the MPAJA and the British Military Command in South East Asia:

> "Shortly before the reoccupation of Malaya the guerrilla forces were informed that they were directly under the Supreme Commander's orders, and in areas from which the Japanese Forces withdrew under the capitulation terms bodies of guerrillas took complete control pending the arrival of the British Forces. *The guerrillas performed very useful service during this period* but it must be said that the authority temporarily conferred upon them tended to be regarded by their leaders as conferring on them a political responsibility rivalling that of the British Military Administration in governing the country. As the Civil Affairs organisation was extended throughout the country the guerrilla leaders were somewhat reluctant to relinquish the control which they had

temporarily exercised over the people and some clashes of opinion were inevitable. With the wholehearted cooperation of the Liaison Officers of Force 136 these minor political differences (sic) were generally satisfactorily smoothed out but the British Military Administration was anxious that as soon as possible the guerrilla forces should revert to their peace time avocations as citizens of the country."[16] [My italics, D.L.]

In reference to this issue it is perhaps interesting as well as important to contrast this Official account of the situation with the one produced some time later by Perry Robinson in his celebrated book *Transformation in Malaya*. The following extract from his book deals with the period described above when the MPAJA took over areas after the Japanese surrender. In reading it it is important to bear in mind the following two points: firstly that the book is extensively quoted as an authorative source in many secondary works that have been produced over the past decade or more, and secondly, rather ironically, during the Emergency Robinson put his undoubted talent for 'objective' and 'impartial' reporting demonstrated below, to good use when he held the post of Senior Information Officer for some time.

". . . Except for the Force 136 men, no allied forces arrived in the country for two weeks, and it was five weeks before they were in effective strength throughout the country. For many people in Malaya [which people?] those five weeks are a more horrible memory than the Japanese occupation . . . The Japanese protected themselves and the officials or townspeople immediately under their care; but they did not (or could not) protect many hundreds of people in the countryside, who were tortured or put to death by the MPAJA . . . "[17]

As the situation in Malaya continued to deteriorate during November, with further strikes occurring, and with little prospect of things improving especially with the cut-back in the rice allocation for December and January, the BMA became increasingly anxious to neutralise the MPAJA. In the November/December edition of the *Review of the Internal Situation in Malaya*, the disbandment of the MPAJA was seen as one of the two major tasks facing the BMA in the following month:

"there is little doubt that December will be a difficult month. The two major factors are the disbandment of the guerrillas and the decrease in the imports of rice . . . Much will depend on the success of the disbandment of the MPAJA (and) of the dispersal and return to their homes of its members."[18]

The specific nature of the threat posed by the MPAJA is spelt out in detail in the following extract from the same report under the section entitled "Armed Elements Threatening Internal Security", where a delay in the disbandment programme is discussed:

"The disarmament and disbandment of the Malayan guerrilla forces has been temporarily delayed, and the 1st December is now likely to be the official

> date. Although in some parts of Malaya the MPAJA are doing useful work, *many of them are joining in disorders and becoming involved with the AJU [Anti-Japanese Union] and thus with the MCP.*"[19] [My italics, D.L.]

Eventually, despite the delays, the disbandment was effected by the end of December, together with the destructuring of the People's Committees. In many ways the whole operation went better than was expected. The operation as a whole is reported in the BMA Monthly Report for December:

> "The disbandment of the Anti-Japanese Army in the early part of the month passed off without incidents. The number of arms handed in exceeded expectations and in Negri Sembilan arms issued to Force 136 constituted only 15 per cent of the total surrendered."[20]

With the MPAJA out of the way the BMA undoubtedly felt a weight off its collective mind. But its problems were far from over. As they celebrated the first new year since the British 'return' two problems were gathering on the horizon. The first and most immediate one was the problem of the mass unrest and public disorder that still persisted. The BMA's failure effectively to improve the conditions of the vast majority of people in Malaya, together with the increasingly heavy-handed way in which they were dealing with the disruption that resulted, meant that far from becoming more settled, the political and economic situation was deteriorating at an increasing pace. The second and closely related problem was less obvious at that time, despite the fact that it had major implications for the whole of post-war British strategy in Malaya. This was the imminent controversy over the Malayan Union scheme, and its eventual rejection. For ease of exposition, however, these two areas will be dealt with separately starting with what was seen as the problem of 'law and order'.

Mid-January 1946 to 31 March 1946 – From 'Economic' to 'Political' Strikes

Despite the liberal rhetoric described in the previous section, in which the 'strikes and disturbances' of the first few months of the BMA period were seen as having an 'economic' rather than a 'political' basis, they were still met with repression and state violence. Although they were perhaps even 'inevitable' as Purcell had said, they still had to be 'dealt with' as disruptive and undesirable events. This was especially so when the strikes and disturbances occurred in strategic centres like the Singapore Docks. In the latter part of October 1945, there had been a number of strikes in the docks, in which the Singapore GLU (General Labour Union – see next chapter) had been active. In a *Report on the Labour Troubles in Singapore* made by the Chief Civil Affairs Officer, Singapore, dated 27 October 1945, it was reported

that there was "still a possibility that a general strike will be called in Singapore on 1 November".[21] The situation was clearly threatening to get out of hand, having already been badly inflamed by the BMA's use of military and Japanese PoW scab labour in an attempt to break the strike. The BMA's response was blunt and repressive, issuing orders on 27 October to "arrest all picketers".[22] Similar straightforward repressive responses to strikes are documented in other cases as well. For instance in a signal to ALFSEA (Allied Land Forces South East Asia), from 14th Army Command in Malaya dated 29 October 1945, the C-in-C ALFSEA, Lieutenant General Sir Miles Dempsey, discusses the situation in Singapore and Malaya as a whole. After having said that the political situation in Malaya is very complex and that the BMA's job is made very difficult by a shortage of Civil Affairs Officers, Dempsey goes on to say that as yet

> "there is only the smallest police force in Singapore and virtually no police in the country. *There have been a few major incidents in the country towns necessitating shooting on a very small scale and this had had a most salutary effect.*"

The signal's conclusion, however, shows the way in which the liberal rhetoric about 'economic' strikes and their 'inevitability' was perfectly compatible with the implementation of a repressive policy on the ground:

> "50,000 tons of rice would go far towards a solution (*and arrests on a larger scale*)."[23] [My italics, D.L.]

By January things still looked far from settled and the outlook was discouraging, there being little prospect that things would be under full control for some time. For a specific set of reasons, however, at this point the BMA changed its perspectives on the nature of the strikes and disturbances, and started to regard them as being 'political' and the product, by and large, of communist subversion, thus returning to the classic anti-communist dogmas. But the change in perspectives did not mark the *start* of a repressive campaign against any opposition to British policy, for repression had been a steady feature of the entire period since the reoccupation. Rather it signalled the *systematic escalation* of this repressive policy, which was no longer conducted in the rather random manner in which it had been previously. The reasons for these changes are complex, and involve a whole set of interrelated factors. The first concerns the effects upon British policy that the disbandment of the MPAJA induced; disbandment had removed a barrier to the operation of a systematic repressive campaign involving violent confrontations. And the second was the need for a more systematically repressive approach – a reflection of the escalated stage of struggle. By the

start of 1946 the people's organisations and the unions had made a great deal of headway and had built up substantial support throughout the country. This was at the same time as the administration was developing and extending its own organisation, with the gradual accumulation of supplies of men and materials.

These two developments are clearly closely interrelated and were indications that the struggle was developing to a higher level. Thirdly was the all-important, and in the last instance the determinant, factor in the change. This was the pressure that was building up both from the owners of the tin and rubber concerns and from the British Government itself, to get the industries rehabilitated quickly so that production could start. As the *Economist* had said in an article in October 1945 both parties were anxious for a quick recovery, "the former to earn profits and the latter to secure dollars".[24] The time was right for the process of 'industrial rehabilitation' to get under way. The widespread civil disorder and strikes were not, however, conducive to rapid rehabilitation. This was especially so as the initial mass unemployment of the first three months of the reoccupation was followed by a shortage of labour. This shortage was largely caused by the wide dispersal of the labour force that had occurred during the Japanese occupation, the extent of which is made clear from the following extract from the Monthly BMA Report for December:

> "The overall dispersal of labour can be estimated at about 50 per cent, the percentage being roughly the same throughout the Peninsula but varying considerably in the case of different estates. In Johore it is estimated that the North retains 60 per cent of its labour force as against 40 per cent in the South . . . "[25]

the reason for this difference being given as the attraction of Singapore to the people in the south with its higher rice rations. In such circumstances organised labour clearly had an advantage, and so the importance of containing it became more and more pressing as rehabilitation began. Many employers when they returned, also set about reducing or attempting to reduce wages, which again escalated the struggle, necessitating a more repressive response from the administration. A good example of this 'get tough' policy is from the Monthly Report of the BMA for February which says:

> "Most managers have been very appreciative of the effects of four years' malnutrition on their labourers . . . but it is felt that this lenient (sic) treatment cannot continue indefinitely."[26]

SAC's 315th Meeting and the Banishment Weapon

As mentioned earlier this new stage in the struggle between the BMA as the agents of British imperialism and the workers and peasants of

Malaya, was reflected in the rhetoric that the BMA used in order to justify its increasingly repressive actions. It is possible to locate the emergence of the new attitude quite precisely. In the second half of December, Singapore experienced a fresh round of strikes and demonstrations which, according to the administration, "though *fundamentally economic* in origin, have been *worked up by trouble makers for political ends.*"[27] This qualification about the nature of the strikes was a new development which had been absent in the main from previous comments and analyses of the disturbances.

The new rhetoric can be most clearly seen, however, in the minutes of the Supreme Allied Commanders 315th Meeting held in Singapore on 9 January. During this meeting the recent incidents in Singapore were discussed. A consensus emerged that the "general strike" (as it was referred to) was the work of agitators and could therefore be classified as basically 'political'. The meeting in fact began with Mountbatten referring to a statement that Purcell had made recently about the strikes in Singapore, when he had said that

> "the reasons for this strike are purely political. There is no question at all of wages or conditions of labour. The leaders of the General Labour Union (GLU) and other Associations cannot, in my opinion be regarded as Trade Union leaders in any real sense. They are purely political leaders attempting to subvert the law and bring the British Military Administration into hatred and contempt."

On this basis, Purcell had felt justified in estimating that "90 to 95 per cent of the strikers were unwilling strikers",[28] (a statement so extravagant that it is almost meaningless).

Mountbatten went on to make reference to what Purcell had said. He "said that he considered that political strikes were only likely to be really successful if they were supported by the bulk of the populace and the above extracts showed that this was far from being the case". Having said this, however, Mountbatten then continues, showing the real teeth of the liberal comments about political strikes having to have mass support thus:

> "Intimidation contravened every known form of law in every civilized country and he was altogether prepared to make use of armed forces in helping to stop it. He pointed out that the support of the armed forces would very probably not be so readily available after the return of civil administration."29

Later in the meeting, the view that the BMA should 'clean up' Malaya, presumably with the Army, before the civil administration returned was echoed by Sir Miles Dempsey, C-in-C ALFSEA, when he said that he considered it the BMA's "primary duty at present . . . to rid the country of blackguards before the civil government took over".[30] With respect to the MCP the meeting's sentiments were well

expressed, if somewhat melodramatically, by Colonel R.M. Broome of Force 136 fame:

> "From my experience with living with the guerrillas, which means the communists, there is no doubt in my mind that they are after revolution for the sake of revolution. There is nothing constructive in their ideas whatsoever . . . The great majority of the leaders are after nothing else but trouble, and gratification of the lust for power that the stirring up of trouble gives them. They are therefore an evil force . . . "[31]

Having been fortified by such ritual statements as to the evil nature of communism and communists, the meeting turned to consider concrete ways in which the 'menace' was to be combatted.

When reading the following extracts an important point to note is the way in which, despite the dropping of the liberal rhetoric within the administration itself, the preservation of a liberal *facade* by the BMA was seen to be of primary importance. The reasons for wanting to preserve and in fact extend the liberal image in the eyes of the world are complex, although one of the main elements is to be located in the struggle that Britain was waging against the post-war rise of American imperialism, especially in South East Asia. For various reasons the British did not want to give the Americans the impression that it was trying to recreate the old 'colonial' Malaya, but rather that it was building the basis for a 'free' and independent nation.

This concern over a liberal facade is well illustrated in the following extract from the minutes of the 315th meeting, where Mountbatten talked about restrictions upon the scope of repressive measures that the BMA could employ.

> "If we arrest a few ['trouble makers'] now we shall probably provoke retaliation which will enable us to arrest many more, but it will be a sort of running battle which will lay us open to misrepresentation both in this country and in the world. It will *look* like an aggressive act during a period of comparative peace. It seems to me that if we are content to wait a little longer another opportunity will come, not perhaps as good as the last one, but still good enough to enable us to take the most widespread and effective action without fear of adverse public opinion."[32]

Such an opportunity was felt possibly to be the forthcoming fourth anniversary of the British defeat in Singapore, on 15 February. The GLUs and other popular organisations had called for the day to be declared a public holiday in memory of those people who lost their lives in the Anti-Japanese struggle. The BMA, however, was not at all sympathetic to such a proposal, feeling that the real motivation behind the calling of the holiday was to create an embarassing situation for the British, in that their then fall from power was the real cause for celebration. For these reasons the BMA had already decided that they were

not going to allow a public holiday, and they were prepared to ban any demonstrations that might be held in protest against this decision. It was the inevitable confrontation that would emerge as a result of this ban that was thought to be the opportunity for taking the desired "widespread and effective action".

Mountbatten was once more cautious, however, in considering the way in which the situation could be used to the advantage of the British. He felt that although it was desirable in the long term, "preventive arrest . . . savoured too much of fascist methods (sic) . . . Action taken against those who were causing the trouble should be unrelated as far as possible, to the political aspect of the strikes". As a way of accomplishing this, Brigadier McKerron, Deputy Chief Civil Affairs Officer, Singapore, made reference to the possible use of the Banishment Ordinance, which he considered to be "one of the strongest available weapons for internal security purposes". Mountbatten was, however, "strongly opposed to the use of the word 'banishment'. There was much historical precedent against the use of banishment as a political weapon . . . " For instance the banishment of Mussolini's opponents from Italy, had produced the "serious repercussion" of "keeping the flames of anti-fascism alive". Similarly Lenin's banishment from Russia by the Czarist regime apparently produced another well known "serious repercussion". Instead, "could not another word, for instance 'repatriation' be used to refer to any undesirables whom it was decided to return to China?" pleaded the Supreme Allied Commander, who continued, "better still was there no ordinance other than the Banishment Ordinance under which it might be possible to get rid of these people?" In reply Purcell obligingly established that the 1933 Aliens Ordinance could indeed be used for this purpose (as it had been before the war).

Having picked the tools, Mountbatten then went on to make some comments about the general conduct of the envisaged "repatriation" operation, and the number of people who could be 'safely' removed. He felt that no more than 50 people could be dealt with in this way initially, without the operation having "very serious repercussions on public opinion". The announcement of the operation had to be carefully phrased as well and "should speak of 'aliens' and 'effective measures' rather than 'members of the GLU' and 'deportation'." Finally Mountbatten said that "he wished probable public reaction throughout the world to be borne in mind by all those concerned with the expulsion of these Chinese from Malaya".[33] This meeting, therefore, was somewhat of a watershed for BMA policy, and this was especially so in relation to the decision taken to use the Aliens Ordinance and other such techniques to neutralise militants and activists, an approach that was developed further and used extensively during the

Emergency some years later.

Confirmation of this new approach is given in documents concerned with the countrywide General Strike that occurred at the end of January 1946. On the 28th of that month a petition was handed into the offices of the Civil Affairs division of the BMA in Singapore. It demanded amongst other things the release of a group of MPAJA cadres arrested and detained by the administration, the release of a group of Indian trade unionists arrested during a recent demonstration in Singapore, and an end to police harassment of the GLU and its officers. The petitition organised by the GLU in Singapore, with the support of other GLUs throughout the country, was a response to the increased repression that the BMA was using in an attempt to smash the militant labour movement. The BMA did not respond to the demands of the petition and so on the following day, 29 January, a national strike was called in support of the demands. By the 30th the GLU claimed that over 173,000 workers were on strike in Singapore, Selangor, Johore and Negri Sembilan. Purcell, commenting upon the BMA's response to this in Singapore, said that they got ". . . out posters very quickly saying that the strike had nothing to do with wages or conditions of labour, that it was an attempt to coerce the BMA and subvert the law, and that it was against the wishes of the majority."[34]

Following these incidents the BMA made preparations for what was going to be the big show-down on 15 February. The widespread support that the January National Strike had attracted and the degree of organisation that it implied obviously disturbed the BMA, who were now even more determined to repress any opposition to their ban on demonstrations on 15 February, and so pick off many militants. This attitude is shown well in the following extract from the Monthly Report of the BMA for February 1946:

> "Previous reports have indicated the growing aggressiveness of the Communist Party, acting through the General Labour Union and after the General Strike of 29/30 January it was clear that *a trial of strength* between the administration and these subversive elements was imminent. Early in February the crisis reared its head when it became known that the Communist Party was proposing to observe the 4th anniversary of the fall of Singapore as a public holiday and a day of 'celebration'."[35]

As is described in Michael Morgan's chapter, however, because of the massive scale of state intimidation the strikes and demonstrations were called off at the last minute. Nevertheless there were many isolated incidents in which the police and army acted with predictable savagery towards those people who did venture to demonstrate against the BMA's policy. In one incident, unfortunately for the BMA, a group of press reporters from such papers as the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*

saw what happened, and subsequently "alleged that certain members of the police were at that time out of hand and beating up arrested prisoners with unnecessary brutality". But despite the political orientation of the papers concerned it was still feared that the incident, because it was such a blatant example of state violence, might invoke "one-sided press comment".[36]

The strategy that the BMA had now embarked upon was one of increasing confrontation with the labour movement and indeed against virtually all opposition whatever its political complexion. Despite their aim of removing alleged 'blackguards' from Malaya before the return of the civil administration they did not, of course, succeeed in doing so. Even the civil administration which followed failed to crush militant opposition completely, and had resort to declaration of a State of Emergency in June 1948 in a last desperate bid to do so. But this area of 'law and order' was only one of the two areas mentioned at the start of this section, and it is to the second – the issue of the Malayan Union scheme – that it is now time to turn.

The Malayan Union

The origins of the Malayan Union proposals, as formulated by the Malayan Planning Unit, (MPU) are described above (Chapter four). Broadly speaking, however, the proposals had two main aims: the first was to create a unified administrative and economic unit out of the previously fragmented pre-war structure; the second was to give citizenship to the non-Malay peoples living in Malaya. The latter, theoretically at least, attacked the fundamentally Malay-supremacist ideology that had been such an integral part of the pre-war colonial structure. The Union proposals can be seen as technocratic reforms of British colonialism, which in no way altered the basically exploitative relationship in which Britain stood to Malaya. They represented an attempt to increase the efficiency of the process of exploitation, mainly by rationalising or removing many of the anachronistic aspects of the classical colonial structure, primarily represented by the colonial 'old guard' and its policies.

The MPU in their formulation of the proposals had failed, however, to appreciate the fact that it is not possible to *impose* on any particular social formation a completely new set of social relations – however desirable they may be in abstract. In other words, it is not possible to *legislate* in favour of one set of social relations and against another. This was the case, for instance, with the proposals to give 'equal status' to non-Malays. As becomes clear below, no matter how desirable this may have been on paper, and indeed, and perhaps paradoxically, in the eyes of those responsible for British foreign policy after the war, the interests

of British imperialism would not have been best protected and advanced if these reforms had in fact been carried through. The various alliances British imperialism had of necessity to form with various different strata within the Malayan class structure, in order to ensure its survival, would have been precluded by these reforms since it was precisely these strata that were most bitterly opposed to them.

Initially, however, the British were not aware of the impending difficulties they were to experience in attempting to implement the Union scheme. The first step in the implementation of the proposals was to get the signatures of the various Malay Sultans on a new set of treaties, which would formally legitimise the changes and the consequent creation of the Malayan Union. This was initially thought to be completely straightforward, as in the past the Sultans had in most cases been quite prepared to agree to any 'proposals' that the British made either directly or indirectly through their 'advisers'. Nevertheless diplomatic skill was necessary, at least to give the proceedings some dignity, and in order to minimise any complications that might arise out of misunderstandings over British intentions. In the last few months, therefore, before the planned invasion, many documents and circulars were sent round to all those who where going to come in contact or deal with the Malay Sultans upon the British reoccupation, in order to brief them fully about what could and could not be said.

One of the most interesting of these documents was one issued by the Principal Staff Officer on the staff of the Supreme Allied Commander. Entitled "Personnel Minute Concerning Malay Sultans", and dated 20 July 1945, it deals with the real status and position of the Malay Sultans in relation to British imperialism, behind the diplomatic facade that was being created for the event. For an official document its straightforwardness is rather amusing; but it has serious implications as well. It begins:

> "Regarding the negotiations with the Malay Sultans, I think it is important to remember that these people are not traditional feudal rulers in any sense; but are a species of 'Head man' chosen by us, and built up with British prestige and British support. This has been done within the last 100 years and in the case of some of them as recently as 30 years . . . Their salaries and the opportunities which British support gave them has enabled these puppets to build themselves up by fair means or foul, into enormous positions of wealth and influence. But as it is the British who gave them the power, then the British can take it away or modify it, without any scruples about interfering with ancient feudal structure of the country, which I think I am right in saying was practically non-existent."[37]

It was with such arrogant confidence that the BMA viewed the outcome of Sir Harold MacMichael's tour of the country, which was meant to get the required signatures. This confidence existed despite the

clearly articulated opposition that had already been voiced in Britain to the proposals. As early as August 1944, hostile comments had been made about a set of draft outline proposals that approximated to the final Malayan Union proposals. These had been circulated amongst members of the 'old guard' and other Malayan colonialists who were in Britain during the war. One of the main channels for discussion of future British proposals was the colonialists' journal *British Malaya*. The outline proposals were, according to various contributions to *British Malaya*, "oblivious of the wishes and rights of the Malay rulers and their peoples"[38] and amounted to "proposals for the dispossession and disinheritance of the Malays and the belittlement of the Malay Rulers".[39] One of the most prominent opponents of the proposals was Sir Frank Sweetenham, one time High Commissioner and Governor of the FMS and Straits Settlements. His main line of criticism was as above – that the proposals had been formulated without consulting the Malay Sultans.

But as the following quote from a brief prepared for a meeting between the SAC and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, dated 3 December 1945, makes clear, such criticisms had yet to make an impact in Malaya itself:

> "Generally the Government proposals are welcomed and the tour of Sir Harold MacMichael has been followed with interest in the press . . . It does not appear that the arguments produced by Sir Frank Sweetenham in the London *Times* have any great following in Malaya."[40]

Similarly we read in the BMA Monthly Report for December:

> "By the end of the month Sir Harold MacMichael had successfully concluded his mission in Malaya and after nearly three months in the country departed for Singapore . . . *No very noticeable popular reaction to his activities here has become apparent* except in Kelantan where . . . some agitation occurred."[41] [My italics, D.L.]

Further on in the same report similar remarks are made about the specific response to the proposals in Pahang: ". . . opinion is reported to be not unfavourable to the Malayan Union proposals", although here an important qualification is made whose full significance only became plain later on: "but objections would be raised to any measure which might appear to sacrifice the political rights of Malays".[42]

In this context the Union proposals were considered to be an important step in the process of accommodating pressure for change, which came predominantly from the non-Malay sector of the population. This liberalisation proposed in the Union scheme was also an important part of changing the anachronistic colonial image that Britain had previously cultivated in Malaya. These liberal views on the constitutional and poli-

tical changes envisaged in the Malayan Union coincided with similar liberal perspectives upon the unrest and disturbances already dealt with in the previous section. This coincidence was not accidental, the liberal attitudes of both perspectives being closely interwined. The emergence of a strong and powerful labour movement, led mainly by Chinese militants, worked against the maintenance of the liberal views. These developments seemed to justify the claims of the 'old guard' that the Chinese and other non-Malays ignored Malaya's 'National Interest', and were therefore not suitable candidates for citizenship. This argument of course ran parallel to and in conjunction with the above-mentioned increasing opposition to the trade union movement.

The End of 'Liberal Policies' and 'Graceful Gestures'

Facets of the liberal perspectives on the Malayan Union are shown in the following extract from an issue of Purcell's *Political Climate*:

> "We British have got to adapt ourselves to world tendencies in our administration and not try to put the clock back. We have accepted the principles of free speech and free association . . . "[43]

Mountbatten at the SAC's 42nd Miscellaneous Meeting held on 4 January 1946 expressed similar sentiments although his formulation of the problem is much more revealing, demonstrating the opportunistic way in which the reforms were viewed:

> "His Majesty's Government should whenever possible pronounce and carry into effect progressive, helpful and liberal policies *before they (are) compelled to do so by popular clamour* . . . Britain has consistently neglected such opportunities to make a graceful gesture and had thereby done nothing but damage to her cause . . . If our policy towards Malaya (is) in fact progressive and liberal we should not hesitate to say so."[44] [My italics, D.L.]

But perhaps the most significant formulation of the need for a reform of the pre-war structures comes again from another issue of the *Political Climate*. In many ways, what Purcell sees here as the real aim of British policy at that time, was almost tantamount to calling for the creation of a comprador bourgeoisie capable of taking over control of Malaya from the British when they left, which he views as inevitable. Such a comprador bourgeoisie would almost by definition be primarily concerned with the maintenance and advancement of the interests of British imperialism. This was therefore a basically neo-colonialist solution, which was not a feasible programme at that time, only becoming a reality more than a decade later with the granting of independence in 1957. This is all summed up in the extract from the *Political Climate* which follows:

> "What is needed for stability (quite apart from raising the standard of living

> of the masses) is a middle class of educated government servants and of academics and teachers as well as of professional men. These as such cannot be created under the pre-occupation scheme of barring entry for Asiatics into the higher grades of the Civil Service . . . "[45]

These perspectives were increasingly challenged during 1946. At the 42nd Miscellaneous Meeting, already referred to above, Purcell had said that unless the BMA stated clearly its intention to democratise the proposed constitution as soon as possible:

> "there would be a profound feeling of disappointment throughout Malaya, *and world opinion would denounce and stigmatise it as reactionary* . . . There were political trends and tendencies throughout the world which should not be overlooked."[46] [My italics, D.L.].

This view was, however, interestingly enough challenged by Sir Harold MacMichael who was at the meeting having recently completed his three months tour of the country holding 'discussions' with the Sultans and getting their signatures. From his tour he undoubtedly saw the strength of opposition that was building up amongst the Malay Sultans, and the Malay aristocracy as a whole, to the union proposals, which had not up to that point been articulated clearly in Malaya itself. His opposition to Purcell's views was from a classically conservative standpoint, which undoubtedly, in part, reflected the conservatism of the strata of the Malay population that he had come into most contact with during his tour. He said that

> "he felt that he was perhaps a reactionary amongst liberal minded people . . . but there were cogent reasons why a too hasty policy would be unsound for Malaya. It was a new country with a new and unproven constitution where all was experimental, and until such time that its organisation could be seen as effective and until racial animosities had died down, he was in favour of the nomination of its members of its various committees without the aid of the electoral principle."[47]

The whole tone of these comments indicate that he had many reservations about the viability of the 'new constitution', in the light of his contact with the Sultans.

This was all brushed aside, however, by Mountbatten who, apparently insensitive and unaware of what was happening, continued to maintain that "His Majesty's Government should come forward with a liberal policy before they were coerced into doing so by the weight of public opinion."[48] In other words, Mountbatten still felt that it was possible to use the Union reforms to contain the rising tide of discontent with British policy and the British presence. Over the following two months this view was severely modified as it became clear that not only were the proposals having no restraining effect upon the growth of working-

class militancy, but that they were also even positively destabilising the situation by undermining the only base that British imperialism still had in Malaya: the Malay aristocracy, the middle strata, and the colonial 'old guard'.

Opposition to the Malayan Union

During the months of January and February 1946 more and more was being heard of the Sultans' moves to oppose the Union proposals. As mentioned already, however, it was not only the Sultans and Malay aristocracy who were opposed to them. Amongst the Malay middle strata, that is the professionals and bureaucrats, there was a growing hostility to them. This was not on the same basis as the Sultans' opposition. In many respects, these two groups were opposed to each other and in the long run had conflicting objectives. Whereas the Sultans were for the maintenance of the colonial *status quo*, with their position as the nominal leaders of the Malay community being preserved, the members of the middle strata were in favour of the creation of an independent Malay nation, which could be 'modernised' and thus take its place in world politics as a developing and progressive country. Such a perspective obviously had little room for the 'feudal' and 'backward' ideology which the Sultans represented. Instead of wishing to keep the Malay peasantry tied to their 'traditional occupations' as the Sultans wanted, the middle strata saw opportunities for 'developing' and 'modernising' the rural sector.

The basis of the middle strata opposition came from their perception that in a very important respect the Union proposals were totally *opposed* to the creation of an independent Malaya. The proposed centralisation and rationalisation of the administrative structure led to a greater and not lesser degree of *centralisation* of power into the hands of the British colonialists. This would leave the Malay community with practically no power, despite their allegedly 'privileged' position. This was repugnant to all those people who formed the basis of the emergent Malay nationalist movement, and smacked strongly of the worst sort of old-time colonial paternalism. As Allen says in his book on the Malayan Union "even the most loyal Malay was not prepared to be annexed so late in the British Empire's day".[49]

The loose anti-proposal coalition between the Malay aristocracy and middle strata was immensely strengthened by the growing opposition to the proposals by the colonial 'old guard', who were starting to make their influence in the British colonial machine felt. A tremendous row was developing over the 'techniques' that MacMichael had employed in order to procure the signatures for the new treaties. There was much talk of 'coercion' and 'trickery', something that was very bad

for the British image, seeming once more to reinforce Britain's classical colonial reputation. Great play was made of these accusations in Britain as well as in Malaya by both the 'old guard' and the liberal opposition. Both felt that the way in which the signatures had been obtained made the treaties almost worthless, and that the whole issue had been approached in a spirit of complete disregard for the 'rights' of the Malay Sultans, and for the validity of previous treaties, which had been effectively contravened by the British in the attempt to set up the Malayan Union. One rather amusing indicator of the growth of this opposition from within the colonial apparatus itself comes from *Malaya's Political Climate – VII.* In it Purcell replies to the recent criticisms made of his internal bulletin, in the first edition of a rival internal publication called *Malaya's Malay Political Climate.* The editor of this new bulletin said that Purcell's *Political Climate* should really be called 'Malaya's Chinese Political Climate', because of its 'biased preoccupation' with Chinese affairs. It maintained that those truly concerned with "Malayan politics cannot possibly ignore the feelings of the Malay race". Purcell replied to this criticism by saying that his preoccupation with Chinese Affairs reflected the dominance of the Chinese and the relative acquiescence of the Malays in Malaya's political arena. This criticism, however, is significant as it shows the way in which there was feeling within the BMA itself that the traditional 'favourites' of the British were being ignored.

At this point it is important to stress that by and large the opposition to the proposals was located within a specific section of the Malay community and not the Malay community as a whole. In a memorandum from the Chief Secretary of the Administration, Brigadier Newboult, dated 31 December 1945, the following comments are made that illustrate this point:

> "It cannot be claimed," he said, "that the idea of a union or common citizenship has been properly appreciated by the majority of people. So far discussions have taken place with the rulers only and public comment has been noticeable by its absence."[50]

Similar views are expressed several months later in the February issue of the BMA Monthly Report: in it, it is reported that opposition to the scheme is mainly confined to the "upper and educated classes . . . the peasant generally speaking having no views on the subject at all."[51] This point is important in that it illustrates the fact that British policy was not really concerned with the wishes or interests of the 'ordinary' people of Malaya, and in this sense the sacred cow of 'public opinion', frequently bandied about in support of one course of action or another, in most cases means no more than the opinions and reactions of the ruling clique or strata within each community, and mostly only the

Malay ruling clique at that. To the majority of people in Malaya the politics of constitutional and administrative reform were very distant issues, their lives being dominated by the basic struggle for existence in the face of acute food shortages, low wages and the activities of a repressive security apparatus. The dispute over the Malayan Union was a dispute between various competing strata of the colonial ruling class, the emergent national and comprador bourgeoisie, and the Whitehall technocrats. Either way the workers and peasants were going to lose out, the 'solution' to the problem ultimately being in the interests of British imperialism alone.

The opposition to the Union proposals eventually led to the abandonment of many of the central features of the proposed reforms, including the liberal citizenship proposals. Later on in 1946 a special committee was set up to investigate alternatives to the Union scheme, but these new proposals were formulated in such a way as to ensure the reestablishment of Malay dominance in the administrative and political structures, a dominance that had been challenged in the Union scheme. As Stenson puts it:

> "The liberal citizenship proposals were withdrawn, thus leaving the overwhelming majority of the Chinese and Indian population as aliens. Proposals for a democratic constitution were denied. The All Malayan Council of Joint Action or any other non-Malay political party were not given genuine opportunity for consultation."[52]

After having been accepted by the administration, the new proposals that emerged from the committee were formalised in the constitution of the Federation of Malaya, inaugurated in early 1948. If one could describe the Union scheme as 'liberal' and 'progressive' in a bourgeois sense, the Federation constitution was positively reactionary. It had absolutely no apparatus for the exercise of representative democracy, and being clearly Malay-orientated, included no parallel to the liberal citizenship scheme of the Union proposals.

Rationalisation of the Bureaucracy

One aspect of the original Union scheme that did get implemented concerned the rationalisation of the administrative and political structures. The Federation like the Union was a single constitutional unit with the exception of Singapore which was treated as a separate entity. The importance of these administrative reforms, which cannot be separated from the political aspect of the changes, was remarked upon by Brigadier Newboult, Chief Secretary of the BMA, when he said in December 1945 that

> ". . . it is essential, if our interests in the Far East are to be safeguarded . . .

> to provide the necessary machinery (to do so). The pre-war machinery was neither adequate nor up to date. In the conditions of our return to the Far East new machinery is required."[53]

One of the debates within the BMA at this time in fact concerned the exact nature of this 'new machinery' of imperial control. This was especially controversial when it came to the issue of whether or not Singapore should be part of what was then thought was going to be the Malayan Union. If it wasn't going to be part of it, then there was still the problem of how the administration in the two units was to be co-ordinated – something that was clearly necessary. The view that eventually emerged was that Singapore should in fact be a separate unit when the civil administration returned, as the following extract from a War Office signal to the BMA(M) dated 19 October 1945, makes clear:

> "The economic interests and outlook of Singapore and the mainland are divergent and might create friction if the two entities are combined at this stage in a single political grouping."[54]

A more objective analysis of the reasons for keeping them as separate entities appears, ironically, in a description of various aspects of the Malayan left's opposition to the Union proposals in the February 1946 issue of the BMA Monthly Report. According to the report, the left felt that the proposed

> "separation of Singapore from the mainland was a move to keep Singapore as a strong military base and trading centre, and the mainland in a state of subservience as the producer of raw materials for British capitalists."[55]

(The absence of any further comments upon this analysis in the Report, maybe indicates that the BMA could find little to disagree with . . .) Having established the principle of separation, measures had to be taken to meet the necessity of "coordinating and directing policies . . . between Malayan Union and Singapore".[56] For this purpose the idea of having a Commissioner General for S.E. Asia as a whole emerged. This fitted the bill for the problem of coordinating Singapore and the Mainland, where "from a military aspect, a single overriding civilian authority would be the ideal answer to the requirements of a supreme commander".[57] Eventually it was decided that such a post would be without executive authority, being responsible for keeping different administrations in different parts of S.E. Asia in touch with each other, and would therefore be able to "present to His Majesty's Government a composite picture of what was occurring in the area".[58] This post was in fact filled in the first part of 1946, by Malcolm MacDonald, former colonial Secretary and son of Ramsay MacDonald, who some years later played a crucial role in the execution of British policy

during the Malayan Emergency.

As stated at the beginning of this section, the period of the BMA was one in which the strategy originally formulated by the MPU was changed and modified, on the basis of which course of action appeared to be in the best overall interests of British imperialism. Often, however, specific fractional interests conflicted, thus uncovering the inadequacy of the original strategy, as well as the complexity of the problem. During this process the BMA laid the basis of British strategy for the following few years. This was despite the fact that they had tried in some way to leave fundamental long-term policy decisions to the civil administration, as the following makes clear:

> "One of the principles laid down for the Chief Civil Affairs Officer and his staff, was that they should avoid, as far as possible, major political issues, these being no concern of the Military Administration and suitable to be dealt with only by the Colonial Office and the Civil Governments when they resume control."[59]

They, however, initiated a process of escalating confrontation between the administration and the mass of workers and peasants, as well as condoning, in the last analysis, the opposition to the Malayan Union scheme, whose rejection seemed assured by the time the civil administration was ready to take over in April 1946.

It was not possible for the BMA to stand outside of the struggle that was being waged between British imperialism on the one hand and the workers and peasants of Malaya on the other. It was unequivocally the agent and primary tool of British imperialism, having the specific task of reestablishing British hegemony in Malaya after the Japanese surrender. Its failure completely to achieve this goal was, however, symptomatic of the depth of the crisis of British colonialism in Malaya, a crisis which eventually came to a climax in the declaration of a State of Emergency in June 1948; the civil administration itself, in turn having been unable to resolve the contradictions they inherited. Throughout the whole period British policy in the last instance was determined by what was best for British imperialism, which meant mainly what was in the interests of the British-owned tin and rubber industries.

During the BMA period, however, these latter factors were often not made explicit, in the sense that production could only begin when a certain level of basic reorganisation and reconstruction had been achieved, and it was this which was the main concern of the BMA. The return of the civil administration, on the other hand, signalled the start of extensive "industrial rehabilitation" and production. It is perhaps best therefore that this section should end with a quote from an article in the May 1946 issue of *British Malaya*, entitled "Threats to Malayan

Recovery". This shows most clearly of all the real determinant of British policy in Malaya at that time and the problems that British imperialism was faced with in executing its strategy:

> "Dissatisfaction over the price of rubber and tin, shortage of tin-mining machinery, equipment for rubber estates and labour, and petty restrictions are all seriously retarding the rehabilitation of one of the most important *economic units* in the British Empire. Until a solution is found for all these problems, Malaya will remain in its present unhealthy condition.
>
> "With labour in a state of unrest all over the Malay peninsula and the usual incentive to production entirely lacking, it would appear redundant, for the present, to examine the prospects for industrial rehabilitation, but with the return of the Civil Administration in April a review of the position seems necessary. *It will come as a profound shock to those acquainted with labour conditions in pre-war Malaya to be told that a strange ferment, with all the characteristics of foreign vintage, has been whipping up local labour into a boiling cauldron . . .* "[57] [My italics, D.L.]

The following years up to the outbreak of the Emergency were ones in which the British tried unsuccessfully to settle the 'ferment' – which, much to their displeasure, became even more intense as the contradictions of British imperialism which lay behind them became increasingly acute.

FOOTNOTES

In this section the majority of footnotes refer to Official Documents kept at the Public Record Office, London. All of these references concern documents from one particular class only. This is known as *WO 203*. The documents within this class are the part of the War Office Collection relating to the Second World War concerned with British and Allied administration and military operations in South East Asia, covering approximately the period between 1942 and 1946.

All the documents referred to here, however, belong to a small number of files within the class as a whole, each file having a 'piece number' as well as a general title. These particular files are listed below in a slightly abbreviated form, omitting the prefix 'WO 203' in each case:

Piece No.	*Period Concerned*	*Title*
2319	September 1945 - January 1946	*Political Despatches and Directives*
2320	January 1946 - March 1946	*Political Despatches and Directives*
3877	November 1943 - December 1945	*Malaya: Planning Directives*
3886	February 1945 - April 1946	*Malaya: Progress Reports*
4495	September 1945 - March 1946	*Malaya: Handover From Military To Civil Government*
5282	January - December 1945	*Malaya: Administration and A Report on the Long-Term Policy Regarding The Chinese in Malaya*
5293	July 1945 - April 1946	*Malaya: Relations with Sultans*
5477	October 1945 - February 1946	*Malaya: Administration Policy*

Each footnote, below, referring to an item from one or other of the above files will start with the relevant 'piece number' only; this will then be followed by any subsidiary titles or dates relevant to the specific item to which reference is being made.

Certain Official Publications found in this class are also referred to extensively. But for the sake of space, each of these will not be referred to in the normal way as outlined above. Rather the items concerned will be identified by their specific name, which will then be followed by any further subsidiary information as normal.

Printed below is a list of these publications, in full, with relevant dates, etc., together with the 'piece number' of the file in which each of them has been individually located. For the Monthly Reports in particular, however, they are likely to be found at other locations besides the ones given, including collections apart from the PRO. They had relatively wide circulation; the other publications referred to below, however, were Top Secret Internal publications, whose circulation was much more restricted.

Piece No.	*Title, Dates, etc.*
3886	*Monthly Report of the British Military Administration, Number 4, for December 1945.*
3886	*Monthly Report of the British Military Administration, Number 6, for February 1946.*
2320	*Malaya's Political Climate VI* – Period 21 December 1945 to 7 January 1946
2320	*Malaya's Political Climate VII* – Period 8 January 1946 to 4 February 1946
2320	*Minutes of the Supreme Allied Commander's 315th Meeting* – 9 February 1946
2319	*Minutes of the Supreme Allied Commander's 42nd Miscellaneous Meeting* – 4 January 1946.

(Abbreviations of titles such as 'SAC's 315th Meeting' will be used throughout.)

1. Piece Number 5282, 'SAC's Policy', 21 July 1945.
2. Piece Number 3877, *Malayan Planning Staff – Directive No. 2,* 29 November 1943.
3. Piece Number 3877, *Malayan Planning Staff – Directive No. 3,* 'Planning for War Establishment'.
4. Piece Number 2319, *Notes for Chief of Staff for Preparation of a Brief for the SAC's meeting with the CIGs,* 3 December 1945.
5. *BMA Report for December,* Part I, Introductory, p.3.
6. Ibid.
7. Piece Number 5477, *Strikes and Disturbances in Malaya,* Report prepared by a Brigadier of Intelligence, 8 November 1945.
8. *BMA Report for December,* op.cit., pp.1-2.
9. *Malaya's Political Climate VI,* p.7.
10. Piece Number 5282 and 5477, *Strikes and Disturbances . . . ,* op.cit.
11. *BMA Report for December,* Part III, 'Singapore Island – Political', pp.16-17.
12. Piece Number 5477, *BMA Monthly Report up to 1800 hrs 28 November.* Section 2, 'Political Chinese Affairs – Singapore'.
13. Piece Number 5477, (BMA) *Report on the BMA (M) for November 1945,* Section 3.
14. Piece Number 4495, Signal: 31 March 1946, *from:* SACSEA *to:* Cabinet Offices – Draft SEACOS – For CoS – from Mountbatten.
15. See Appendix, below.
16. *BMA Report for December,* op.cit., p.3.
17. Robinson, J.B., *Transformation in Malaya,* Secker and Warburg, London, 1956, p.24.
18. Piece Number 5477, *Review of The Internal Situation in Malaya, end November/beginning December, 1945,* Section – 'Armed Elements Threatening Internal Security,' sub section 9 – 'MPAJA'.
19. Piece Number 5477, ibid.
20. *BMA Report for December* – Part II, Malay Peninsula, p.6.
21. Piece Number 5282, CCASO – 27 October 1945, *Report on Labour Troubles in Singapore.*

22. Piece Number 5282, Signal: 30 October 1945, *from:* BMA (M) *to:* SACSEA.
23. Piece Number 5282, *Top Secret Telegram:* 29 October 1945, *from:* 14th Army *to:* ALFSEA, *Personal from PYMAN to Dempsey.*
24. *The Economist,* 13 October 1945, Quoted in: Yip Yat Hong, *The Development of the Tin Mining Industry of Malaya.* University of Malaya Press, 1969, p.297.
25. *BMA Monthly Report for December* – Part II, 'Malay Peninsula – Labour', p.9.
26. *BMA Monthly Report for February* – Part II, 'Malay Peninsula – Labour', p.10.
27. *Malaya's Political Climate VI,* p.7.
28. *SAC's 315th Meeting* – Item I – 'Threat of a Renewal of a General Strike in Singapore', p.1.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., p.5.
31. Ibid., p.3.
32. Ibid., p.4.
33. Ibid., pp.5, 6, 7.
34. *Malaya's Political Climate VII,* p.7.
35. *BMA Monthly Report for February* Part I, 'Introduction', p.1.
36. Piece Number 2320, *Top Secret Telegram:* 15 February 1946, *from:* SACSEA *to:* Cabinet Offices, for C's of S.
37. Piece Number 5282, *Personal Minute Concerning Malay Sultans,* 20 July 1945, PSO/SAC.
38. *British Malaya,* August 1944, Roland Braddell, "Reconstruction of Malaya", p.44.
39. Ibid., p.40, Letter to Editor from E. La M. Stowell.
40. Piece Number 2319, *Notes for the Chiefs of Staff,* 3 December 1945, op. cit., Section – 'Malayan Citizenship'.
41. *BMA Monthly Report for December* – Part II, 'Malayan Peninsula – Political and Chinese Affairs', p.6.
42. Ibid., p.7.
43. *Malaya's Political Climate VII,* p.9.
44. *SAC's 42nd Miscellaneous Meeting,* section – 'The Political Future of the Malayan Union and Singapore'.
45. *Malaya's Political Climate VI,* p.3.
46. *SAC's 42nd Miscellaneous Meeting,* op.cit.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Allen, James de V., *The Malayan Union,* Yale University South East Asia Studies Monograph Series No.10, 1967, p.19.
50. Piece Number 4495, Memorandum by Brigadier A.T. Newboult, on the Political Position in Malaya, with regard to the New Policy Proposals, 31 December 1945.
51. *BMA Monthly Report for February,* Part I, Introductory, p.3.
52. Stenson, Michael R., *Repression and Revolt,* Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1969, p.9.
53. Piece Number 4495, Miscellaneous document, 31 December 1945.
54. Piece Number 5293, Signal: 19 October 1945, *from:* War Office *to:* BMA (M) SEAC, 'Discussion of Separation of Singapore from Malayan Union'.
55. *BMA Monthly Report for February* – Part II, 'Malay Peninsula', p.6.
56. Piece Number 2320, *Top Secret Telegram:* 26 January 1946, *from:* War Office, *to:* BMA (M).
57. *SAC's 42nd Miscellaneous Meeting,* op.cit.
58. Piece Number 4495, Miscellaneous Document, 31 December 1945, op.cit.
59. *BMA Monthly Report for February,* Part I, Introductory, p.3.
60. *British Malaya,* May 1946, 'Threats to Malayan Recovery', p.13.

APPENDIX – STRENGTH OF MPAJA FORCES UNDER FORCE 136 IN DECEMBER 1945.

The following figures are taken from *The Review of the Internal Situation in Malaya* (WO 203 5477), end November/beginning December 1945, section – 'Armed Elements Threatening Internal Security', sub section – '9. MPAJA'.

They are an estimate of the number of MPAJA guerrillas enrolled under Force 136 on 1 December 1945. This estimate is almost certainly below the real strength of the MPAJA at that time, the guerrilla command having a number of units operating independently of the British liaison force, so as not to have all their 'eggs in one basket'. The figures are broken down into the various states, and areas within them. Presumably all states are not listed because the guerrilla concentrations were not very high in the missing ones.

Selangor	718	Negri Sembilan	786
North Johore	767	South Johore	728
Perak	689	West Pahang	507
East Pahang	423	Kedah	486

Total = 5,104

The Rise and Fall of Malayan Trade Unionism, 1945-50

Michael Morgan

Politics in Malaya has long been concerned not with social inequality and class – a situation which in other areas gave rise to trade unions and the socialist movement – but rather with conflicts among ethnic groups, in which the pattern of exploitation of the economy has become obscured. The Malayan economy at the time of its penetration by British imperialism in the nineteenth century was overwhelmingly agricultural and characterised by subsistence production. By the turn of the century however it had been greatly transformed. In the agricultural sector subsistence production gave way gradually to commodity production,[1] while at the same time an expansion of tin-mining and a prodigious development of plantations, largely rubber, occurred. The labour force for the new tin mines and plantations was not recruited from within Malaya, but imported from China and India. A surplus of land within Malaya, coupled with a reasonable return for their products, meant that there was no incentive for the Malay peasantry to leave the land and take up wage labour. The British for their part were largely content with this position for they had no wish to disturb Malay society; on the contrary they sought to reinforce the bonds which kept the peasantry tied to the soil by strengthening the authority of the sultans and by protecting Malay ownership of the land through a series of land enactments. Thus British policy, rather than breaking down the "feudal" hold of the sultans over the peasantry, preserved it – and led to what William Roff has described as ". . . an authoritarian form of religious administration much beyond anything known to the peninsula before".[2]

The Indian labourers, mainly Tamils, were employed on the rubber plantations, on the railways and in government service. Chinese labourers predominated in the tin mines and in the service industries. To what extent this pattern of employment continued well into this century can be gauged from the following table:

TABLE I
Racial Composition of labour force in the two major industries in 1931*

	Rubber Industry	*Tin Industry*
Chinese	100,989	70,704
Indians	131,099	4,622
Malays	27,618	543
Total	259,706	75,869

Source: V. Purcell, *Chinese in Malaya*, pp.239-240.

*These figures apply to the Federated Malay States, the most economically developed sector of Malaya after Singapore and Penang. In the Unfederated Malay States there were only some 1,000 tin miners and approximately 100,000 rubber workers – 61,374 Chinese and 34,776 Malays.

The association of the different ethnic groups in Malaya with different economic roles, together with the use made of this by the colonial regime, made it extremely difficult for a non-communal labour movement to grow. When one did arise after 1945 the British did all they could to smother it at birth, for Britain's retention of the Malayan Peninsula had long become dependent on the maintenance of communal barriers. The rapid rise of a class-based movement threatened to restructure politics around the realities of ownership of the means of production and exploitation. Precisely this situation arose in post-war Malaya when a militant trade union movement challenged the continued British control of the economy. For Britain this could not have come at a worse time, given the crucial importance of Malaya to the British economy and the universal demands for self-determination which arose after 1945. In order to retain control of the Malayan economy it thus became imperative for the British that the challenge posed by the labour movement be met and defeated *before* independence. To have granted independence with a strong class-based movement still in existence was a risk the British were not willing to take.

Malayan Labour Before 1945

Prior to the 1930s little concern was shown by the colonial authorities for the welfare and social needs of workers in Malaya.[3] The Indian labourers, particularly on the estates, did, it is true, fall under the paternalist care of the European estate managers who provided temples and toddy shops for their labourers as well as housing, and generally cultivated an atmosphere of deference amongst the labourers for their 'betters'. For the Chinese this was not provided. It is not surprising, then, that they turned to the secret societies and guilds, so ubiquitous amongst Chinese everywhere, for social welfare. These

were based largely on language groups and so divided the Chinese workers amongst themselves. By encapsulating both capitalist and wage-labourer, they delayed the development of trade unionism in Malaya.

Stenson has noted the formation of a Pineapple Cutters' Association as early as 1908 and William Roff has pointed to an even earlier example of trade unionism amongst Malay seamen, the Club Kapitan-Kapitan Dan Injinir-Injinir, founded in 1894.[4] By and large, however, these early attempts at working-class organisation produced few lasting results. The hostility of employers, the continuation of the contract system of employment, the geographical and social isolation of most tin mines and plantations and the general availability of labour, combined with the difficulties of class organisation in a multi-racial society, militated against the development of trade unionism.

Only in the 1930s did this situation begin to change and conditions become more propitious to the development of trade unionism. From the beginning of the century increasing stratification amongst the Chinese community had become more apparent and as a consequence placed severe strains on the secret societies and guilds which found it increasingly difficult to reconcile the different class interests of their members. At the same time the cornerstone of British labour policy, namely guaranteeing a constant flow of labour to Malaya, was curtailed. Because of increasing pressure from the Malay sultans and their own fear of the leftward drift of Chinese politics, the authorities in Malaya had begun placing restrictions on Chinese immigration to the peninsula. Efforts to encourage increased immigration from Southern India were dealt a sharp blow, moreover, when the Indian Government, under pressure from the Congress Party, placed a ban on emigration to Malaya in 1938. The effect of these moves was considerably to strengthen the bargaining position of Malayan labour, at a time when both Indian and Chinese workers were beginning to see their future as being in Malaya and not in their respective homelands. At the same time Malaya's two primary products which had suffered badly in the depression began to recover as a result of international agreements to control tin and rubber production. Prices for both commodities rose; between 1933 and 1936, for instance, rubber prices rose 250 per cent.[5] Prosperity returned to Malaya and labour soon became aware that it was visibly not sharing in this new prosperity. This was the background to the first real outbreak of labour unrest in Malaya which occurred in the mid-1930s.

A Malayan General Labour Union was formed in 1934 by members of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), and the following year two significant strikes broke out at the Batu Arang coal mines and among

employees of the Singapore Traction Company, the city's largest bus company. In both these instances the labour force was multi-racial and the solidarity shown in the strike of Singapore busmen in particular demonstrated to all the possibilities of class organisation overcoming ethnic barriers. Beginning in September 1936 a much bigger strike wave took place. This was almost completely spontaneous and involved workers at pineapple canning factories, building workers, municipal labourers, tin miners and, for the first time, rubber tappers. More than 10,000 rubber workers came out on strike in North Johore, Negri Sembilan and South Selangor. Although attempts were made to ascribe blame for this unrest to the communists, there was little truth in this, for, as Dr Stenson notes, 'evidence of communist instigation . . . of the strikes was most remarkable for its paucity'.[6] The strikes continued into 1937 and the tactics of the workers included mass protest demonstrations, sit-down demonstrations, and, in one case, at the Batu Arang collieries, an attempt at setting up a soviet.[7] Here the workers took possession of the property, setting up an internal government complete with an elaborate defence system. The bargaining position and determination of labour was such that all employers were forced to grant substantial concessions. The strikes had shown that the workers were aware not only of current social and economic trends but also that they were resolved to remedy past grievances and gain genuine improvements in their conditions. The newly-found strength of labour revealed itself when Malaya suffered a further recession in the late thirties and employers were not able to carry out the repatriations and extensive wage-cuts associated with the earlier depression.

The development of trade unionism in the thirties took place despite the antipathy not only of employers but also of the colonial governments, for the state, as a major employer itself, was as interested as private capital in depressing wages. Trade unionism was accepted reluctantly only because of the labour shortages caused by the 'turning off' of the immigration tap, and under the concerted pressure of labour unrest and Colonial Office advice from London. An air of urgency was attached to the latter with the outbreak of war in 1939. Britain was now exceedingly anxious to improve its colonial image both in the eyes of the world, and, more important, amongst the colonial peoples. Whitehall began to impress on its colonial governments the need for recognition of trade unions. This attitude led to the passing of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 which specified that funds were to be made available to aid social progress in the Empire but were conditional upon the prompt introduction of labour legislation including provision for the right of trade unions to legal existence. In Malaya this led to the hurried introduction of the Trades Unions

Ordinance of 1940. One student of labour law in Malaya, Charles Gamba, has noted this sudden switch in Malayan government policy from one of trying 'to strangle trade unionism at birth . . . (to) a burst of generosity which smacked of wartime propaganda'.[8] This generosity was, however, more apparent than real. The Ordinance borrowed a great deal from the UK Trades Disputes Act of 1927, introduced following the defeat of the British labour movement in the general strike of 1926, and its political character was largely the same – highly conservative and restrictive. It required compulsory registration, strongly emphasised 'conciliation procedures', denied the right to picket and prohibited political and sympathy strikes. Despite the obstructions of employers and government, by 1941 the need for working-class organisation and the principle of collective action was no longer alien to Malayan workers. The groundwork was thus prepared for the post-war development of the trade unions.

The Japanese Occupation and its Effect on Labour

The ignominious defeat of British Imperial rule in 1942 by the Japanese made an indelible impression on the Malayan people. The collapse of the whole panoply of colonialism in a few weeks was an even greater shock to them than to the British. The manner of the withdrawal, the evacuation of Europeans by night from Penang, the desertion of their posts by many administrators and estate managers, contributed to a considerable lessening of British prestige.[9] Left to their own meagre resources the Malayans were forced to fend for themselves. From this humble beginning, the largely Chinese Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was able to form an effective resistance force against the Japanese, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) and a civilian support organisation, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Union (MPAJU). Both these organisations had a profound effect on labour during the occupation. Before the war, labour – particularly on the estates – had been subdued by a mixture of authoritarianism and paternalism. The estates had been organised on rigidly hierarchical lines. The top management posts were reserved for Europeans, while middle positions were occupied largely by Malayalams (North Indians), who, if anything, distinguished themselves by evincing even less sympathy for the mass of labourers than did the British. By language, culture, and social position, they were separate from the Tamil labourers. The internment of all those Europeans who had not fled Malaya left the management of the estates in the hands of this group. Whereas under British management, paternalism had been built into the estate social system,[10] the whole basis of rule on the estates was changed during the occupation. The 'Asiatic Estate Staff', lacking the colonialist prestige of

the British, had to resort to sheer coercion in order to maintain their rule on the estates. Indeed, to employ the old type of paternalism was only to invite the reprobation of the Japanese.[11] In the circumstances of the occupation, the MPAJA was the only defence labour had against the arbitrary rule of the estate staff and the Japanese. The resistance was fully aware of this and cultivated the support of labourers by periodically meting out punishment to brutal foremen and collaborators and generally doing what they could to lessen the hardships of occupation.

For the Indian worker in particular the war years were to be a baptism in politics. He above all had been mystified by the paternalist curtain behind which the British exploited his cheap labour. Once it had been torn down it was to prove extremely difficult to draw again. The establishment of Subhas Chandra Bose's fiercely anti-British Indian Independence League (IIL) and of the Indian National Army (INA) evoked considerable response from Indian workers, not least because the only alternative to the INA for many young men was to work on the infamous 'Death Railway' in Siam. Although these organisations were confined to the Indian community, for the first time a political movement was established that transcended the narrow circles of Malaya's Indian elite. Nor did the movement's Japanese patronage lead it into conflict with the MPAJA, for it firmly refused to be used against the resistance. Indeed, the latter was able to recruit cadres from within the IIL and INA,[12] as Jain notes:

> "A number of interviews I had with estate labourers in the Pal Melayu region conveyed a distinct impression of the widespread sympathies that existed between estate workers and the anti-Japanese guerrillas . . . In this region a large number of guerrillas were Indians, mostly ex-labourers from estates."

Although leadership of the IIL and INA was largely petit-bourgeois its real strength lay in the young working-class militants that were its core. A similar phenomenon occurred amongst the Chinese community. As the occupation progressed, leadership passed from the wealthy urban Towkays (businessmen) to the young men of the MPAJA. The former, having fled with the British to India[13] or remained in the cities, became discredited by their passivity and in many cases by their outright collaboration. Little wonder, then, that upon their return the British found things profoundly changed. In the words of the official history of the period:

> "Respect for the foreign rulers, fear of their power, ebbed away as the Europeans were defeated and fled before the Asian conquerors . . . the habit of generations was rudely broken."[14]

The Background to the Labour Unrest of 1945-48

When the British returned to Malaya in September 1945 they were to find the country much changed. The attitudes of Malaya's workers, already changing in the thirties, had considerably toughened towards the British by 1945. The MPAJA, and not the British, was widely regarded as the liberator of Malaya. This was true even when the British arrived in strength, and the view contained more than a germ of truth for the resistance, ably led by the MCP, had not deserted the Malayan people in the way that the British had. In the 30-day interval between the Japanese surrender on 15 August and the British arrival in September effective political power was in the hands of the resistance. Throughout the country People's Committees were established and there was a widespread settling of old scores. In particular, the props of both British and Japanese imperial rule, the 'Asiatic' estate staff and the Malay police force, were subject to attacks because of their collaboration in the war years.

The British now found these formerly reliable supports regarded with the utmost opprobrium by the workers. This was to make the task of reconstituting British control exceptionally difficult and liable to bring it into conflict with labour. The addition of two further factors made the situation explosive: firstly, the crucial importance of Malaya in the post-war period; and, secondly, the widespread determination of workers to improve their deplorable social conditions. Together they explain the ferocity with which the post-war class struggle was fought.

A. Malaya and the British Economy

Malaya's contribution to the recovery of British capitalism after 1945 cannot be underestimated; Purcell stated it baldly thus: 'Without Malaya the Sterling system as we know it could not exist'.[15] The state of the British economy in 1945 was, to say the least, precarious. The Kolkos note that

> "England went bankrupt in everything but name. It liquidated £1.1 billion of its overseas investments and accumulated an external sterling indebtedness of £3.4 billion . . . piling up a deficit in its balance of payments of £1 billion in 1944 alone. Its gold and dollar reserve . . . was less than $2 billion at the war's end".[16]

Furthermore, the election of a Labour Government, pledged to carry out major social reforms, put an additional strain on the economy, at a time when Lend-Lease aid had been abruptly terminated by the United States. This forced the new Labour Government to ask for a further major loan from the US amounting to $3.75 billion.[17] With Britain heavily indebted to the US, the rubber and tin of Malaya assumed

an even greater importance after the war than they had in the inter-war period. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the recovery of the British economy would have been problematic without Malaya's crucial contribution.

The importance of Malaya lay not only in the fact that it was a captive market or in the repatriation of profits and raw materials to Britain, but in the far more critical fact that rubber and tin were Britain's major dollar earners in the post-war years. This crucial point was never far from the minds of those concerned with Malaya at the time; indeed, they could not afford to forget it. In 1947 for example, Malayan rubber alone earned for Britain US$200 million. This compared with the US$180 million earned by manufactured goods exported from the UK.[18] The colonial administration in Malaya was acutely aware of this situation:

> ". . . of the world's total output of rubber and tin in 1948 this country produced 45.8 per cent of the former and 28.1 per cent of the latter. This achievement afforded more assistance to the UK and Commonwealth in terms of gold and dollars earned than was afforded by the total export drive of Great Britain over the same period."[19]

Nor was this awareness limited to those in Malaya; in a debate in the House of Commons the Tory MP for Bury, Walter Fletcher, pointed out that

> "the value of Malaya to the British Empire cannot be over-emphasised. The Chancellor of the Exchequer must be keeping an eye on this . . . The rubber shipments from Malaya alone total more than the direct imports from this country to the USA."[20]

Those with direct interests in Malaya were even more anxious that the policy-makers in Whitehall take heed of its significance for the British economy. Sir Eric Macfadyen in his annual report to Lenadoon Rubber Estates in 1949 observed:

> ". . . rubber is of more importance to the British economy than Marshall Aid. Last year Malaya alone produced just about 700,000 tons. The USA imported from that country over 450,000 tons . . . Every penny in the price per pound up or down means about US$17 million in our balance of trade."[21]

Given this awareness in British ruling circles of Malaya's contribution to the economy of the motherland it comes as no surprise to find that policy-makers for the colony were fully cognisant of this fact. They had to take into consideration that in Malaya no viable political elite existed which could be trusted not to interfere with the nexus of economic relationships that tied Malaya to Britain. In 1947 the *Straits Times* of Singapore could bemoan the fact that the Malayan Communist Party '. . . is the only political party in this country other than purely

racial movements'[22]; it was also the only political grouping with a mass social base – the trade unions. Allen has pointed out that the Colonial Office recognised that independence would come at some future date '. . . and sought only to lay the foundations of a stable self-rule so that it would continue to earn dollars for the sterling area up to and after independence'.[23] That such a 'stable self-rule' could not yet be guaranteed was patently obvious to the British by the end of 1945. To have conceded independence, with a strong organised labour movement under Marxist leadership, was – for the British – to have courted disaster. Malaya's workers were no longer content to work docilely while the dollars they produced flowed into the British Treasury.

The dominance of the United States as the world's leading capitalist power after 1945, and the fact that it was now bailing out the European colonial powers, meant that it was in a position effectively to dictate terms. With respect to Malayan rubber and tin, this meant it would only buy it cheaply; as the Kolkos point out:

> "In natural rubber the US in consultation with the American rubber industry worked with Britain, France and the Netherlands to regulate the buying price for the US *at a level it wished to pay*."[24] (My emphasis – MM.)

In effect, the Americans were keeping prices down as a *quid pro quo* for their post-war 'aid' in reconstructing the devastated industries of Europe. But a limit on the price the Americans, the major foreign consumer, were willing to pay for rubber meant a limit on wages in Malaya. As a commentator in the *New Statesman and Nation* remarked:

> "As the Americans strengthen their hold on the commerce of the Western World, they will inevitably force the terms of trade increasingly to their advantage. Already they are paying for our imperial rubber and tin so low that British producers have a plausible case for paying wages which make labour unrest inevitable."[25]

To keep wages low, however, was not as easy in post-war Malaya as it had been in the pre-war period. Indeed, to attempt to do so was fraught with danger, for labour was firmly bent on improving its position at the expense of private capital and the British. Thus the overriding economic constraints placed on the British in the post-war years made a struggle between capital and labour in Malaya inevitable. There could only be a continuous struggle between the two while, on the one hand, the unions were united and strong and, on the other, the colonial authorities and employers were adamant in refusing a wholesale revision of wages and major reforms of the employment system.

B. Social and Economic Conditions of Labour in Post-War Malaya

No account of labour unrest would be adequate without considering

what one of the foremost historians of the English working class, Edward Thompson, has called 'an assessment of the total life-experience, the manifold satisfactions or deprivations, cultural as well as material, of the people concerned'.[26] As he passionately argues, only an imaginative effort of this sort brings us to the reality, the human dimensions, of the working class situation. The writer interested in the history of the Malayan working class has, unfortunately, to rely primarily on sources and accounts largely hostile to the politics of the labour movement during the period under consideration. Nevertheless, despite this caution, one can manage to build a picture of the social conditions of Malayan labour that reveals the grim reality of its everyday life. Despite frequent protestations from employers that the Malayan workers' conditions were the best in Asia, in general they were deplorably inadequate and were even worse than those they had known before the war. In part the worsening of conditions was the result of the deterioration of health and housing during the Japanese occupation, but it was also the result of British policies – and in particular the unwillingness of government and employers to carry out much-needed social reforms. They were unable to see the connection between the labourer's conditions and his militancy in the post-war years, and like all dominant social groups, preferred to ascribe the unrest to the work of 'agitators' and 'trouble-makers'. Occasional references were made to rice shortages in the country as a source of discontent but even these were largely blamed on world conditions and on the 'stubbornness' of the labourer in not accepting substitutes.

In general, housing conditions at the time were unspeakably bad for both urban and rural labour. The situation as regards Singapore is well-documented in the official reports of that city. Deleterious conditions were widespread, with premises originally designed to house one family now housing three to six families on each floor.[27] The annual report for 1947 spoke of the 'airless cubicles' in which many of the city's workers lived and recorded that in many of these 'houses' there was not even room for all the occupants to lie down.[28] It is worth quoting at length the official description of the workers' housing and of the sharp inequality in the city:

> ". . . there are large areas within Municipal limits which are occupied by the large houses and spacious grounds of former and present commercial magnates while most of the poorer classes live within 1,000 acres in the heart of the city. There are rows and rows of back-to-back houses crammed to the physical limit. Conditions are indescribably bad. Rooms contain several separate families. Densities of from 300 to 500 per acre are common, and in some blocks the figure rises to 1,000. Those who cannot share rooms live underneath stairways or in cubicles which are in complete darkness at all hours of the day and without direct contact with the air. . . . The dirt and

> stench are appalling and the effect on the morale and physique of a generation born and bred in such surroundings can easily be imagined. A tuberculosis rate of 323 per 100,000 as compared with one of 79 for England and Wales is only one instance of the results. There is further an overflow of about 130,000 persons who cannot find room even under such conditions of overcrowding."[29]

One would have thought that such conditions would have been a spur to a massive plan of state housing but the elders of the city, obsessed at every turn by the mammon of private capital, could only comment, 'that in view of high land values . . . the housing of the labouring classes does not provide a profitable use for capital except under conditions of overcrowding'.[30] A social survey conducted by the Singapore Welfare Department in the same year provides further insight into the total inadequacy of workers' housing. It found acute overcrowding to be the norm throughout the city, except among Grade 1 – constituting only 2 per cent of the population – and even here just under half the households concerned were overcrowded.[31] It estimated that some 41 per cent of the total population was chronically overcrowded (using a very conservative definition) and that some 80 per cent of households lived in one room or less.

A similar pattern repeated itself in the other cities of Malaya. Nor for that matter were conditions any better for the large number of labourers housed on the barrack-like estate lines throughout the country. Plantation owners were of the opinion that these were somehow the best in Asia and, in the opinion of one of their number, the Malayan rubber worker was even better off than the British worker.[32] In reality conditions were far from being as ideal as the employers liked to think and outsiders tended to be far more critical of estate housing. The Representative of the Indian Government in Malaya, S.K. Chettur, a person who knew both Malaya and its labour force well, remarked that:

> ". . . the barrack-like structures of which the majority of the estate lines are composed are in very poor shape . . . These lines are an attempt to regiment the docile Tamil labourer in an effort that no other body of labourers on earth would dream of being subjected to and it is high time that these lines were entirely scrapped . . . "[33]

An English newspaper correspondent records being shown around labour lines in Malaya and being treated to the usual employers' story:

> "Several times I have been shown with pride coolie lines on plantations that a kennelman in England would not tolerate for his hounds . . . There is little consciousness [among the plantation owners – MM] of the poverty and illiteracy that exists in this country. And, too often, it is a foul, degrading, urine-tainted poverty, a thing of old grey rags and scraps of rice, made tolerable only by the sun."[34]

Even more revealing of true conditions on the estates was a statement made at the 1953 Havana Conference of the International Labour Organisation that housing conditions in Malaya were no better then than in 1930, while three years later the Assistant Commissioner for Labour in Johore himself declared that more than 50 per cent of accommodation on estates were just 'sleeping boxes'.[35]

The health of the workers gave even more cause for concern, for it deteriorated markedly in the post-war years as a result of the Japanese occupation, bad housing and rice shortages. Because of British concentration on rubber and tin production, Malaya had long ceased to be self-sufficient in rice production, although rice remained the staple diet of most of its labour force. During the occupation, rice shortages had occurred, as the Japanese were loath to divert much-needed shipping resources to import rice for Malaya's workers. With the collapse of the Japanese and the return of the British, labour not unnaturally expected the rice shortages to end, particularly as it was known that Thailand, a war-time ally of Japan, had vast surpluses. The shortages did not disappear, however. Malaya only got a small portion of the Thai surplus, much of it being diverted to India and, ironically, Japan. What Malaya itself received often found its way on to the black market and reached prices that workers just could not afford. This caused much resentment against the British Military Administration (BMA) which became popularly known as the 'Black Market Administration'.[36] Although rationing existed, the shortages continued throughout 1946. In April of that year the rice ration in Singapore was reduced from four pounds a week (for an adult male) to three pounds and in mid-August the ration was further reduced from three pounds to one and two-third pounds per week. This final cut was reverted only in December. The normal consumption of rice pre-war was 1¼-1½lbs *per day*,[37] that is, as much as a male worker received in a week during August-December 1946. On the mainland the picture was the same, but here shortages existed of other foodstuffs and clothing as well. Supplies of the latter were so bad in 1946 that many labourers in rural areas were reduced to wearing sacks and rags.[38] It is not surprising, then, that the combination of rice shortages and bad housing took a heavy toll on the health of workers and their families. That of children in particular suffered badly. In Singapore it was noted that '. . . an important section of the really poor is more undernourished and in poorer health than before the war'.[39] The same report found that the majority of infant deaths were attributable to rice shortages and lack of proper food. In a survey conducted amongst working-class families it was found that only 22 per cent of families appeared to have sufficient diets with a satisfactory energy-providing content. It was estimated that some

30-40 per cent of the children were suffering from malnutrition.[40] While 'People's Restaurants' were set up providing cheap meals in Singapore and Malaya these were woefully inadequate given the extent of the problem. Medical facilities were sadly deficient. In Singapore there were only 2,400 hospital beds in a city with a population of nearly a million, while in Malaya as late as 1948 the number of hospital beds remained below the pre-war level.[41] Nor was the picture any brighter as regards labour on the estates, where it was admitted by the Labour Department that 'hospital dressers and doctors are still insufficient to meet minimum requirements'.[42]

In all respects the Malayan workers' conditions were bad: the provision of public health, housing, food and even education for labour were at a far worse level than for any other section of the community. In the social survey conducted in Singapore in 1947 it was found that the class background of children was the major determinant of whether they received an education or not: 'survey interviewers when asking why children were not given education received with monotonous regularity the reason that the major hindrance was lack of finance'.[43] Only a third of working-class families in the city were found to send all their children to school and more than 40 per cent sent none at all. Indeed, fewer children were then attending school than before the war.[44]

In conditions such as these it was no wonder that workers revolted, as the *Far Eastern Economic Review* remarked:

> ". . . labour unrest was inevitable . . . Although wages were at least double the pre-war rates, purchasing power had decreased in greater proportion. With the higher cost of living, limited rations, lack of clothing and inadequate housing there was every reason for continued unrest."[45]

The final match to the straw was the widespread increase in the cost of living which left labour worse off in many cases than it was before the war. Although apparently substantial wage increases were sometimes granted, in no cases did these manage to keep pace with rising prices. An investigation of labour unrest conducted by two British trade unionists, S. Awberry MP and F.W. Dalley, estimated the increase in the cost of living as between 300 and 400 per cent.[46] Very often the government tried to suggest that the cost of living was decreasing – but this was taking 1945 as a base; when the year 1939 is taken, a very different picture emerges, as Tables II and III indicate. It should be noted that both these tables refer to the late forties and that for the years 1945-47 the rise in cost of living was probably even greater. There seems little doubt that a large part of Malaya's labour force actually suffered disguised wage cuts – so much so that one trade unionist thought that '. . . the biggest and most subversive element that is working amid the working classes today is the denial of a living wage'.[47]

TABLE II

Cost of Living 1939-48 for Malaya's Different Races

	1939	*1948*
Europeans	100	232
Chinese	100	328
Indians	100	328
Malays	100	340

(Source: *Annual Report of the Federation of Malaya for 1948*, p.17.)

TABLE III

Wages of Field Workers in the Rubber Industry 1939-49

	1939	*1949*
Wages	100	315
Cost of Living	100	412
Real Wages	100	77

(Source: V. Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?*, p.148.)

No clearer indication of the situation of the workers is given than by the demands they formulated in strikes – demands which reveal their awareness of both falling wages and their shabby social conditions. The Pan-Malayan Council of Government Workers in putting forward a wage claim in 1947 pointed to the fact that

> '. . . the real wage we are demanding today is much less than the real wage we were given in 1939 . . . We refuse to allow ourselves to be impoverished so that certain powerful sections of the community can be spared some discomfort.'

So strong was the case of this group of workers that even the *Straits Times* pleaded their case. The government, however, took a different attitude and threatened instant dismissal to would-be strikers.[48] In April 1947 the tin miners struck, putting forward demands for 13 paid days' leave per year, a $2 a day minimum wage, an eight-hour day, a maximum of four hours' overtime per week, and provision of a trained dresser for mines employing 100 men and a doctor for those employing 300 men or more. They also demanded that hospital expenses be paid by employers and that housing be provided on the basis of no more than five persons living in one room.[49] Coal miners at Batu Arang requested one month's notice on either side (instead of 24 hours), free medical attention and sick pay, allowances for working clothes and equipment, and no more wage reductions. For these demands they were prepared to strike, while the answer of the management was the use of Japanese prisoners of war to break the strike.[50] In May 1948 the 800 dockers employed at Port Swettenham downed tools. This strike was often

cited as the work of 'agitators' and the first phase in the Communist revolt. Yet a few months later the court of inquiry into the strike found against the government. It pointed out that there were no provisions in the way of latrines or washing facilities and that the supply of drinking water was thoroughly inadequate, while

> ". . . the bulk of the labour is housed at its own expense in insanitary shacks rented from private landlords at exorbitant rents of $10 a month or even more . . . (and) . . . there are no provisions for the welfare of labourers such as are required under the Labour Code."[51]

That in this case the employer was a government department, and that the blame for the strike was put on the Communists, says much about the nature of labour unrest in Malaya. Undoubtedly many strikes were led by Communists but the seeds of discontent were more than evident without their presence.

The thoroughly inadequate social conditions of Malayan workers called for radical reforms of the employment system and the provision of social welfare for labourers. However, the governments of both Singapore and Malaya proved unwilling to undertake, and incapable of implementing, this task. To have carried out the reforms would have meant acting against the interests of employers, and this they were not prepared to do. Although the post-war government in Britain pressed for the introduction of income tax throughout the Empire, the outcome of this proposal in Malaya is most informative of the close rapport between government and the employers. The plantation, mining and commercial interests of the country fought the proposals, and, indeed, successfully delayed the introduction of income tax until 1948. When the tax *was* introduced, its original purpose – to provide significantly increased social services – was dropped completely and its yield was on a scale merely adequate to balance the budget.[52]

The lamentable social conditions of Malayan workers, coupled with the decisive importance of Malaya to British capitalism, made a bitter struggle between organised labour and the employers and state almost inevitable after 1945, for the Malayan worker was no longer prepared to accept his conditions cap in hand. He had long been subjected to employer paternalism and political repression, while the fruits of his labour lined the pockets of others. He now sought to rectify this state of affairs and his determination to take part in his own history was to come as a rude shock to those previously used to his docility.

Trade Unionism 1945-47

That employers and government failed to appreciate this change was to be expected. Dominant classes everywhere have found it difficult to

understand the causes of revolts against their rule and the employers and the government in Malaya were no exceptions. A commentator in the journal *British Malaya* wrote in 1946:

> "It will come as a profound shock to those acquainted with labour conditions in pre-war Malaya to be told that a strange ferment, with all the characteristics of foreign vintage, has been whipping up local labour into a boiling cauldron . . . Before the war labourers on the whole were happy and contented except on rare occasions when some stormy petrel roused them to an exaggerated sense of their grievances. The war has completely detached them from their old moorings."[53]

What this commentator found so unexpected was the widespread development of trade unions and of labour unrest in Malaya after 1945.

Following the Japanese surrender in August 1945, the cadres of the MPAJA and the MCP were instrumental in establishing, in collaboration with the workers, a number of broad-based organisations, the most important being the General Labour Unions (GLUs). The GLUs were based on districts, rather than trades or industries, and so resembled more a trades council than a trade union in Britain. This was in line with the conscious decision, taken early on, that trade unions had to be non-communal bodies and, from the beginning, every effort was made to encourage Indian and Malay, as well as Chinese, workers to join these unions. This policy met with success as far as the recruitment of Indian labour was concerned, but with the Malays it had only a qualified success. During the occupation, tension between Malays and Chinese had been deliberately fostered by the Japanese, particularly in Johore, and this carried over into the post-war period. The police force, almost entirely Malay, had distinguished itself by abject collaboration during the war and, in the period after surrender, there was an understandable squaring of debts between them and the guerrillas. Once the GLUs were established, however, great pains were taken to reassure Malay workers that the unions were not only bodies for Chinese and Indian workers and this determined policy line was demonstrated in the practice of the unions.

Throughout September and October 1945 unions began to spring up, at first mainly amongst urban labour but soon spreading to workers on plantations and tin mines. A series of lightning strikes called by the nascent unions demonstrated their capabilities to employers and workers. These were largely successful in gaining concessions for labour and proved the unions' ability to lead workers in a campaign to improve their social, economic and political standing. The process of unionisation was most rapid in Singapore where, following preparatory meetings, a Singapore General Labour Union (the SGLU) was established embracing most of the unions in the city. At a three-day conference

held from 25 October, it put forward what were to become labour's basic demands in post-war Malaya – the abolition of the contract system of employment, the establishment of an eight-hour day and six-day week, equal pay regardless of race or sex, the provision of social insurance and compensation and a general attempt at improvement of workers' conditions. Strikes followed involving Singapore seamen, dockers, and employees of the Traction Company. This strike wave spread to the mainland, involving tin miners at Ipoh, the coal miners of Batu Arang, and workers at the railway workshop at Kuala Lumpur. Chinese, Indians and Malays were all participants in these early strikes.[54] Although they did not result in any great amelioration of the workers' conditions, the strikes vividly illustrated the determination of labour to stand up for its rights.

As economic conditions, and especially rice shortages, worsened towards the end of the year, a new strike wave broke out in December. Largely centred on Singapore, it involved municipal workers, rubber factory workers, brewery workers, bus and taxi drivers and engineering workers. At its peak on the 17th, 18,000 workers were on strike.[55] These strikes further strengthened the unions' self-confidence and dispelled any illusions labour had that the British Military Administration was going to carry out practical and effective reforms, as opposed to those restricted to the realm of airy rhetoric. Indeed, the intransigence of the BMA in not recognising the changed social situation of post-war Malaya made a trial clash between it and the GLUs ever more likely. This occurred in January 1946, over the arrest of a leading militant, Soong Kwong. Soong had been the head of the Selangor section of the MPAJA and was arrested for a crime committed on 10 September 1945, when full British control had not even been established over Malaya. His crime had been the punishment of a Chinese businessman known to have collaborated with the Japanese during the war. He was twice acquitted by courts consisting of an official president and two local assessors, but was finally found guilty by an all-European court on 3 January. The trade unions protested vehemently against this decision against a man with an impeccable anti-Japanese record. A large public meeting was held on 28 January by the SGLU to protest at Soong's continued detention and to call for a general strike to begin on the thirtieth. Already by the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth some workers had begun to come out on strike and by the thirtieth the correspondent of the *Times* estimated that 200,000 workers were involved, making it 'the biggest stoppage of work since the reoccupation of Malaya'.[56] Besides rubber factory workers, dockers, building workers and transport workers, the strike extended even to hospital attendants and domestic and hotel staff. The authorities themselves admitted to 150,000 Singa-

pore workers being on strike.[57] By the thirty-first, Singapore was at a complete standstill and on 3 February Soong Kwong was released from prison.[58] The unions had won a notable victory and yet at the same time they were aware of their weaknesses. The strike had been a great success in Singapore but on the mainland the response had been patchy and badly co-ordinated. There, unionisation had not proceeded so rapidly as in Singapore and, outside of Penang, Selangor and Johore, labour organisation was still comparatively weak. The greatest need the strike pointed to was a body comparable to the SGLU on the mainland so that the strength of the Malayan workers could effectively be marshalled against employers and government. This led to the formation of the Pan-Malayan General Labour Union (PMGLU) in February 1946.

Prior to its founding conference, a large demonstration was called for 15 February, the anniversary of the fall of Singapore to the Japanese. This has been widely interpreted as a celebration of the British humiliation in 1942;[59] however, the organisers claimed it to be in memory of all those killed by the Japanese. The Chinese, particularly the Communists, had fought heroically alongside the British in defence of the city and when it fell paid dearly for their bravery; the figure for those killed by the Japanese in the first week of the occupation has been estimated at between 10,000 and 40,000.[60] The MCP and the unions had good cause to remember the fifteenth then. The British, however, chagrined at having been out-manoeuvred over the Soong Kwong affair, were determined to redress the balance somehow. Accordingly, the BMA banned the demonstration and on the fourteenth arrested, and placed banishment orders on, 24 leading militants. On 15 February itself the police and military made a show of their overwhelming armed strength. In clashes in Singapore between troops and demonstrators one worker was killed and 17 injured, while in Johore 17 were killed in clashes.[61] The 15 February incident stressed the need to build a national trade union organisation in order to combat the increasingly repressive attitude of the BMA to organised labour and to gain concessions from employers.

At its first congress the PMGLU decided to embark on a nationwide unionisation campaign paying particular attention to estate labour and starting 'a broad campaign for the education of the workers and their families, the formation of workers' cadres and the publication of trade union literature'.[62] The next twelve months witnessed a rapid expansion of unionisation and the PMGLU throughout the peninsula. This was to affect all races and sectors of the Malayan working class. The PMGLU met with success only because the mood of the workers was responsive, because 'it liberated, encouraged and controlled the forces

of discontent'.[63] The attitude and outlook of the workers had been revolutionised. The arbitrary brutality of the overseer, the paternalism of the employer, and the repression of the government were resisted and rejected where before they had been passively accepted. They objected to being called 'coolies', to being subjected to physical punishment, to the old servility. These days were gone for ever. A strike was reported of Chinese and Indian hospital workers because they no longer wanted to be addressed as 'boy', while in Penang the municipal labourers insisted that the name 'Cooly Lines Road' be altered.[64] Workers demanded an influence not only in their rates of pay but also in their conditions of employment. In short, the whole system of management of the economy was being actively challenged by labour.

Sections of workers which had not previously had much record of militancy such as Malays, clerical workers and Indian rubber workers were often amongst the most militant. Malay workers were much in evidence in the union at the Sentul workshops of the Malayan railways, while the post-war labour shortage meant that more and more Malays were being attracted to wage labour. The 1947 annual report of the Labour Department in Singapore noted that 'since the liberation it has become more and more difficult to say that any particular type of work is done by Chinese and any particular piece by non-Chinese, in fact all races work together'.[65] Nor were clerical workers immune from unrest. The Singapore Clerical Union felt itself obliged to issue in September 1946, a list of far-reaching demands, designed to improve the welfare of its members, and it held mass demonstrations on their behalf. For the first time, too, many clerical workers saw themselves as belonging to the working class. Writing in the official organ of the Army Civil Servants' Union, a trade unionist, Mr P. Williams, wrote:

> "The amazing success so far achieved by militant trade unionism . . . augurs well for the future . . . The fundamental problems facing workers are identical, whether the workers belong to the clerical, mechanical or the manual category, and whether their employers are commercial firms, military establishments, government or private concerns'.[66]

But nowhere was the changed outlook of labourers more evident than amongst the Indian estate workers.

Although the leadership of the Indian Independence League and the Indian National Army during the occupation had been largely middle-class, these organisations had managed to give some expression to the labourers' aspirations and ideals. The proscription of these organisations by the British on their return left a political vacuum that was soon exploited by the trade unions. Even during the war some Indians had realised the limitations of the IIL and INA and had transferred their allegiance to the MPAJA. Anti-British feeling ran high amongst estate

labour and increased with the insensitive handling by the British of problems arising from the occupation. Europeans were paid back-pay for the occupation years and in many cases so were the 'Asiatic' staff. The mass of labourers who had suffered the most and longest got nothing however. But even more galling for labour was the prospect of being managed by the same personnel as under the Japanese. The shortage of European managers in 1945-46 placed employers in something of a predicament and the way they extricated themselves from it was to utilise to the full the experience the Malayalams and other Asiatic staff had gained during the occupation. Thus, far from being punished as Japanese collaborators as the mass of labourers expected them to be, they were now treated by employers as the saviours of Malaya's rubber industry. Their former role was explained away by the fiction that their actions had been committed under duress and so even the most notorious quislings got off scot-free. On the estate where the sociologist R.K.Jain worked in the mid-sixties this fact was still remembered with great bitterness. The Kiriany (chief clerk) on the estate had been personally responsible for the deaths of a number of labourers under the Japanese and, despite attempts by the workers to bring him to justice for these crimes, he remained at his post on the estate.[67] Such actions were bound to increase the resentment of the labourers at the return of the British and the attempt to re-establish the old paternalist style of management. On many estates the changed attitude of labourers manifested itself most clearly in campaigns against toddy drinking. These campaigns were usually led by young labourers mindful of the connection between toddy and the servile labourer of pre-war days. The creation of unions harnessed the newly-found self-consciousness of these workers.[68] The emphasis by GLU leaders on the common suffering of all workers regardless of race helped overcome the diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds of Malaya's workers. Throughout 1946 PMGLU leaders sought actively to attract Indian labour unions into the GLUs in order to break down communalism. By the end of the year all had done so with the sole exception of the Negri Sembilan Indian Labour Union which insisted upon the separate interests of Indian workers but it remained a negligible force until after the declaration of the Emergency. 'Rice bowl', or social security, demands were put forward to emphasise the workers' common predicament and where Indian workers' organisation was weak neighbouring Chinese unions would be brought out to help their case.

The PMGLU expanded rapidly throughout 1946 – not because it coerced labourers, or because of their ignorance, but rather because it fulfilled the aspirations of Malayan labour for a radical restructuring of Malayan society. It provided a co-ordinating body for labour with-

out which, divided up into separate unions probably along racial lines, they would have been subject to the old 'divide and rule' policy. It had its own weekly paper *Vanguard* printed in four languages. It provided a vast number of broadsheets, informational literature and strike bulletins and employed negotiators, stenographers and interpreters, all of which were at labour's disposal. In addition, the local GLU officials concerned themselves with a host of local problems. Assistance was offered in the form of strike relief, sympathy strikes, and protection from victimisation, all of which were essential to the success of the PMGLU. Although its methods and organisation were often deprecated by employers and government and even visiting British trade unionists,[69] any alternative strategy based on 'democratic' procedures would not have succeeded. It was precisely because they were not afraid to use the strike weapon and were not intimidated by the forces of 'law and order' that the PMGLU was accepted by labour and won concessions from employers and the government.

The strength and combativity of the workers manifested itself in an unparalleled wave of strikes which continued throughout 1946 and into 1947. In March the docks and the great tin smelter at Penang were paralysed by strikes. By April a strike of railway workers had broken out; this lasted for several weeks. Simultaneously, unrest continued in Singapore and amongst Indian estate labour along the entire west coast of Malaya. The journal *British Malaya* lamented in September:

> "The labour situation on rubber estates still gives grounds for uneasiness. There have been on average 27 strikes a week for the last seven weeks and the prospects for the immediate future do not appear to be bright."[70]

In Singapore alone the aggregate of working days lost on account of strikes from April to December 1946 was 850,000.[71] For the twelve months between April 1946 and March 1947 there was a total of 713,000 man-days lost as a result of strikes in Malaya, or two days per employee, while in Singapore the total was 1,173,000 or ten days per employee.[72] The unions' policy of militancy met with success, too; indeed any other policy would have met with little or no success, given the determination of employers and government not to change the essential outlines of the pre-war employment system. In a large number of cases increased wages and living allowances together with better conditions were won for the workers.[73] By March 1947 the Malayan labour movement was at the peak of its strength. In the preceding twelve months it had conducted far more strikes, and been more successful as a result of them, than the labour movement has ever been since. In April the PMGLU had a membership of 263,598 (over 50 per cent of the total work force) and some 85 per cent of the unions under its wings.[74]

British Attitudes to Malayan Trade Unionism

The far-reaching social and political changes Malaya experienced as a result of the occupation, coupled with the international ideological climate, prevented a complete restoration of the *status quo ante*. However, this did not mean that the British ruling class was prepared to contemplate radical reforms in the peninsula, for they were afraid that the latter might endanger the relationship between Malaya and Britain. They were acutely aware at the time of the dangers posed to the Empire both from without – principally American attempts to get the 'Open Door' accepted throughout the world – and from within – in the case of Malaya, the MCP and the labour unions. The post-war years called for the adoption of a new strategy in Malaya by British imperialism, one that accorded at least *de facto* recognition to the unions and – given its enormous prestige and influence – even the MCP.

Essentially, the new strategy called for a redefining of British imperialism's attitude to labour in the peninsula and throughout the Empire. Just as in an earlier epoch it had been in the interests of imperialism to replace slavery by an indentured labour system, so it now saw its interests best served if, on the surface, labour had greater control over its destiny, while in reality attempts by the labourer to make his 'independence' a reality were dealt with firmly. This more 'liberal' policy inevitably brought Whitehall and the Colonial Office into conflict with their more parochially-minded local agents – the Malayan Civil Service and the planters. While Britain was prepared to tolerate trade unionism, provided it was of a 'sound' character and did not seek to terminate Malaya's role as 'the dollar-earning arsenal of the Commonwealth',[75] they were not. The changed social and political atmosphere of the post-war world, both in Malaya and in the world, put it at a loss to consider any other policy. It was confident that trade unions could be made amenable to imperial purposes provided they did not interfere in politics. Those whose ties to Malaya were more intimate, such as the colonial administration, local planters and commercial interests, were, however, far more wary. To them the prosperity of their interests depended upon the maintenance of pre-war social relationships and they were inclined to regard any sort of labour organisation as an attempt to take the labourer out of their paternalist 'care'. But the power and influence of this settler group was somewhat reduced in post-war Malaya as a result of its prior internment, and subsequent leave of absence, and it was not to recover its coherence and former influence until the beginning of 1947. But Whitehall's adherence to a policy of 'encouraging' trade unionism did not mean that there was an

absence of the repression that labour had been subject to in the pre-war period.

From the first, the policies of the British Military Administration, in the words of Dr Stenson 'provided infinite scope for "agitation", but little potential for real co-operation'.[76] Its handling of the first serious strike it faced, that of Singapore dockers, gave an indication of how things would develop. Japanese prisoners of war were used to break the strike, while 'agitators' were excluded from future employment.[77] Proposals and programmes suggested by the Communist Party and the labour unions were studiously ignored. Already in October 1945 two left-wing Chinese newspapers, *Shih Tai Jit Pao* and *Pai Ma Tao Pao*, were forcibly closed down and their editors and staffs sentenced to prison terms for sedition for using the term 'economic exploitation'.[78] No efforts were spared in attempts to find a 'trouble-free' labour force to break union organisation, particularly during strikes. For this purpose the British were fortunate to have at hand thousands of Japanese prisoners of war. Beginning with the Singapore docks strike of October 1945, these were consciously used as an instrument of British labour policy in an attempt to wear down union militancy.[78] They were supplemented in some strikes by British Pioneer Corps troops and even by prisoners from the Civil Gaol.[80] The Japanese were kept in Malaya until 1947 and were consistently used by the British as blacklegs in strikes. There were nearly 20,000 in Singapore alone in 1946.[81] The Malayan workers thus found their former oppressors used to break their own efforts to improve their wages and social conditions. At the same time employers and government began to think of replacements for the 'Japanese Surrendered Personnel' as they were euphemistically known. Both China and Java were ruled out as further sources of docile labour for both countries were already regarded as too infested with recalcitrance to imperialism. Desperate efforts were made in the course of 1946 to persuade the Indian government to lift its ban on further emigration but these were unsuccessful. A short-term answer to the problem was found in the recruitment of a Ceylonese military labour force and in trying to encourage Malay peasants to engage in wage labour.[82] The latter policy was to meet with some success in later years.

Despite the patently anti-labour character of many of the acts of the BMA, the trade unions did not suffer the repression they had had to face before the war. To have banned them outright would have contradicted the 1940 Ordinance, been thoroughly unjustifiable in the world's eyes, and would have been tantamount to risking insurrection. Instead, the British Military Administration preferred, in Purcell's words, to extend

> "the widest possible tolerance consistent with public safety . . . it was thought expedient that in the interests of the mental health of the people (sic) they should after such a long period of repression be allowed to indulge their new-found sense of liberty, to 'blow off steam'."[83]

In reality, this 'tolerance' was dictated more by the circumstances of the moment than by any deep concern for the social well-being of the Malayan people. From the beginning, the British were worried because of the close connection between the GLUs and the MCP. The Communist Party had emerged from the war with considerable prestige and its cadres had thrown themselves wholeheartedly into the task of building labour unions afterwards. The reaction of the British was to attempt to reconstruct labour organisation along other lines, usually referred to as 'healthy', 'sound' or 'independent' trade unionism. All manifestations of labour unrest such as strikes and demonstrations were denounced as the work of 'agitators' who were not prepared to sit down and negotiate without resorting to the threat of strikes. Thus in a fairly typical example of official attitudes, the Annual Report for Singapore for 1946 notes:

> ". . . there are subversive and anti-social elements in the colony who are actively opposed to the development of healthy trade unionism but are at the same time determined to use the trade union movement to obtain control over labour by their own means and for their own purposes."[84]

Of key importance in this policy of encouraging 'sound' trade unions was the sending of British trade unionists to the colonies to advise on their development. It should be noted that these advisers were appointed *after* trade unions had come into existence and the task given to them was to change the character of these unions. Their primary purpose, then, was not to oversee the development of trade unions that would fight to raise living standards and the political rights of colonial workers, but – on the contrary – to make sure that the development of trade unions did not challenge imperialism's rule of Malaya.[85] The trade union adviser to Malaya was John Brazier, an Isle of Wight railwayman, magistrate and member of the Colonial Bureau of the Fabian Society, who had been active in regulating labour disputes in war-time Britain.[86] Brazier was fervently anti-communist and had the traditional dislike of the English labour aristocracy for trade union 'interference' in politics. He spoke none of the local languages and evinced little knowledge of Malayan social and political movements. It was not surprising, given his background, that he achieved a far closer political and social rapport with the colonial administration than with labour. Although he himself made many references to the different social circumstances of Malaya and Britain he rejected the specific manifestation of Malayan trade unionism, the General Labour Unions.[87] Garrett, the Trade

Union Adviser in Singapore, had the following to say about Brazier:

> "Many within the administration were all for putting the GLU out of business and for pursuing a policy of Government-sponsored unions, to which policy the Trade Union Adviser in Malaya fully concurred with, advocated and applied."

and furthermore that Brazier,

> "in his consistently prejudiced and biased attitude . . . is *producing* and *creating* political discord and is driving this organization and their state federations (FTUs) into political outlets, because they are denied their rightful function within Malaya in trade union directions."[88]

In the philosophy of Brazier and the British administration the struggle between labour and capital was to be replaced by that 'joint effort' that employers the world over are enamoured with. The type of trade union that they actively encouraged was a thoroughly emasculated non-political union that never resorted to the strike weapon and showed a proper deference to employers and government. In most cases, the only workers who could be moulded into such unions were government clerical workers and the hated Asiatic estate staff. Those in government employ largely joined because they were afraid of losing their jobs otherwise. Nor was the government above fostering communal unions as long as they were 'sound and healthy' (sic). A report in 1947 noted the growth of unions with a membership 'confined to Tamil labour workers . . . This type of organisation lends itself to the use of agreed conciliation machinery and fits in well with the administrative structure of the Employers' State Planters Association'.[89] Needless to say, this type of union attracted few recruits voluntarily and it was not these unions which won wage increases and improvements in benefits for their members. In short, British attitudes towards trade unionism were never as liberal as official spokesmen tried to make out[90] and they were never given that freedom to expand and grow which official statements seemed to imply. Increasingly, British policy came to represent the fears of local planters, commercial interests and others who had the strongest say in the Councils and spoke more and more of the need to disarm labour.

The Turning of the Tide

Beginning in early 1947, it became more and more apparent that government and employers were intent on restricting trade union activity. The three prongs to their offensive against labour were, firstly, the enforcing of the registration provisions of the Trade Union Ordinance; secondly, a concerted effort on the part of employers against trade unionism; and, finally, enforcement of the trespass law on estates

and mines, with tighter police control of labour unrest. Registration of the trade unions under the 1940 Ordinance was first requested as early as April 1946 when the civil administration took over from the military. Under the provisions of the Ordinance, the registrar was empowered to inspect the accounts and procedures of trade unions and also to forbid them to accept the guidance of non-registered unions, i.e. the PMGLU. Registration was compulsory in Malaya and from mid-1946 greater efforts were made to enforce it.[91] But the act was so restrictive that the GLUs did all they could to evade registration, for compliance meant, in fact, the chaining of labour unions. Under Article 10 the registrar could grant registration to a union only if it was not likely to be used for unlawful purposes inconsistent with its objects and rules. Government employees were forbidden to join or become affiliated to unions of non-government employees. At the same time, under Section 2 of the Ordinance, the registrar was given the right to ensure that union funds were not used for political purposes. This provision was used in an attempt to sever the trade unions from the PMGLU and the SGLU, the government being fully aware that the bargaining power of labour would thus be greatly reduced.

The PMGLU itself had sought for official recognition as the main representative of organised labour in Malaya since its foundation in February 1946, but obviously it wished to do so with the minimum of government control over its operations. While it was prepared to allow its affiliates to register under the Ordinance it was not prepared to do so itself. It was encouraged by an agreement reached in August 1946 between the Singapore General Labour Union and the trade union adviser in the city, S.P. Garrett. In addition, Brazier, the trade union adviser for the mainland, seems to have led it to believe that a similar agreement might be reached with the PMGLU.[92] The agreement in Singapore reflected both the greater strength of the trade unions there – the SGLU could effectively paralyse the city in hours – and the genuine sympathies Garrett had for the trade unions. Under the agreement the SGLU was reorganised as the Singapore Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU) and not required to register under the Ordinance. The PMGLU concluded from this that if it reorganised as a federation of labour unions it, too, would escape registration. Thus on 25 August the PMGLU formally became the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions, with separate federations for each state which would also not register but would encourage all their affiliates to do so. However, no sooner had it done this than the registrar insisted not only that all affiliates should register but that they should remove from their rules all references to accepting the 'guidance' of non-registered societies and that the use of funds for political and sympathy strikes be ruled out.

Rules permitting the payment of contributions of 20 per cent of a union's subscriptions to a federation were not allowed. In October the registrar ruled that federations of trade unions would have to apply for registration or for exemption and in November he stated that the state federations of trade unions should dissolve and wind up their assets before reforming on the wishes of those affiliates already registered. Further, when they did so their role should be purely advisory. Throughout 1946 Brazier and the registrar, Prentis, had set increasingly rigorous standards for registration, precisely to restrict the influence of the Federations. The latter decided to apply, reluctantly, for registration only in March 1947. In the meantime no action was taken to declare them illegal but the potential for further government restriction clearly existed. The PMFTU had been deluded by Brazier and Prentis, for they had committed their branch unions (now recognised on a craft, industry or regional basis) to registering while gaining no concessions themselves. The danger of even greater restrictions was illustrated by an editorial in the *Straits Times* in March 1947 which pointed out that 'it would be taken as a sign of weakness to go on tolerating unions which are not prepared to take the steps necessary to make themselves legal bodies'.[93] On 17 March the registrar reminded all unions that the closing date for applications was 1 April. Its significance was quickly taken up by the *Straits Times* in an editorial entitled 'A Warning to Unions';

> ". . . this fixing of a time limit . . . marks the beginning of that firmer handling of extremism and lawlessness in the Malayan labour movement for which employers of all races have been clamouring."[94]

At the same time as the registration controversy raged, Brazier was continuing his efforts to develop 'healthy' trade unionism. Here government was not to meet with the success achieved over registration. The methods which Brazier used demonstrated the lengths to which his passionate anti-communism took him[95] and the unions he set up were largely of white-collar workers with few members and little bargaining power. Nevertheless, 'independent unionism' remained a threat to the Federations because it provided a base, however small, for the government to avoid coming to terms with the mass of organised labour. Although the FTUs had to be dealt with in strikes, government in Singapore and Malaya continued to deny them official recognition and they were entirely excluded from official consultative bodies which were filled instead by 'sound' trade unionists.[96]

The successful strikes led by the FTUs in 1946 and the widespread unionisation which accompanied them was to produce an equally forceful reaction from the employers in 1947. Previously disorganised and divided in the general struggle for profits, employers now feared

that the spread of trade unions, particularly among estate labour, would fatally undermine what little authority and respect the workers still retained for them. In 1946 they had usually given way to union demands so as not to interrupt production, for this would have been more harmful to profits than conceding to the workers' demands. However, by the end of the year the attitude of employers towards the unions began to toughen noticeably. This was discernible amongst both European and Chinese employers. Amongst the Chinese employers there was a revival of the Kuomintang and its youth corps, the San Min Chu I. Both these organisations were often used to recruit labour and to intimidate striking workers. In late 1946 the Malayan Mining Employers' Association (MMEA) was formed, combining the larger Chinese and all European mine-owners into the one body with power to negotiate and to enforce observance of wage rates upon its members. Soon afterwards, employers established two front organisations representing their political interests – the Singapore Association and the Malayan Association. These moves occurred with the blessing of the government, if not with their active encouragement. The Acting Governor of Singapore, P.A.B. McKerron, in a statement to the Singapore Association, spoke of the 'agitation' in the country and added:

> "That such agitation has been so often successful is due in very large measure to the fact that individual employers, in order to realise quick profits, have frequently given way to it . . . It is the opinion of Government that an effective union of employers has an important function to perform in resisting unreasonable demands . . . "[97]

To appreciate the vigour and aggressiveness of the 1947 employers' offensive the high degree of centralised financial control of the European enterprises should be stressed.[98] The consequent concentration of leadership greatly facilitated the direction of the employers' counter-attack and gave their campaign a high degree of coherence. The employers' campaign concentrated on two main points: firstly, firm resistance to workers' demands for higher wages; and secondly, enforcement of stricter discipline and terms of employment for workers. Garrett, the trade union adviser in Singapore, warned in February that the employers were deliberately exploiting the 'red bogey' in order to achieve these aims.[99] Garrett's warning coincided with a new wave of strikes which swept Malaya between January and March 1947. In Singapore 171,000 days were lost as the result of strikes in February alone.[100] To employers this was the last straw. The feeling began to gain ground that unless something was done rapidly it would become impossible to restrain the workers:

> "Everywhere in business circles there is a very marked reaction against the

> manner and spirit in which labour is presenting its demands . . . Among businessmen there is also outspoken criticism of the new trade union movement in Malaya . . . All confess to grave doubts whether the objective of a sound, stable and responsible trade union movement . . . in this country is possible."[101]

All that the employers and government were now waiting for was a suitable incident to redress the balance which they felt had swung too far in favour of labour.

They did not have long to wait. The strikes of early 1947 had been particularly bitter in Kedah where Indian estate labour showed every sign of rejecting completely management control. The police in the state had been considerably reinforced to show the labourers, in the words of the Commissioner for Police, that 'the country could not and would not be run by a party of agitators'.[102] The situation throughout February was that labourers were virtually in control of many of the estates and there seems to have been an almost complete breakdown in managerial authority. Labourers began taking over estates and managers were forced to retreat to the safety of neighbouring towns.[103] On 3 March, police moved into Bedong estate and in the resulting disturbance 21 labourers were injured and 66 arrests were made. The strike leader died of injuries received at the hands of the police a few days later. Of those arrested 61 were sentenced to six months' imprisonment.[104] Despite this incident, and mass dismissals, strikes continued throughout March and April.

Towards the end of the month, however, tougher police action began to take its toll and there was a notable decline in labour militancy after an incident at Dublin estate, Kedah. Here a heavy force of police arrived in the middle of a workers' meeting addressed by an FTU official. The estate manager had refused the men permission to hold the meeting, although it was in their own free time. The police tried to arrest the speaker on a charge of trespass, but he was protected by the crowd. The police then opened fire on the workers, killing one and wounding five. Although other incidents in Kedah and elsewhere were just as bloody what was at stake for the employers was crucial, for 'the labourers are beginning to question quite sharply the claim made by estate managers to assert the rights of private property'.[105] Starting with this incident, employers and police began a determined effort throughout Malaya to enforce the law of trespass on estates. This measure, coupled with victimisation of known militants on estates, was a direct attack on the right of rubber workers to organise themselves.

There seems little doubt, in fact, that Kedah was deliberately chosen by employers and the government as the starting point of this campaign. The Indian Government representative who investigated the strikes, J.A. Thivy, detected

> "a degree of co-operation that amounts to collusion between the vested interests on the one hand and the Government and the Police, for the purpose of suppressing the fundamental rights of the largest class of people in this country."[106]

The Kedah 'incident' marked a decisive turning point in the class struggle in post-war Malaya. In future, Government did not hesitate to join employers in denouncing all labour unrest as the work of 'agitators'. The Annual Report for 1947 described the disturbances in Kedah as having 'no background of general labour grievances' and as being inspired by 'political opportunists' and 'unscrupulous self-appointed leaders of unofficial trade unions'.[107] Every assistance was given by the police to estate owners both in enforcing the law of trespass and in dealing with strikes once they occurred. This made union organisation on estates very difficult. Very often if FTU officials wished to contact unionists on estates they could do so only at secret rendezvous in the middle of the night. Organised labour was visibly on the defensive after this incident and employers' journals were not slow to see this as the turning of the tide. In May a correspondent in *British Malaya* wrote:

> "While the problem of security still represents great difficulties, lawlessness throughout the country is being brought under control by the relentless good work of the police. The unrest last month in Kedah . . . subsided rapidly as a result of resolute police action."[108]

The Kedah incident could not have come at a worse time as far as the unions were concerned for the FTUs were preparing to put concerted pressure on the rubber industry to improve the conditions of labourers, and in particular the Indian workers. The campaign had already been started in March when the Selangor Estate Workers' Unions presented demands covering all the main aspirations and grievances of labour – 100 per cent wage increases for all Indian workers, a war bonus or rehabilitation grant, sick pay, longer notice before evictions and the removal of trespass restrictions.[109] Chinese estate workers had long been better paid than their fellow Indian workers because their earnings were based on piece-work. The FTUs now hoped to stop this anomaly and raise Indian workers' wages to the level of Chinese, a move which would also cement class solidarity and break down racial barriers. However, for an industry created on the basis of cheap, docile labour, such as Malayan rubber, even seemingly moderate propositions such as these assumed revolutionary dimensions. UPAM (the United Planters Association of Malaya) did not even consider the workers' claims and pleaded that because of falling world prices some estates would go bankrupt if the demands were met. They followed this by cutting contract tapping rates by 20 per cent at the end of May.[110] As a result of the cut Indian and Chinese workers became even more united

in their opposition to UPAM. The PMFTU sponsored the forming of the various estate workers' unions into a Pan-Malayan Rubber Workers' Council,[111] with the intention of entering negotiations at a national level with UPAM. This met with no response from the employers. Despite threats of strike action they refused to make any concessions, fully aware that they had the full power of the Government behind them. In September they formed a new association for planters, the Malayan Planting Industries Employers Association (MPIEA). Members were bound on penalty of expulsion and fines to carry out the rules of the Association and the organisation was conceived, in the words of the *Straits Times*, as 'a new instrument with which to deal with the trade unions'.[112]

Throughout the summer of 1947 the Government and employers showed increasing toughness in dealing with strikers. The arbitrary actions of employers were endorsed without question by the Government. As well as the rubber tappers, Penang dockers, in June, and sago mill workers in July, suffered wage cuts.[113] When 500 sago mill workers at one factory struck in protest at this action they were all instantly dismissed. This tactic was employed elsewhere by employers, including the Government. The postmen who considered strike action in October were prevented from doing so by the threats of mass dismissals.[114] In both Singapore and Malaya there was a notable decline in labour militancy after March. Of the 29 strikes that occurred in Singapore in the last nine months of the year, 13 were for the reinstatement of men dismissed, six were in opposition to wage reductions, and only five were for wage increases.[115] Strikes were now being fought largely on the issue of maintaining the *status quo* against concerted employer/Government attacks to reduce the power of the trade unions. The report of the Singapore Labour Department for 1947 frankly admitted that 'labour has hard a hard fight of it to keep the wage level up'.[116] The average number of days lost in 1947 was only four per man compared with ten the year before.[117] The total man-days lost was reduced from 1,173,000 to 205,000 in Singapore and in Malaya from 713,000 to 512,000.[118] Undoubtedly this was largely the result of the increased tempo of the employers' and Government offensive against organised labour. The employers' strength was evident too in its successful resistance to the introduction of any meaningful income tax and the constitutional proposals of the All-Malayan Council of Joint Action, a multi-racial body formed for the advancement of democratic rights. Between employers and Government no major differences now existed. In June Garrett had been removed from his post in Singapore, a move employers had long desired. Government and employers were convinced of the need to introduce further restrictions that would effectively

destroy the PMFTU and FTUs. At a conference of Labour Department officials in November an attitude of extreme hostility to the trade unions was the keynote:

> ". . . officials were virtually unanimous in the opinion that workers were basically satisfied, that union demands were usually 'frivolous' or 'unreasonable' . . . Relationships between officials and non-officials were improved to such an extent that it was no longer necessary for employers to send delegations to the Governor."[119]

The unions faced increasing repression from the courts and towards the end of the year they found the full weight of the law brought down on them with the right to strike itself brought into question. In October, Sir Harold Willan, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, ruled that a Chinese estate owner who had dismissed three women tappers for striking was legally justified. He set aside an earlier judgement of the Deputy Commissioner for Labour of Selangor and said that the women had broken their contract by absenting themselves from work. This was a direct attack on the right to strike and the message was not lost on the *Straits Times* which appeared the following day with the headline 'Dismissals for Striking Legal'.[120] In an editorial on the judgement it noted:

> "The Chinese estate proprietor in this case has thus established his legal right, and that of all employers in similar circumstances, to refuse to take back strikers."[121]

Dismissed strikers thus had no legal case against their employers. The lesson was not lost on unions or employers. For the unions, staging a strike was now far more difficult; no guarantee could be given that jobs would be given back on the resumption of work while strike leaders could be very easily victimised. Employers realised that they would have full police backing in dismissing and evicting striking employees. The rights of labour had been dealt a savage blow; as a PMFTU statement on the judgement observed:

> ". . . it is not unlike a bolt from the blue and has reduced them (trade unionists) to a state akin to disarmed soldiers."[122]

The Willan judgement had an almost immediate effect as a deterrent on strikes. Only six days after it, the Pan-Malayan Council of Government Workers which had previously been considering strike action in furtherance of a wage claim deferred a strike decision and decided to ask the Chief Secretary for an amendment to the law.[123] It boosted the morale of employers and was the signal for much tougher legal action against trade unionists. Indeed, the courts now became one of the major weapons in capital's attack on labour. The following month, S. Appadurai, vice-president of the Penang Federation of Trade Unions

and chairman of the Indian section of the Penang Harbour Labour Association, was arrested in the middle of a strike. An extremely able trade unionist, Appadurai was charged with intimidation for having written to an employer warning him against employing blacklegs. On this dubious intimidation charge, he was found guilty and sent to prison.[124] In January 1948, K. Vanivellu, secretary of the Kedah Federation of Rubber Workers' Unions, was arrested on a charge of criminal intimidation. The manager of the Pelam estate in Kedah had sacked 14 workers for striking in September and evicted them from their quarters on the estate. Vanivellu took up the workers' case and wrote to the manager asking him to reinstate the dismissed workers and pointing out that, if he did not, many of the remaining labourers might leave and seek employment elsewhere. On 28 January, Vanivellu was arrested without any previous warrant or notice and bail was refused. The letter was interpreted by the court as constituting intimidation and Vanivellu was found guilty of the charge. For this he was sentenced to eighteen months' rigorous imprisonment (hard labour).[125] The jailing of Vanivellu and Appadurai, two leading trade unionists, so soon after the Willan judgement, gave effective notice to the labour movement that its right to pursue strike action was in future seriously curtailed. Simultaneously with the repression of militants, the long drawn out stalemate in the rubber industry over labourers' wages came to an end. The employers had continued to refuse to recognise the Pan-Malayan Rubber Workers' Council (PMRWC) as a negotiating body. In February 1948 the position of the employers was reinforced by the decision of the registrar to refuse the PMRWC registration as a trade union. This decision, coupled with the collapse of union organisation in some areas such as Central Perak and Kedah because of employer and police intimidation, gave employers a free hand. The Malayan Planting Industries Employers' Association, having successfully avoided uniform national rates, now entered negotiations with unions in the state of Selangor. The result was a 25 per cent daily increase for labourers. In the circumstances it was the absolute minimum the employers could concede without risking a drift of labour from the estates. The increase in wages was also tied to changes in the tempo of work, the result of the increase being for many workers both longer hours and far harder work.[126] Taking advantage of the favourable terms of the agreement and the weakening of the trade unions, the MPIEA, the employers' organisation, proceeded unilaterally to enforce the agreement throughout Malaya from April 1948.

There is no doubt that, because of this offensive, by the beginning of 1948 employers had recovered, to a considerable extent, the position they had lost in the immediate post-war years. For the first time since

the occupation it looked as if the employers and not the unions held all the cards in their hands. The executive secretary of the MPIEA, C.D. Ahearne, reflected this newly-found optimism at a meeting of planters in early March, where he observed:

> "All conditions, economic and political, are now in our favour and we should in my opinion be most unwise were we to miss the tide now flowing so strongly in our favour."[127]

The meaning of Ahearne's statement for the PMFTU and labour could not have been clearer. In February registration had been refused to both the PMRWC and the Pan-Malayan Council of Government Workers, despite the fact that the Labour Department had previously recommended the formation of national negotiating bodies by labour. Simultaneously, the registrar took action to prevent the payment of affiliation fees to the Federations. A leading militant, Lu Cheng, recalled the position of the trade unions in early 1948:

> ". . . the wage increases granted by the government in 1947, after two years of bitter struggle by the workers, only raised wages to 92 per cent of the already inadequate level of 1941. The increase in the number of unemployed, the absence of any system of social insurance, the flagrant inadequacy of the Health Service, the introduction of savagely reactionary labour legislation, all these things combined to make the Malayan workers' situation even worse than under the [Japanese] occupation."[128]

All the attempts of the Federations throughout 1947 to establish country-wide bargaining systems, particularly in the rubber industry, had met with the utmost determination on the part of the employers to avoid formal recognition of the FTUs and any bodies associated with them. Instead, the employers' organisations preferred to enter local agreements which were generally on more favourable terms or even to determine wage increases unilaterally. The increasing victimisation of militants and the threat of dismissal and eviction that hung over estate labour inevitably weakened trade union organisation. This was especially true in Kedah and Central Perak. Trade union activity throughout the country became more difficult. The rigorous enforcement of the trespass law by police and employers made union organisation on estates much more difficult. The much-reduced subscriptions that affiliated trade unions paid to the FTUs and PMFTU meant that the strength and coherence of these bodies was reduced and cuts had to be made in the number of newspapers and broadsheets produced as well as staff employed by them. In short, by early 1948 labour had been put very much on the defensive and the conditions for free activity of trade unions were becoming increasingly difficult. Given these insurmountable barriers to labour activity and the increasing likelihood of a final assault by employers and government on labour organisation, trade

unionists, particularly those who sympathised with the Malayan Communist Party, were forced to think in terms of an armed rebellion. As Stenson has cogently argued, not to think along these lines by early 1948 would have been committting political suicide.[129] Revolt was the only path left open:

> ". . . preceding and subsequent events amply justified their fears that there was no real alternative to a British prison or the jungle."[130]

But even before the final plans for this course had been laid out, the employers and the Government had begun their final assault on Malayan trade unionism.

In April and May 1948 a new wave of labour unrest broke out in Malaya which was to be used as a *casus belli* by the Government for banning the PMFTU. The unrest involved estate labour in Selangor, Johore and Malacca, rubber factory workers in Singapore, dockers at Port Swettenham and tin miners in Selangor. All available means were used by the employers to break these strikes. At the beginning of April the workers at the Pulau Brani tin smelter in Singapore came out on strike. After two weeks they were all given 24 hours' notice and told to leave their houses.[131] The dockers' strike at Port Swettenham was broken by the employment of 200 Malay peasants as blacklegs.[132] Cases of police brutality were frequent. In Singapore police were used to reoccupy the Tai Thong rubber factory where the workers had been holding a sit-in strike; 40 of the workers were arrested for trespass and the following day 38 were sentenced to three months' rigorous imprisonment on this charge.[133] In strikes in the Slim River area of Perak 79 'undesirables' were evicted on two estates alone.[134] On 31 May the leading FTU organiser in Perak, R.G. Balan was arrested, together with four other unionists. The next day the Commissioner for Police warned of a general offensive against 'certain subversive reactionary (sic) organisations'.[135] This was coupled with a movement of detachments of Ghurka troops into Perak. By far the worst incident of the police campaign occurred at the Chan Kang Swee estate in Segamat, North Johore. Here the entire labour force had been dismissed by a new European management. The workers, however, refused to leave their quarters, took over the running of the estate and expelled the manager. The latter returned with 100 police, who in a baton charge against the labourers beat to death seven and injured ten others, without firing a shot or suffering any injuries themselves.[136] The Segamat incident was only the worst case in a wave of police action against striking workers. Arbitrary raids were carried out throughout the country against union premises and trade unionists were often intimidated by being locked up for a few days and then released. In the two

months of April and May 1948, eight workers were killed, 24 injured, and 73 imprisoned as a result of their campaign.[137] In Singapore even the traditional May Day demonstration was banned by the Government, the excuse given being that it would 'embarrass or inconvenience the Public'.[138]

This unrest was used by the Government, in its own words, to deliver the *coup de grace* to the organised labour movement.[139] This came in the form of amendments to the Trade Union Ordinance, quickly passed by the Federal Legislative Council on 31 May, which effectively banned the PMFTU, the SFTU and the state federations. The reason given for these amendments was the labour unrest of the preceding months. The Annual Report of the Malayan Labour Department for 1948 is illuminating on this. Many references are made to the presence of 'agitators' and communists (later to become 'bandits') in the leadership of the strikes and much is made of the intransigence and 'unreasonable' demands put forward by labour. Yet the same Report gives numerous examples of employer victimisation, of refusing to re-engage strikers, of the employment of scabs, the institution of eviction procedures and widespread wage reductions. Indeed, the only unfavourable comment passed on an employer is on one who raised the wages of his estate workers without consulting his fellow employers, this action being termed 'ill-considered'.[140] In reality, the amendments had little to do with the immediate events but had more to do with the long-term ambition of British imperialism to retain its hold on the Malayan peninsula. By 1948 it already knew that this aim was incompatible with the presence of a powerful labour movement. The removal of the latter had become a *sine qua non* to Britain's future control of Malaya's rich economy.

The Demise of Malayan Trade Unionism

The hurried passage of the amendments to the Trade Union Ordinance on 31 May in effect destroyed Malayan trade unionism. Never again would trade unionism be as strong as in the immediate post-war years, numerically or politically. The amendments were in three parts.[141] The first restricted trade union offices to persons who had a minimum of three years' experience in the industry concerned; the very nature of a colonial economy made this repressive. The seasonal and casual character of much of the work, the flow of people from job to job, particularly noticeable after the occupation, made it impossible to confine all workers within the narrow limits of craft unions catering for workers belonging to the same trade. Limiting trade union officials only to those working in a trade was also a clear incitement to dismissal and blacklisting of militants. Once a worker lost his job, or went on strike,

for by 1948 they were often the same thing, he was forced to resign his union post. If he could not obtain employment in the same industry elsewhere, as was likely, he lost his post for ever. In this way subservient unionists were ensured of inheriting the leading posts. The second amendment prevented people convicted of a criminal offence from holding trade union office; as it had become so easy to secure convictions against militant trade unionists in 1947 and 1948 this was in effect an attempt to fill the trade unions with the 'independent' (sic) protégés of Brazier, the Security Service and employers. The third amendment to the Ordinance prohibited federations of trade unions other than on an industrial or occupational basis. This outlawed the PMFTU and the state federations of unions even though their affiliates were all registered. These could no longer operate legally, even if they wanted to, as the *Straits Times* was quick to proclaim the day following the passing of the amendments.[142]

Events after this moved fast. On the fourth of June, police leave was cancelled in Kedah and Ghurka troops were drafted into Johore. The editor of *Min Sheng Pao*, a Communist Party daily, Liew Yit Fun, was arrested on charges of sedition on the ninth; these related to his newspaper's coverage of the Segamat massacre.[143] On 13 June the FTUs were refused registration and formally declared illegal. Thereafter a whole array of repressive measures was introduced by the Government using as an excuse the killing of three European planters on the fifteenth.[144] The PMFTU was banned, wide powers of arrest and deportation were granted to the police and a state of emergency was declared throughout the country. Widespread raids followed on trade union premises. On the night of 21 June raids were carried out in Penang on offices of the local FTU, the Harbour Labour Association, the Municipal and Government Union and the Malay Nationalist Party. In Kedah the premises of the Kulim Federation of Rubber Workers' Unions were raided and in Teluk Anson in Perak the premises of the Rubber Workers' Union, the Farmers' Association and the Forest Workers' Union. On this night alone 600 arrests, mostly of trade unionists, were made throughout Malaya.[115] It is not surprising that the number of strikes decreased markedly, as the *Financial Times* reported on the twenty-ninth:

> "The spread of lawlessness has had one unexpected effect . . . At the present time there are on strike only 1,004 workers from eight rubber estates and two tin mines, compared with 6,095 workers on 26 estates and mines 17 days ago."[146]

The figures for 1948 are even more revealing of the overall effect on labour of the 'emergency':

TABLE IV

Man-days lost as a result of strikes in Malaya for 1948

January	17,506	July	3,394
February	28,049	August	nil
March	10,514	September	348
April	12,773	October	250
May	178,634	November	1,317
June	117,154	December	525

Source: *Annual Report of the Labour Department of the Federation of Malaya for 1948*, p.85.

In Singapore, of the total of 19 strikes and 128,619 man-days lost in 1948, only two strikes representing a loss of 597 days were recorded after the Emergency Regulations came into force.[147] It is not always the case that a reduction in labour militancy is caused by repression of trade unionism. However, in Malaya this was manifestly the case. The strike waves certainly did not decrease because of great improvements in social conditions or wages. In fact, there was a noticeable tendency in the opposite direction and the conditions of Malayan workers, deprived of their trade unions, worsened after June 1948. With the amendments to the Trade Union Ordinance, and the introduction of the Emergency Regulations of June, employers had a field day, reversing the reforms won by labour in the post-war period and restoring the outlines of the pre-war restrictive and paternalist régime. The correspondent of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* observed in September:

> "The special emergency powers conferred on the police enabled them to round up many undesirable characters, while the few that escaped have gone underground so that with the disappearance of the intimidators (sic) all workers *returned to work on their employers' terms.* Not a single strike is in force at the moment so that maximum production is being obtained from the many plantations and mines which had experienced labour trouble in the past."[148] (My emphasis – MM)

A clearer indication of the strength of the employers after June could not be forthcoming.

With the trade unions removed from the scene, employers were effectively given a free hand to manage the economy as they saw fit. By the end of 1948 most trade unions had been suppressed and those 'independent' unions that remained were little more than staff associations or unions of government employees. They were thoroughly emasculated, easily controlled and purged of political ideas and they could do little to stem the tide of events. A report of the International Labour Organisation later acknowledged that

> ". . . these bodies were . . . mainly house or company unions organised on a craft basis and having little contact with the mass of underprivileged workers."[149]

Employers eagerly seized their opportunity of pushing through measures which the strength of the organised labour movement had hitherto prevented them from doing. In many industries there were wage cuts, redundancies, and a withdrawal of previously granted privileges. In Singapore the Annual Report recorded

> ". . . a tendency for wages to fall. This was particularly noticeable in the closing months when many employers withdrew special concessions and allowances hitherto paid and also in some cases gave notices of reductions in piece rates."[150]

An increase in unemployment of over 6,000 was also recorded. To ascribe this to purely economic causes as the Government tried to do[151] was mere justification of the employers' actions. It is more than clear that had the trade unions still existed they would have vigorously fought these attacks on workers' conditions, as they had successfully fought attacks on workers' conditions in earlier years.[152] Now that the unions were no longer able to protect the workers the employers did as they pleased. Indeed, so extensive were the wage cuts that even the Government voiced some disquiet. The Governor of Singapore, referring to the wage reductions, said employers were taking advantage of the situation, hastening to add: 'I do not wish, in any way, to imply that these reductions may not be necessary . . . '.[153]

For estate labour, conditions were even worse. Gamba has painted a grim picture of conditions in his works.[154] Dismissals and evictions were frequent for those who had ever dared to raise their voices in protest against management or been active in the trade union movement. Workers were afraid of belonging to trade unions, even of the 'independent' variety, because of the consequences they risked:

> ". . . the average Indian and Chinese estate worker was convinced that the Government would regard anyone attempting to organise workers or to make active demands on employers as a Communist agent."[155]

Intimidatory practices, made all the more easy by the granting of the honorary rank of police inspector to planters and mine-owners, were frequent. Conditions were particularly bad for Chinese labour because of the association in the authorities' eyes between Communists and Chinese in general. Following the declaration of the 'Emergency' virtually all the Chinese-speaking officers of the Labour Department were transferred to the Security Service thus reducing considerably the number of inspections carried out on mines and estates.[156] Nor were conditions noticeably different in 1949. Large-scale redundancies continued

to occur without labour being able to ameliorate its position. In Singapore some 4,000 rubber factory workers, 1,000 workers in the sago industry and large numbers of workers in private industries lost their jobs. Wage rates, too, fell rapidly, as the Annual Report laconically notes: 'The general wage tendency throughout the year was towards reduction'.[157] It went on to report wage decreases in the oil milling industry, in transport, and on the docks, side by side with an increase in unemployment. Purges of 'undesirable elements' continued in both Malaya and Singapore. The confidence of employers in the post-Emergency period was reflected in a statement by the Chairman of Tronoh Mines Ltd. at its AGM in 1949 when he noted:

> "No serious difficulties with labour were experienced, and it is significant that this happy state of affairs (sic) should have existed when so far as our labour was concerned there were no trade unions in existence."[158]

What this 'happy state of affairs' in effect meant was that the whole social atmosphere after the introduction of the 'Emergency' was hostile to organised labour. In 1950 the Commissioner for Labour for Selangor could publicly state that 'nothing should be done to encourage Chinese workers to join trade unions until the bandits have been eliminated'.[159] One of the few strikes of 1949, at the offices of the *Malay Mail*, is illustrative of the pressures that labour faced even when organised into 'independent' unions. The strike arose from the dismissal of two lino-operators who just happened to be the President and Secretary of the Union. A strike ensued involving 25 of the 33 workers employed by the *Mail*. The management refused to reinstate the two sacked men, dismissed a further 13 workers and began hiring blacklegs to take their place. The company then announced that its workers 'with every encouragement from the company, would now set up a "closed" union of their own, and that they would no longer be a prey to "outside influences"'.[160] The only comment of the Labour Department on this strike was that 'the company had held all the cards and had played them masterfully'.[161] Similar instances were reported elsewhere. When workers at the Hume Pipe Co. in Singapore who were members of the Singapore Chinese Engineers' Association (pro-Kuomintang) threatened to strike they were subjected to all manner of threats from the employers. According to the *Malayan Tribune* the management is quoted as having written to the Association:

> "We trust that it is not necessary for us to call in the Security Department, but they are definitely interested. We have a file of fingerprints and photographs of all workmen."[162]

Although the Governor-General had announced soon after the introduction of the Emergency that now was the time to build up 'good

industrial relations' (sic),[163] everything possible was done to discourage free trade union activity. The Emergency Regulations had given the Government powers which turned Malaya into a virtual police state.[164] Under Regulation 4 the Governor was given unlimited powers to legislate as he saw fit. Regulation 7 gave the police the right to disperse any meeting of five or more workers. In connection with this regulation, Brazier in October advised trade unions that they should inform police in advance of trade union meetings in order 'to lessen the possibility of the meeting being interrupted'.[165] Under Section 3 of the Regulations, strikes were strictly illegal without giving the employer 14 days' notice. In addition, strike notices had to be accompanied by seven signatures – thus making victimisation of strike leaders even easier. Penalties of imprisonment could be incurred for striking without giving due notice in writing, for instigating illegal strikes, and for sympathy strikes. In May 1949 the Trade Disputes Ordinance (No.4) was enacted, which deprived labour even of the right to strike after 14 days' notice. It laid down a penalty for a breach of contract of service, resulting in the interruption of 'the efficient operation of any public health service, or (causing) serious bodily injury, or (exposing) valuable property . . . to destruction or serious damage'. Further, the definition of 'public utility service' read

> ". . . any industry, government undertaking or service which the High Commissioner in Council may, if satisfied that public emergency or public interest so requires, by notification in the Gazette declare to be a public utility service for the purposes of this Ordinance."[166]

Provision was also made for the introduction of the Eviction of Estate Workmen Ordinance, the object of this piece of labour legislation being to 'provide simple and expeditious machinery for the ejectment of estate workmen'.[167] This consolidation of reactionary labour legislation was accompanied by continuous repression of those who had taken an active part in the struggle against employers and Government before June 1948. Already by September 1948 no fewer than 185 leading trade unionists had been imprisoned. In May 1949 the former President of the PMFTU, S.A. Ganapathy, was hanged for being in possession of a gun. The next day the vice-president of the PMFTU, Veerasenam, followed him to the gallows.[168] Hanrahan has calculated the number of deportations from Malaya in 1949 at more than 10,000.[169] Actions such as these played an important role in terrorising labour into submission in the post-Emergency period.

The whole apparatus of repressive legislation, concluding with the Emergency Regulations, was designed to smash the organised labour movement in Malaya. The workers were left disarmed and hopelessly enmeshed once again in the authoritarian-paternalist régime that im-

perialism sought to reconstruct in Malaya. It is no exaggeration to say that the attack on the trade unions was characterised by an unparalleled ferocity, matched in European experience only by the assault of fascism on the labour movement. Purcell, who himself had recommended a tougher policy against labour in 1946, was shocked to find on his return to Malaya in 1952 a virtual police state:

> "There was no human activity from the cradle to the grave that the police did not superintend. No-one opened his mouth to speak to the smallest group without the knowledge that he was overheard. A wedding, a funeral, a committee meeting were incomplete without the detective in plain clothes."[170]

Needless to say, the effects of this repression were felt most by the labour movement. Between April and September 1948, according to the Government's own figures, trade union membership fell more than 50 per cent from 154,434 to 75,504.[171] The collapse was probably even greater than these figures suggest, as they are based only on registered trade unions. During the same period the number of trade unions fell from 289 to 162. But the fall in trade union membership did not stop in 1948. In Singapore trade union membership fell by a further 25,000 in 1949 and there were 24 fewer unions at the end of the year than at the beginning.[172] The fall in Malaya was even more catastrophic. Whilst in January trade union membership had been 70,037 it had sunk to 42,288 by December. During the period December 1947-December 1949 trade union membership in Malaya fell by no less than 78 per cent.[173] Of the 169 unions still in existence in December 1949 six were employers' unions with a membership of approximately 1,000, while 70 were closed unions of government employees with a membership of 20,142. Even an 'independent' union such as the All-Malaya Railways Workers' Union had seen its membership drop in 1949 from 5,000 to a mere 1,717. In effect only about 20,000 workers were unionised out of a total labour force of 479,707. An anomalous feature of the trade union scene in that year was that the number of unions actually increased from 162 to 169. Although no explanation was offered for this, it is clear that in this period of Government-sponsored trade unionism it was all too easy to set up trade unions but it was quite a different story when it came to filling them with workers. If one discounted the number of workers on whom direct and indirect pressure was exercised to secure their membership in trade unions, the proportion of workers who voluntarily joined unions was infinitesimal. On the other side of the coin, with labour organisations smashed and demand for rubber and tin rising as a result of the Korean war, capital in Malaya profited as never before. In December 1949 large profits were announced by four leading British-owned tin mines, dividends averaging 60 per cent. Petaling Tin Co. announced a

dividend of 100 per cent for the year ending October 1949, with gross profits jumping from £361,282 to £582,656. The dividends paid out by Southern Tronoh Tin Dredging increased from 50 per cent to 80 per cent (equivalent to about 36 per cent on capital invested including profits ploughed back). Bekoh Consolidated Rubber declared a dividend of 10 per cent with net profit trebling from £11,766 to £36,010 on a crop one-tenth lower than that of the previous year.[174] Nor was this an exceptional year. In 1952 most tin companies declared dividends in the region of 75 per cent, many around 100 per cent and one a staggering 272 per cent – having placed $1½ million to reserve! In the same year rubber company dividends averaged 50-60 per cent.[175] Labour, deprived of organisation, did not share in this remarkable prosperity.

What was left of the trade union movement after 1948 was remoulded and its spirit and independence entirely crippled in order to fit in with the long-term objective of British imperialism, namely, the retention of Malaya as a 'dollar-earning arsenal' and source of raw materials after independence.[176] The PMFTU and its predecessor, the PMGLU, had supplied labour with organisers, clerks, interpreters, assistance in formulating claims, attending to negotiations etc. – services of which labour was now deprived. The destruction of the PMFTU, of the organisational head of the Malayan trade union movement, inevitably meant that labour's struggle against employers and state was left uncoordinated and – even worse – those unions still in existence saw themselves as being in competition with each other. In this atmosphere, the possibilities of communal competition and conflict were exacerbated. Encouragement was given to unions of Indians only, as there was a 'responsible' leadership in this community, namely the Malayalam professional class. If the British in their propaganda professed that they desired unity of the races in Malaya it was most decidedly unity at the top of the social pyramid. The Government, the employers and the Malay feudal leaders of UMNO were at one in their desire not to see a multiracial labour force emerge again. This much was clear even to Purcell:

> "When the progressive elements came together, as they were allowed to before the Emergency controls were imposed, they showed a strong sense of having problems in common . . . in many respects, the communal elements showed a much better disposition to compromise on inter-communal questions than were evinced by their middle-class counterparts who have been occupying the stage without competition since . . . "[177]

There was no chance of real unity in Malaya, of developing common national consciousness, as long as the working class was deprived of its coordinating body and its political representation. The socio-political identity of any working class is first and foremost incarnate in its trade unions. It experiences itself as a class only through its collective in-

stitutions, of which the most elementary one is the trade union. The destruction of the Malayan labour movement in the years 1945-48 meant that the British were able successfully to determine the structure of communal politics that has prevailed in Malaya ever since.

FOOTNOTES

1. See G.Lee, "Commodity Production and Reproduction amongst the Malayan Peasantry", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol.3, no.4 (1973).
2. W. Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, New Haven, 1967, p.72.
3. For the early history of the Malayan working class, see M.R. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948*, London, 1970, pp. 11-37; J.N.Parmer, *Colonial Labour Policy and Administration: a History of Labour in the Rubber Industry in Malaya* c 1910-1941, New York, 1960; W.L. Blythe, 'Historical Sketch of Chinese Labour in Malaya', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol.XX, no.4, December 1947; P.P. Pillai (ed), *Labour in South-East Asia*, New Delhi, 1947, pp.139-163; C. Gamba, *The Origins of Trade Unionism In Malaya: a Study in Colonial Labour Unrest*, Singapore, 1962, pp.1-15; V. Thompson, *Labour Problems in Southeast Asia*, New York, 1947, pp.62-108.
4. Stenson, *op.cit.*, p.7; W. Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, p.54.
5. Stenson, *op.cit.*, p.15.
6. Ibid., p.15.
7. G.Z. Hanrahan, *The Communist Struggle in Malaya*, New York, 1954, p.22, and R.K. Jain, *South Indians on the Plantation Frontier in Malaya*, New Haven, 1970, p.319.
8. Gamba, *op.cit.*, p.4.
9. Tan Cheng Lock, *Malayan Problems from a Chinese Point of View*, ed. C.A. Lee, Singapore, 1947, p.45; Chin Kee Onn, *Malaya Upside Down*, Singapore, 1946.
10. See in particular Jain, *op.cit.*, ch.7.
11. *Ibid.*, pp.297-314. In some ways the estate staff were caught between two stools. If they were not tough with the labourers there was the possibility production would fall, thus inviting retaliation from the Japanese. There were many cases of the latter beating up estate staff for being too lax(!) with the labourers.
12. Stenson, *op.cit.*, p.63, and Jain, *op.cit.*, pp.303-304.
13. Such as Tan Cheng Lock.
14. F.S.V. Donnison, *British Military Administration in the Far East*, London, 1956, pp.332-333.
15. V. Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?* London, 1954, p.172.
16. G. and J. Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, New York, 1972, p.61.
17. *Ibid.*, pp.61-63. As the Kolkos show, this is exactly what the Americans wanted. Indeed, they saw the loan as the first step in prising open the British Empire to US investment and trade.
18. *Malayan Monitor*, March 1948.
19. *Annual Report of the Federation of Malaya for 1948*, Introduction.
20. House of Commons, 15 September 1948, cited by *Malayan Monitor*, November 1948: This is further affirmed in interviews given by Lord Ogmore and Malcolm MacDonald to G. Sweeney, *Political Parties in Singapore*, M.A. Thesis, University of Hull, 1973.
21. *British Malaya*, August 1949, p.xviii.
22. *Straits Times* (Singapore), 16 April 1947.
23. J. de V. Allen, *The Malayan Union*, New Haven, 1967, p.8.

24. The Kolkos, *op.cit.*, p.74.
25. *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 October 1948.
26. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, 1963, p.444.
27. *Annual Report of the Colony of Singapore for 1946*, pp.72-74. Hereafter referred to as SAR followed by year.
28. *SAR 1947*, p.9.
29. *Ibid.*, pp.79-80.
30. *Ibid.*, p.80.
31. *A Social Survey of Singapore: a preliminary study of some aspects of social conditions in the municipality of Singapore*, December 1947, Singapore Department of Social Welfare, pp.74-75, 81, 82-83.
32. *Straits Times*, 14 April 1947. Hereafter referred to as ST.
33. *ST*, 1 May 1947.
34. Patrick O'Donovan in *The Observer*, 10 October 1948. See also G. Netto, *Indians in Malaya: Historical Facts and Figures*, Singapore, 1962, pp.72-82, on post-war conditions of Indian estate labour.
35. Gamba, *Origins*, pp.302-303.
36. V. Purcell, *Memoirs of a Malayan Official*, London, 1965, p.350; on the BMA's corruption see also Gamba, *Origins*, p.45.
37. *Keesings Contemporary Archives 1943-46*, 8246A; *SAR 1946*, pp.11-12.
38. *Annual Report of the Malayan Union Labour Department* 1946, p.10.
39. *SAR 1946*, p.37.
40. *SAR 1947*, pp.74-76.
41. *SAR 1947*, p.69, and *Annual Report of the Malayan Union Labour Department for 1947*, p.23.
42. *Ibid.*, p.30.
43. *A Social Survey of Singapore*, pp.97-98.
44. *SAR 1946*, p.63. In Malaya in 1948 only 34 per cent of Chinese children were receiving any kind of education, *Annual Report of the Federation of Malaya for 1948*, p.74. Hereafter MAR.
45. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol.III, No.1, p.15 (1947).
46. *Labour and Trade Union Organisation in the Federation of Malaya and Singapore*, report by S.S. Awberry and F.W. Dalley, London 1948, p.5.
47. M.P. Rajagopal, an 'independent' unionist in the Federal Legislative Council, *ST*, 9 June 1948.
48. *ST*, 22 September, 30 September and 7 October 1947.
49. *ST*, 25 April 1947.
50. *ST*, 21 January and 17 March 1947.
51. *ST*, 2 July 1948.
52. Stenson, op.cit., pp.173-76.
53. *British Malaya*, May 1946, p.13.
54. V. Thompson, *op.cit.*, p.111; *Times* (London) 21 November 1945.
55. *ST*, 28 December 1945; *New York Times*, 27 December 1945.
56. *Times*, 30 January 1946.
57. V. Purcell, *Chinese in Malaya*, p.272.
58. F.S.V. Donnison, *op.cit.*, pp.389-391; *Daily Worker* (London) 30 January 1946; *ST*, 5 February 1946; Stenson, *op.cit.*, pp.74-76.
59. Even Stenson for instance, *op.cit.*, p.78.
60. See Purcell, *Chinese in Malaya*, pp.249-251.
61. Donnison, *op.cit.*, p.393; *ST* 16 and 18 February 1946. It is interesting to note that the Trade Union Adviser, J. Brazier, supported these arrests and the subsequent banishing of ten trade unionists; *Daily Worker*, 18 April 1946; Gamba, *Origins*, pp.189-90.
62. Lu Cheng, 'Report on the Trade Union Movement in Malaya' in *World Trade Union Movement*, December 1949, p.37.
63. Stenson, *op.cit.*, p.101.
64. *New York Times*, 12 August 1946; Stenson, *op.cit.*, p.96.
65. *Annual Report of the Labour Department of Singapore for 1947*, p.45. In

Malaya the number of Malay manual labourers increased from 25,896 in December 1938 to more than 78,000 by December 1947. *MAR 1947*, pp.6-7. According to the *annual report of the Trade Union Registry for 1947*, Malays formed 5 per cent of the unionised workers (p.11).

66. Cited in the *Malayan Monitor*, June 1948.
67. Jain, *op.cit.*, pp.309-311.
68. Gamba, *Origins*, p.204 and p.292.
69. See Awberry and Dalley, *op.cit.*, p.30, who refer to PMGLU leaders as 'mere ignorant mischief makers', and p.43 *ibid.*
70. *British Malaya*, September 1946, p.69.
71. *SAR 1946*, p.14.
72. Stenson, *op.cit.*, p.104.
73. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol.II, No.11, 12 March 1947, p.140; Gamba, *Origins*, p.38; Stenson, *op.cit.*, pp.114-118.
74. M.R. Stenson, *Repression and Revolt: the Origins of the 1948 Communist Insurrection in Malaya and Singapore*, Ohio University, 1969, p.3; *Annual Review of the Labour Department of the Malayan Union*, 1946, p.32.
75. W. Fletcher, MP, House of Commons, cited by *Manchester Guardian*, 9 July 1948.
76. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict*, pp.73-74.
77. *Manchester Guardian*, 21 October 1945; and *Times*, 23 October 1945.
78. G.Z. Hanrahan, *op.cit.*, pp.54-55.
79. *Times*, 23 October and 26 October 1945.
80. *Times*, 18 December and 5 November 1945.
81. *SAR 1946*, p.41.
82. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict*, pp.83-84.
83. Purcell, *Chinese in Malaya*, p.270.
84. *SAR 1946*, p.14.
85. For an expose of the role of these men see J. Woddis, *The Mask is Off: an Examination of Trade Union Advisers in the British Colonies*, London, 1954. The whole patronising ethos behind the enthusiasm with which the TUC embraced the needs of British imperialism is illustrated by a Fabian pamphlet by Walter Bowen, *Colonial Trade Unions*, London, 1947, p.22 '. . . there are still far too many colonies who have not the "know-how" of trade unionism. It is unfortunate that there is not in any territory . . . a sufficiently informed trade union membership. It is here that the more advanced movements of the industrial countries can be of help.'
86. See Gamba, *Origins*, and R. Palme Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire*, London, 1953, p.371.
87. The Trade Union Adviser to Singapore, S.P. Garrett, had more sympathy for the workers' cause and to his credit resigned in June 1947 when he saw the extent of the offensive by employers and Government against the unions. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict*, p.135.
88. S.P. Garrett, "Report on Employers and Workers Associations, Colony of Singapore", mimeo, n.d., p.4 and 17, in *F.W. Dalley Papers*, Microtexts 1193-96, University of Hull. See also Garrett's "Report on Industrial and Social Unrest". I am most grateful to George Sweeeney for bringing my attention to the *Dalley Papers*. On his decision to resign, Garrett wrote, '. . . (it was) clearcut as I either had to remain true to Labour and trades union principles and international obligations and resign, or be false to those principles and remain", 'Industrial and Social Unrest', p.11.
89. *MAR 1947*, p.11.
90. Gamba, *Origins*, p.381.
91. Registration in the UK had never been compulsory. The fact that it was in the colonies was criticised by the Fabian Society, *Labour in the Colonies*, Fabian Research series no.61, 1942.
92. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict*, p.135.
93. *ST*, 17 March 1947.
94. *Ibid.*
95. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict*, pp.142-5 and pp.91-2. In Kedah, for instance,

Brazier worked in conjunction with the Security Service and the employers to try to establish 'independent' (sic) unions.

96. *ST*, 2 April 1947.
97. *ST*, 3 March 1947.
98. J.J. Puthucheary, *Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy*, Singapore, 1960, p.47.
99. *ST*, 3 February 1947.
100. *Singapore, Labour Department Annual Review*, 1947, Table XIV.
101. *ST*, 29 January 1947.
102. *Daily Worker*, 13 May 1947.
103. *ST*, 1 March 1947, and *Times*, 1 March 1947.
104. *ST*, 5 and 8 March 1947.
105. *ST*, 3 June 1947.
106. Cited by Gamba, *Origins*, p.294; see also *The Findings of the Board of Inquiry into the Kedah Incidents*, Ta Chung Press, Kuala Lumpur, n.d., in *Dalley Papers*.
107. *MAR 1947*, p.7 and p.94.
108. *British Malaya*, May 1947, p.193.
109. *Financial Times* (London), 25 March 1947.
110. Netto, *op.cit.*, p.78.
111. *ST*, 3 May 1947.
112. *ST*, 29 September 1947.
113. *ST*, 26 June and 2 July 1947.
114. *ST*, 7 October 1947.
115. *SAR 1947*, p.29.
116. *Annual Report of the Labour Department of Singapore for 1947*, p.23.
117. *Ibid.*, p.42.
118. *Ibid.*, 1948, table XIV, and *Annual Report of the Labour Department of the Malayan Union*, 1947, Table X.
119. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict*, p.165.
120. *ST*, 22 October 1947.
121. *ST*, 24 October 1947.
122. *ST*, 11 November 1947.
123. *ST*, 27 October 1947. *The Annual Report of the Malayan Union for 1947* noted that 'the Willan Judgement which clearly stated that, under the existing Labour code, labourers employed in agreement, who went on strike, automatically broke their agreement, did much to discourage irresponsible strike action' p.8.
124. *ST*, 24 December 1947.
125. *ST*, 25 February 1947; *Malayan Monitor*, April 1948.
126. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict*, p.187.
127. MPIEA, Proceedings of Council Meetings, 3 March 1948, cited by Stenson, *Industrial Conflict*, p.191.
128. Lu Cheng, *op.cit.*, p.37.
129. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict*, Ch.XI, and also his *The 1948 Communist Revolt in Malaya: a Note on Historical Sources and Interpretation*, Institute of South-East Asian Studies, Singapore, Occasional Paper No.9. G. Sweeney, *Political Parties in Singapore*, M.A. Thesis, University of Hull 1973, ch.6
130. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict*, p.229.
131. *ST*, 16 April 1948.
132. *ST*, 17 May 1948.
133. *ST*, 25 and 26 May 1948.
134. *ST*, 28 May 1948.
135. *ST*, 1 June 1948.
136. *ST*, 2 June 1948; *Times*, 2 June 1948; *Annual Report of the Labour Department for Malaya*, 1948, p.48; Gamba, *Origins*, p.339.
137. *Malayan Monitor*, June 1948.
138. *SAR 1948*, p.9.
139. *MAR 1948*, p.182.

140. *Annual Report of the Labour Department of the Malayan Union*, 1948, pp.37-41.
141. *Ibid.*, pp.33-34; *MAR 1948*, pp.12-13.
142. *ST*, 1 June 1948.
143. The *Ming Sheng Pao* had been taken over by the MCP only in June. This was hardly the action of a party about to launch an armed rebellion, as the Government later tried to prove.
144. The Government charged the Communists with responsibility for this incident. There were, however, many armed bands in the area, some just plain bandits, others belonging to the pro-KMT, Malayan Overseas Chinese Self-Defence Army. See H. Miller, *The Menace in Malaya*, London 1954, pp.74ff.
145. *ST*, 22 June 1948.
146. *Financial Times*, 29 June 1948.
147. *Malayan Monitor*, February 1949.
148. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol.V, No.11, p.242, 9 September 1948.
149. *The Trade Union Situation in the Federation of Malaya*. Report of a Mission from the International Labour Office, Geneva, 1962, p.28.
150. *SAR 1948*, p.30.
151. *SAR 1948*, p.33.
152. *The Annual Report of the Singapore Labour Department for 1947* noted that 'the unions have tried throughout the year, with considerable success, to prevent any employer from dismissing any of his employees even when there is insufficient work for them' p.42.
153. *ST*, 18 August 1948.
154. See his *Origins*, Ch.IX and Ch.X, and also his *National Union of Plantation Workers* Ch.II, Singapore, 1962.
155. *The Trade Union Situation in Malaya*, ILO Report, *op.cit.*, p.32.
156. *Annual Report of the Labour Department for the Federation of Malaya 1948, pp.18-19.*
157. *SAR 1949*, p.32.
158. *Malayan Monitor*, October-November 1949.
159. Gamba, *Origins*, p.368.
160. *Annual Report of the Labour Department of the Federation of Malaya* 1949, p.30.
161. *Ibid.*
162. *Malaya Tribune*, 4 November 1948, cited *Malayan Monitor*, October-November 1949, p.6.
163. *Malayan Monitor*, August 1948.
164. *The Emergency Regulations Ordinance 1948*, Singapore, 1951.
165. *ST*, 23 October 1948.
166. *Annual Report of the Labour Department of the Federation of Malaya* 1949, pp.50-54.
167. *Ibid.*, p.57.
168. *Malayan Monitor*, May 1949.
169. Hanrahan, *op.cit.*, p.65.
170. Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?*, p.14.
171. *MAR 1948*, pp.13-15.
172. *SAR 1949*, p.34.
173. *Annual Report of the Labour Department of the Federation of Malaya* 1949, p.2; Gamba, *Origins*, p.365.
174. *Malayan Monitor*, February 1950 and October 1950.
175. Woddis, *op.cit.*, p.30; Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?*, p.148; Gamba, *National Union of Plantation Workers*, p.45, noted that the average rubber worker brought home 15lbs of dry rubber per day, 'the employer now gets over M$30, out of which the worker, on an average, earns only a figure of less than M$2'.
176. On trade unions in the fifties see J.N. Parmer, 'Trade Unions and Politics in Malaya', *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol.XXIV, No.3, March 1955; C. Gamba, *National Union of Plantation Workers;* Alex Josey, *Trade Unionism in Malaya*, Singapore, 1954, pp.25ff; M. Rudner, Malayan Labour in Transition:

Labour Policy and Trade Unionism, 1955-63, *Modern Asian Studies*, 7, 1, (1973) pp.21-45. The decline of trade unionism is vividly illustrated in the strike figures for 1946-51, which show a massive reduction over six years.

STRIKES AND STOPPAGES OF WORK
Man-days lost as at December each year

	1946	*1947*	*1948*	*1949*	*1950*	*1951*
Malaya	476,101	696,036	370,464	5,390	37,067	41,365
Singapore	845,637	492,708	128,657	7,074	4,692	20,640

Source: Gamba, *Origins*, p.288.

177. Purcell, *op.cit.*, p.145.

Singapore, 1945-57

George Sweeney

In comparison with other Southeast Asian countries, a nationalist movement was relatively slow to develop in Malaya. However Singapore, with its long established working class and middle class was naturally more politically advanced and this relative maturity was reflected in the existence of a radical or revolutionary nationalist movement. That is, there existed in Singapore, prior to the last war, a movement which was both anti-colonial and radical or revolutionary in content, and genuinely Malayan in aspiration.[2] Although its impact had been limited, it was still sufficiently strong to compel the British to introduce repressive measures designed to cope with the new threat.[3]

It was hardly surprising, then, that following upon the Japanese surrender and the British re-occupation, the movement re-appeared spontaneously in a far more extensive form. As had been the case before the war, the leading role in the movement was taken by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) which could justly claim to be the oldest Malayan nationalist organisation.[4] Certainly it was to play a crucial rôle in the emergence of a militant trade union movement which possessed a revolutionary nationalist perspective. Both the unions and the MCP had a traditional working-class base but the post-war nationalist movement in Singapore also began to touch racial groups and social classes which until then had been relatively a-political. Almost overnight there appeared a host of parties and organisations, like for example the Malayan Democratic Union (MDU),[5] which not only had nationalist objectives but also drew membership and support from the English-educated middle class. It seems likely that the MCP played a part in the formation of groups like the MDU in accordance with its united front strategy but one cannot doubt that they were evidence of a spontaneous Malayan nationalism which was no less intense for being late developed. Given the rather complex racial, linguistic and class character of Malaya, the post-war nationalist movement was highly fragmented but for a

short period in Singapore it did show signs of coalescing under the leadership of the MCP. In part this was due to the latter's united front strategy but it was also a product of increasingly repressive British policies. This was the movement's fundamental weakness. Unity did not grow naturally but had to be forced on the movement by the logic of British policies.

The nature of these repressive policies was obviously related to the abortive Malayan Union scheme and its successor the Federation of Malaya. However they also had a purely Singapore dimension deriving from the exclusion of the island from both schemes.[6] There was probably no single motive inducing the British to separate Singapore from Malaya. Obviously the racial 'balance' of the projected Malayan Union was a consideration[7] and one might also argue that it was an attempt to isolate the most potentially revolutionary part of Malaya or that it was another illustration of the traditional colonialist divide-and-rule tactic.[8] Undoubtedly however the most important British motive was the island's strategic importance. Crucial though the dollar-earning industries of Malaya were to post-war British economic recovery,[9] Singapore had a geopolitical importance in the structure of Western imperialist interests in Southeast Asia which gave it a more than purely Malayan significance. Two conclusions logically followed from this premise. First – the British were determined to retain direct control over Singapore as a strategic military base for as long as possible almost regardless of the constitutional fate of the remainder of Malaya. Second – they were equally determined to crush any attempts to challenge their control.

The British saw the nationalist movement in Singapore as a threat to their interests and sought to emasculate it by a combination of direct repression and cynical political manipulation. Direct repression was reserved for the most potent threat to British interests – a militant industrial working class under the leadership of the MCP. Prior to the war a virile trade union movement had emerged in Singapore. Initially the British responded with arrests and banishment but when these did not work two Trade Union Ordinances were passed in 1940 with the objective of depriving the unions of their wider political functions and restricting their activities to economic disputes.[10] The movement was ruthlessly suppressed by the Japanese but spontaneously re-emerged in the conditions of intense economic dislocation in the period after their surrender. Because it was a revolutionary party and instinctively recognising its potential, the MCP successfully placed itself at the head of the re-emerging movement in the expectation that it could be guided in a particular direction.

The most important organisations it was instrumental in creating

were the Singapore General Labour Union (SGLU) and its successor in August 1946 the Singapore Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU). Under their leadership, the Singapore workers engaged in a wave of militant industrial action which did much to defend working-class living stan dards which had undoubtedly fallen even from their low pre-war level. Until early 1947 militancy was aimed at winning wage increases to compensate for rapid inflation and after this it was largely concerned with defending earlier gains. Militancy, however, was not simply confined to economic objectives but extended to include wider political aims. In other words, from the beginning the unions were the industrial arm of a wider nationalist movement and were continuously mobilised in support of its objectives.

The British accepted the inevitability of unionism, but their policy was designed to crush the indigenous movement and substitute an emasculated version which would offer no real threat to their interests.[11] The only official to resist this policy out of a genuine sympathy for the indigenous movement (S.P. Garrett, the Singapore Assistant Trade Union Adviser) was relentlessly squeezed out of office.[12] The methods chosen for repression were direct confrontation, arrest and banishment. The crucial confrontations were precipitated by a series of disputes beginning with a major strike in the Singapore Harbour Board in January 1948. Wholesale arrests of SFTU officials during April and increasingly blatant co-operation between the police and employers defeated a number of existing and projected stoppages. The decapitated SFTU suffered a final defeat and collapse when a projected May Day demonstration was banned. By this time the indigenous trade union movement lay in ruins and the nationalist movement, but particularly the MCP, had suffered a catastrophic defeat.[13]

Until the end of 1946, the political wing of the nationalist movement remained fragmented in a multitude of groups that had developed following the British re-occupation. Largely because of this fragmentation and relative immaturity, these groups exhibited no coherent sense of strategy beyond a shared belief that Malaya – including Singapore – ought to proceed to some form of self-government or independence. Had the MCP not been so pre-occupied with building up the trade union movement, it is likely that as the oldest Malayan nationalist party it could have given a lead. However by the time it did so late in 1946, the movement came into conflict with a substantial proportion of the Malay population under UMNO as well as the British.

The story of the Malayan Union and its successor the Federation has been told above. What is important for this analysis is that the fragmented nationalist groups first came together in a Council of Joint Action in Singapore in December 1946. This provided the model

which was subsequently adhered to by the Malayan-wide fronts, the All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA) and *Pusat Tenaga Ra'ayat* (PUTERA). Throughout 1947 they mounted an energetic campaign of public meetings, protests and demonstrations. The immediate issue was the travesty of 'consultations' offered by the British to groups other than UMNO. Around the issue the front was able to crystalise a genuine nationalist movement which could claim support from every class and every community and which was capable of producing something of the character of the 'People's Constitution'.[14] The most spectacular demonstration of the extent of the movement's appeal was the nationwide *hartal* held in November 1947. It is worth noting that the stoppage was most complete and effective in Singapore.

Paradoxically, the success of the *hartal* was to contribute to the demise of the AMCJA-PUTERA front. Certain in the support of UMNO, the British had met its challenge head-on and survived. It was clear that they were not prepared to make any concessions of substance unless the campaign was pressed in a still more militant form. Frightened of the consequences, the Right gradually withdrew its support and the front disintegrated.[15] Its demise as an effective political force was manifest when a second *hartal* called in February 1948 failed except for a partial stoppage in Singapore.[16] Its collapse was a severe blow to the MCP because although it had never formally joined the front, there is little doubt that the Party had been the main moving spirit behind its formation. The simultaneous final assault on the trade union movement meant that by April-May 1948, the MCP's united front strategy lay in ruins.

The events of 1945-8 had measured the appeal of radical and revolutionary Malayan nationalism in Singapore and the strategy employed then of basing the movement on the power of the industrial working class was to be employed by nationalists again during the 1950s. At the same time the events had illustrated the ruthless determination of the British to hold Singapore for as long as possible and the vulnerability of the movement to their repressive measures. The events of April and May had temporarily destroyed the movement in Singapore and the Emergency made an immediate recovery impossible. When this became a possibility in the early 1950s, the Left was faced with the difficulty of re-building a shattered movement capable of winning independence without inviting British repression.

The situation they then faced in Singapore had changed in three important respects. First, the MCP – which until 1948 had been permitted to operate openly – was declared an illegal organisation and therefore subject to intense police harassment. For the greater part of its existence the Party had been an illegal organisation and accordingly

skilled in the art of clandestine operation but inevitably it could no longer provide the open leadership it had given in the immediate post-war period.[17] Second, the separation of Singapore from the mainland increasingly became more than an administrative and constitutional arrangement as the island developed into a separate polity with a dynamic of its own. Inevitably this meant that although the Left nationalists still thought in terms of a Malayan national revolution, they were increasingly compelled to act in a purely Singaporean context. Third, and perhaps most important, British tactics had undergone a subtle transformation.

In 1948 the British had bludgeoned the nationalist movement into virtual submission and forced the MCP to undertake a military struggle at a time not of its own choosing. Essentially it was a negative tactic designed to crush a movement which threatened British interests. Effective though it was, it offered only short-term protection. In the long-term the British sought to encourage "responsible" political parties. In the parlance of colonialism, "responsible" parties meant those to whom the British could hand a measure of self-government (and much later independence) in the certain knowledge that they would not threaten Singapore's status as a strategic British base.

To stimulate the growth of this 'alien' plant, the British set about creating a political greenhouse in which the environment would be completely under their own control. By carefully regulating the conditions, they believed they could produce two parties which would be prepared to operate a 'responsible' two-party system. The greenhouse was a representative asembly[18] and the conditions were regulated by gradually extending the electorate, the proportion of elective seats and the assembly's legislative powers.

Prior to 1955, this strategy had produced two parties which exactly fitted British specifications: a Progressive Party (PP) and a Singapore Labour Party (SLP). The PP was formed, for the purpose of fighting elections, by the older generation of the English-educated professional middle-class. Easily the more successful of the two, it consistently won elective majorities over its main rival. The SLP was formed by a group of lower-middle-class, English-educated trade unionists who had been closely associated with British attempts to sponsor 'responsible' unions as an alternative to the SFTU. Modelled on the British Labour Party, the SLP was also formed primarily to contest elections. It can be said on behalf of the Progressives that they at least believed in a gradual transition to self-government and were therefore happy about operating within a very limited assembly. The same cannot be said about the SLP leaders. They were united only by opportunism and in the end this did not provide a sufficiently binding cement. From the beginning the

SLP was riven by disputes which centred on personalities rather than ideology or programme and these became so serious that it had ceased to exist as an effective political force by 1953. Neither party was the product of the nationalist movement because they did not articulate its central demand for independence, nor did they win popular support for the colonial constitution in terms of the numbers who bothered to register themselves as voters. Until automatic voter registration was introduced in 1955, the number on the register remained a very small fraction of the potential electorate.[19] Both the PP and SLP were simply electoral parties restricting their energies to securing the return of candidates at successive elections and each fully accepted the rigid limits set on the scope of political debate and activity by the British.

Of the two the British had selected the PP as the party which would best safeguard their interests and the new constitution introduced for February 1955[20] was made in the image of the Progressives. Whilst ensuring that power remained firmly in British hands, the new constitution provided for a very limited form of self-government to be exercised by a Council of Ministers responsible to a predominantly elective Legislative Assembly. The franchise was still confined to British subjects (thereby excluding a large proportion of the Chinese population) but the size of the electorate had been vastly increased with the introduction of a system of automatic registration.

The Progressives did not win the victory the British had anticipated and planned for but instead obtained only four seats. They had suffered badly from the last-minute intervention of the Democratic Party – a party organised by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce – but their critical weakness had been the 'colonial stooge' label that had hung around their neck. Victory of sorts in the election went to the Labour Front (LF). Nominally led by David Marshall, the LF was a hastily constructed coalition whose political base was the British-sponsored Singapore Trades Union Congress (STUC). With the support of the Alliance, and the *ex officio* and nominated members, the LF was able to command a majority in the Assembly and in February it formed the first Council of Ministers under David Marshall as Chief Minister. From its own point of view, by accepting office, the LF was committing political suicide because it had placed itself in the position of accepting responsibility without power. The Rendel Constitution had ensured that power remained firmly in the hands of the British. It was precisely for this reason that the nationalist movement had attacked Rendel as a fraud and then attacked the LF as a colonial stooge for agreeing to operate it. Essentially an alliance of opportunists, the LF was eventually to disintegrate under this withering attack.

The nationalist movement did produce two parties to contest the

election. In terms of this analysis the less important of the two was the Singapore Alliance which polled impressively and won three seats.[21] An offshoot of the Alliance in the Federation, it was of lesser importance because it was almost wholly reliant on Malay support and had no following amongst the Chinese and Indian urban working class. In contrast the other nationalist party, the Peoples Action Party (PAP) had a far more extensive following in terms of both class and community. Formed in November 1954, the PAP used the occasion of the Assembly elections not simply as a means to gain seats but also as a platform to denounce colonialism.[22] Winning three of the four seats it contested in spectacular style,[23] the PAP did not see the seats or the elections as ends in themselves but as another device to be exploited in the interests of its general strategy of winning independence for Malaya, inclusive of Singapore. Although the situation and individuals dictated different tactics, the similarities between the PAP and AMCJA are obvious. Both represented attempts to form a genuinely all-inclusive anti-colonial front drawing together every race, class and most shades of the political spectrum.[24] Both drew their main public spokesmen from the younger generation of the English-educated middle class and, most important of all, their real political strength lay in the working-class movement which inevitably was overwhelmingly Chinese. However the PAP had an additional strength deriving from the support of a militant Chinese student movement.

The defeats of April and May 1948, culminating in the declaration of an emergency, had placed the Left nationalists firmly on the defensive in Singapore. For over four years any form of overt Left-Wing activity invited the unpleasant attentions of the Special Branch. It was only during 1953 that the Left again began to emerge as a coherent political force. A number of factors may be said to have accounted for this re-emergence. The MCP's new emphasis upon building up a united anti-colonial front in the urban areas outlined in the 'October Directive' meant that its cadres in Singapore became active in galvanizing and seeking to lead a mass movement. Inevitably they were forced to operate on a clandestine basis through organisations like the Anti-British League.[25] Almost simultaneously there was a shift in British strategy away from straight-forward repression towards encouraging safe take-over parties. Inevitably this policy required that indigenous political groups, including the Left, be accorded a greater degree of freedom of action and organisation. Finally, Singapore was a natural centre for both radical and revolutionary movements and the British could only keep the cork jammed into the neck of the bottle for a limited period. Inevitably the nature of the colonial system generated events and issues around which the mass movement was able to re-group irrespective of British countermeasures.

A classic illustration of this process was furnished by the emergence of a Chinese student movement. Chinese-language education had been completely neglected by the British until the Middle Schools[26] became centres of revolutionary activity during the early 1950s. Attempts by the colonial administration to reduce this activity by imposing ever-increasing controls on the schools brought it into open conflict with both the school management committees and the students. The conflict smouldered until the British provided an issue (not in the event directly concerned with Chinese education) around which the student movement was able to crystalise. In 1953 the Legislative Council approved an Ordinance which provided for compulsory national service on a selective basis. The proposal was naturally anathema to them and the Chinese Middle School students came together in a spontaneous protest. A protest march on 13 May 1954 was attacked by the police who injured and arrested a large number of students.[27] The "May 13th Incident" as it came to be called, marked the beginning of a sustained militant campaign involving school strikes, occupations, marches, arrests and trials.[28] For the first time in five years, colonialism was challenged on the streets of Singapore. Out of this agitation eventually emerged a Singapore Chinese Middle Schools Students Union (SCMSSU). It operated effectively from July 1954 but it was not formally registered by the LF Government until October 1955 after it had given a formal undertaking not to engage in political activity.

From the beginning, the Chinese student movement was an integral part of a wider nationalist movement. Whilst it remained concerned about those issues affecting Chinese education in particular, care was always taken to relate these to the wider issue of colonialism and national liberation. The students siezed upon every opportunity to build links with workers by openly supporting them in industrial disputes. For example they were particularly prominent in the Hock Lee bus strike and the subsequent disturbances in the few weeks after the LF had assumed office. They were equally assiduous in establishing links with Singapore's small rural population when the latter were severely afflicted by floods during 1954.[29] Finally, they were particularly tireless in their efforts on behalf of the PAP, forming a substantial proportion of the audience at its militant meetings and giving prodigious service during the Assembly campaign. Obviously MCP cadres played an important, or even dominant, part in determining the strategy adopted by the movement through the SCMSSU, but they were only able to do so because the MCP was the only party or organisation which could give expression to the students' aspirations – national freedom and revolution.

Precisely the same point can be made about the new trade union

movement which began to emerge during 1953-4 under the leadership of a young generation of militants like Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan; undoubtedly some of them were MCP cadres. The methods they used to build up the new movements were strongly reminiscent of the strategy employed by the SFTU. Immense care was taken not only to build union strength through the successful resolution of industrial conflicts and the involvement of as many members as possible in union activities, but also to relate the union and its struggles to the wider political context. In other words, the objective was to develop the political consciousness of the worker by convincing him that his industrial liberation could only be achieved after Malaya itself had been liberated from colonial rule.[30] Unlike the "yellow" unions which had survived the holocaust of 1948 and subsequently been organised into the STUC under British patronage, the Middle Road Group as they came to be called[31] was primarily political in intent. And like the SFTU before, it was the working-class base upon which the revolutionary nationalist movement was built.

Many of these union militants, including Lim Chin Siong, were also active in helping to build, or re-build, a variety of other organisations which eventually covered a substantial proportion of the population. Much of the rural population was organised into Farmer or Community Associations,[32] women into a Women's Federation, parents of Chinese-language students into Parent-Teacher Associations and there was a revival of Chinese cultural societies.[33] Like the students and workers, these groups had a wider political purpose and came to form an integral part of the nationalist movement.

The movement whose emergence has been described above was predominantly Chinese, working-class and revolutionary-Socialist in orientation. Conscious of the lessons of 1948 the Left was aware of its own vulnerability to British repression which would follow any premature action on its part. The danger could only be reduced if the movement could be broadened to include groups and opinions which would be more acceptable to the British. It was at this point in 1954 that the Left was joined by a group of English-educated intellectuals, under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, in forming the PAP. The alliance, which was in many respects reminiscent of the relationship between the MDU and AMCJA, was mutually advantageous. The Left, whilst broadening the nationalist front, had gained the protection afforded by the presence of a section of the English-educated middle class. The latter for its part gained the mass political base which, until that moment, it lacked.

At that time the Lee Kuan Yew group certainly employed the language of Malayan Socialism and had been particularly active on behalf of the workers and students. Like the underground MCP and other Left

nationalists, they were working towards the creation of a united anti-colonialist front based on the working class. However, whilst the Left saw this as a preliminary phase towards the development of a genuine social revolution, the English-educated 'radicals' had a far more limited objective. They realised that they were the people to whom the British would prefer to hand control, but they also realised that in view of its strategic importance, the British were unlikely to relinquish control of Singapore in the immediate future irrespective of their intentions *vis á vis* the Federation. Given this, the middle-class radicals felt that they needed the power of the mass movement to compel the British to relinquish control but they sought to use it in such a way that social revolution would not follow national revolution.[34]

The origins of the PAP are essentially the story of how these two disparate elements – a revolutionary mass movement based on the working class and a radical English-educated middle class – came together to form a party whose immediate objective was Malayan independence. From the beginning both elements made a conscious attempt to broaden even further the party's base. At various times approaches were made to UMNO, the Singapore Alliance and even the LF. Unlike its rivals, the PAP's organisation was not simply determined by the electoral system but reflected its primary purpose of developing and leading a broadly based movement which could command support from every community and class.[35] In this the PAP was largely successful, but its success could not obscure the fundamental conflict that was inherent in the relationship between the two original elements. Eventually this would lead to a formal separation, but until then the conflicts were confined within the Party. It was during the first two years of the LF Ministry, from 1955 to 1957, that the character which this conflict would assume first took shape.

This short period was dominated by two associated themes: the constitutional issue, turning on the degree of internal self-government the British would permit for Singapore; and the increasing militancy of the working-class and student movements and the British response to them. Throughout, the role of the LF was completely self-destructive. It is true that it called for an independent Malaya inclusive of Singapore, and was also responsible for liberalising the law in certain important respects as it affected the police, trade unions and Chinese education. Despite this it acted, and more important was seen to act, as the pliable instrument of British policy. This was particularly true after Marshall was replaced as Chief Minister by Lim Yew Hock in June 1956. Lim owed his political and trade union career entirely to British patronage and he was fully to repay their confidence in him during (and after) his time as Chief Minister. The irony of the situation was that the LF had

not been chosen by the British as the group to take control of a self-governing Singapore when the time eventually came. Instead their choice had fallen upon the 'radical' faction in the PAP.

During this period, the constitutional position of Singapore was the subject of two separate conferences. The first held in London during April-May 1956[36] was attended by an all-party delegation (including both Lee Kuan .Yew and Lim Chin Siong) and led by David Marshall. It completely failed to reach an agreement. Lennox-Boyd, the Secretary of State, explained that the British were not prepared to tolerate a situation in which ". . . the essential defence bases . . . would assuredly be crippled in times of emergency by strikes or sabotage." To avoid any possibility of this happening, the British therefore insisted that they ". . . retain an ultimate authority in matters of external defence, internal security and external affairs." In short the British were prepared to offer self-government for Singapore as long as they retained the power to control the Left. The proposals were rejected only after it became clear that Marshall and Lim Chin Siong were implacably opposed to them.[37]

Formal discussions were resumed the following March at a second conference held in London.[38] Whilst the British position remained completely unchanged, the character of the all-party delegation from Singapore had changed in two important respects. First, the unpredictable Marshall had been replaced by the more pliant Lim Yew Hock as its leader.[39] Second, the arrest and detention of Lim Chin Siong the previous October had deprived the Left of its voice at the conference. The delegation agreed a form of self-government for Singapore which in every important respect was indistinguishable from that which had been offered the previous year. The important element as far as the British were concerned was that, in addition to certain overall reserve powers, they retained effective control over internal security through the mechanism of an Internal Security Council (ISC) in which its interests would always be certain of majority support.[40] It is now clear that Lee Kuan Yew played an important part in devising the ISC formula[41] for obvious motives. His faction was politically dependent on the Left but stood in constant danger of being overwhelmed. They could only prevent this *and* keep their Socialist-nationalist *bona fides* if the superior strength of the Left was kept in check by British police action. This was to happen on a number of occasions during 1956 and 1957.

British-inspired police action to save the Lee Kuan Yew faction took place in the context of a mounting crescendo of revolutionary anti-colonial activity. Its most striking manifestation was the dramatic increase in working-class industrial militancy indicated by the number of strikes. In the two years preceding the Assembly elections there had

been only 13 strikes in Singapore. In the five months following April 1955 this figure jumped spectacularly to 213. The majority involved Middle Road Unions but even according to the government's own estimates, over 50 disputes involved other unions including those belonging to the STUC. Many were relatively straight-forward industrial disputes but still others took on an explicit anti-colonial character culminating in direct confrontation between the workers and the colonial authority acting through the LF Ministry.[42] Simultaneously the SCMSSU began to engage ever more overtly in revolutionary anti-colonial activities. In conjunction with Middle Road Unions and other Left groups, the students organised picnics the purpose of which were political rather than recreational.[43] Later, in December 1955, the SCMSSU launched a *Hsueh Hsih* campaign amongst the students modelled on the system Mao Tse Tung had established for party workers in China.[44]

By the middle of 1956, the developing power of the mass movement – and its suspicion of the line taken by Lee Kuan Yew in the London constitutional conference – probably convinced the Left that the time had come to be more assertive within the PAP and thereby end its increasing drift to the Right. Following the annual conference in July 1956 an attempt was made to change the party constitution by giving more power to the branches where, naturally, the Left was at its most dominant. The change was bitterly opposed by the Right under Lee Kuan Yew but it almost certainly would have come into effect if the LF under Lim Yew Hock had not chosen that moment to have an "anti-communist purge" and remove the key PAP personnel concerned with the projected move. This was the first occasion when the Lee faction was saved by executive action on the part of the LF. It was certainly not to be the last.

The British had decided that the failure of the constitutional talks in April-May 1956 would preciptate a period of sustained nationalist agitation and they therefore decided on a strategy which would break what they regarded as the MCP's "open front". In July that year, the Commissioner of Police in conjunction with the General Officer Commanding the Singapore garrison prepared a new internal security plan to secure the city in the event of widespread rioting or urban insurrection.[45] It is clear that the British cynically intended to provoke a situation in which the former would inevitably occur and thereby provide them with the excuse and the occasion to administer the Left a crushing blow. The plan involved deploying in the city over 30 per cent of the infantry then stationed in the whole of Malaya. It was an indication not only of the crucial importance the British attached to the city, but also the severity and scope of the reaction they anticipated to their repressive measures. Their preparations complete, the British

finally launched their attack on the Left in September 1956.

Their first attacks were not on the workers but on the student movement and on the various cultural and social organisations that the Left had been instrumental in creating. A number of the latter were banned in September, to be rapidly followed by the SCMSSU on the grounds that it had violated the no-politics pledge it had given as a condition of registration. The first arrest was that of its Secretary General, Soh Loh Boon. There were further arrests and mass expulsions as the students, with the active support of the Middle Road Unions. reacted during October in the manner the British had expected – with strikes and school occupations. Amidst rapidly mounting tension and agitation, the police on the morning of 26 October attacked and removed the students from the occupied schools, killing one in the process. Simultaneously the troops were deployed throughout the city. The police attacks on the schools precipitated the riots proper which extended over a period of several days during which police and troops killed 12 people.[46] In the early stages of the disturbances, the Special Branch raided six separate meetings simultaneously and detained 234 people including the group known as the 'Big Six'.[47] In the immediate aftermath a number of Middle Road Unions were banned, amongst them the spectacularly successful Singapore Shop and Factory Workers Union (SS&FWU) led by Lim Chin Siong.

The events of September-October were not the product of a spontaneous British response to an outburst of insurrectionary or revolutionary violence. Instead the entire operation bore the marks of careful planning in order to achieve a particular end. That end was the cynical determination by the British to crush any threat to their continued control of Singapore. As in 1948, the events illustrated the intense vulnerability of the Left to police action. However, on this occasion the arrests were not followed by a period of prolonged repression and the Left was able to begin to pick up the pieces again in trade union and student movements.[48]

Recovery was not such a simple matter in the PAP. Amongst those arrested and subsequently detained were 15 PAP office holders including Lim Chin Siong. Their arrest not only significantly weakened the Left in the decision-making organs of the Party, it also enabled the Lee faction to exploit their absence in two ways. First, their public posture was to condemn the arrests as yet further examples of the repressive nature of colonialism. But at the same time they were able to put the PAP's full support behind the constitutional proposals of March 1957 involving as they did the perpetuation of British control through the mechanism of the ISC. The Lee faction had not only had the pressure from the Left removed at a crucial time, but they had also helped to

ensure that they themselves could also remove it at any time in the future without incurring the public odium that the LF had done during September-October.

The third occasion on which the Lee faction was saved by police action was perhaps the most blatant and it grew more or less directly out of the constitutional conference held in March 1957. By this time the Left's suspicion of Lee's complicity with the British had developed into a certainty[49] and it determined to halt the increasing drift to the Right. The opportunity presented itself at the annual conference, held in August, when in the elections for the policy-making organ of the Party – the Central Executive Committee (CEC) – the Left was able to take effective control from the Right when six of its candidates were unsuccessful. The Lee faction were flabbergasted and promptly resigned their posts. It was a stunning defeat for them, because although they lacked a mass political base they had always been in a majority on the CEC. For a time it appeared that their strategy lay in ruins; but only ten days after the CEC elections, the Lee faction was restored to full control when five of the six successful Left candidates were arrested as part of an 'anti-communist purge' initiated by the LF Ministry. This episode had an important sequel. The Lee faction realised that the number of occasions on which it could expect to be blatantly rescued by such police action were strictly limited if it were to keep even the minimum acquiescence of the Left to their continued leadership. However it was virtually certain that, given the Party's democratic structure, the natural majority which the Left commanded would produce an identical situation at the annual conference the following year. It was in order to avoid this possibility that the Lee faction proceeded to destroy any semblance of intra-party democracy, the better to entrench and ensure their own control over its machinery and policies. The means by which this was to be accomplished was the creation of two separate class of party members: ordinary and cadre. Only the latter, who were a tiny minority, were to be permitted to elect the CEC which, in turn, was responsible for selecting the cadre membership from amongst the ordinary membership.[50]

At some time after the 1955 Assembly elections, the British had obviously decided that the Right Wing of the PAP under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew was the local group which was best equipped to safeguard British interests when Singapore eventually became internally self-governing or independent as part of a larger whole. Having taken this decision, they then proceeded to sacrifice a not unwilling LF Ministry as colonial stooges in the interests of perpetuating the ascendancy of the Lee faction over the Left within the PAP. Lee Kuan Yew certainly played his part in this strategy by deftly signalling to the British

that his revolutionary anti-colonial rhetoric was no more than a ploy which would be dropped at the appropriate time. Heavily disguised in public, the assurances were made explicit in private discussions with British officials including the Chief Secretary,[51] (the senior British official in the Legislative Assembly) and the Governor.

By the end of 1957, the Lee faction was in a dominant position. Assured of British patronage, yet simultaneously able to retain a revolutionary anti-colonialist posture, they could look forward with confidence to the next Legislative Assembly elections scheduled for 1959 The PAP's spectacular success in the December City Council elections[52] was proof of this, but it was a victory that had been secured by the strength of the mass movement. The question which had yet to be finally resolved was this: could the Left, as the mass movement's natural representative, choose the correct time to make its bid for power? The events of 1948 and 1956 had demonstrated that an error in timing could prove fatal in the face of the British determination to safeguard their interests.

FOOTNOTES

1. This section is based on a thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of Hull, 1973: "Political Parties in Singapore: 1945-1955".
2. The existence of groups dedicated to revolutionary change in China since the turn of the century has never been disputed.
3. See Onraet, Rene, *Singapore – A Police Background*, London, Dorothy Crisp & Co., 1946.
4. Its ancestry can be traced to the Malayan Revolutionary Committee of the Kuomintang formed in Singapore in 1925.
5. Formed in December 1945. The best account of the MDU, scheduled for publication by Federal Publications – Asia Pacific Press, Singapore, 1977, is Cheah Boon Kheng: "The Malayan Democratic Union, 1945-1948", M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1974.
6. It must be remembered that Singapore was administered separately from the rest of Malaya immediately after the British re-occupation.
7. Interview with Malcolm MacDonald, British Commissioner General in S.E. Asia.
8. Even if it had not been an original motive, the separation was subsequently exploited for this purpose.
9. Malaya earned more dollars than the rest of the Empire-Commonwealth combined.
10. For a description of pre-war unionism see M.R. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya*, O.U.P. London 1970.
11. Ample evidence for this view is to be found in the *F.W. Dalley Papers*, Microfilm in University of Hull library. A member of the TUC Council, Dalley was sent on a number of official missions to Malaya and he maintained an extensive correspondence with a large number of officials in the Federation and Singapore.
12. See his two unpublished manuscripts in *F.W. Dalley Papers*.
13. For the MCP's own account of these events see *Malaya Fights for Freedom*, London, April 1954, Freedom Press.
14. *People's Constitutional proposals for Malaya*, Ta Chong Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1947.

15. The most important defection was that of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce.
16. The stoppage occurred despite intensive British efforts to prevent it.
17. The difficulties under which it laboured were illustrated by the arrest of the entire Town Committee in December 1950. Arrests also destroyed the structure of the Anti-British League for long periods.
18. Between 1948-1955 a Legislative Council. After 1955 a Legislative Assembly. The same motive lay behind the creation of a partially elective Municipal Commission which later became a City Council.
19. It probably did not exceed 10 per cent of the potential electorate. The British were intensely disappointed that it remained so small.
20. See Sir George Rendel, *Constitutional Commission, Singapore*, 22 February 1954. The new constitution closely followed its recommendations.
21. It won 43 per cent of the vote in the constituencies it contested. This figure was exceeded only by the PAP.
22. A comprehensive account of every meeting it held is provided in a Special Branch Report found in the *F.W. Dalley Papers*. Its author even notes that Malay police appeared to be moved by the anti-colonial speeches.
23. It won 55 per cent of the vote in the constituencies it contested.
24. For example its inaugural meeting was attended by Tungku Abdul Rahman and Tan Cheng Lock from the Federation Alliance.
25. This was formed some time in 1946 and appeared to be used as a training ground for potential Party members.
26. Approximately equivalent to secondary education. At this time there were a large number of students in their late teens or early twenties whose schooling had been interrupted by the Japanese occupation.
27. Even the *Straits Times* (14 May 1954) was moved to comment on the violence employed by the police.
28. For one trial the students secured the services of D.N. Pritt, the socialist barrister. See his *The Defence Accuses*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1966.
29. The students collected money, food and provided much voluntary help.
30. For example see a memorandum of trade union organisation by Lim Chin Siong in *F.W. Dalley Papers* (translated from Chinese).
31. Their offices were mainly situated in Middle Road. They were later more formally organised into a Singapore Trade Union Working Committee.
32. Lim Chin Siong was elected for a constituency with a large number of Chinese small-holders.
33. Many had been banned during the first years of the Emergency.
34. For example see Lee Kuan Yew's speech on the role of the returned student given to the Malayan Forum. It has been reproduced in full in A. Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew*, Singapore, Donald Moore, 1968. Lee also made the same analysis in a private talk with F.W.Dalley in 1955 *(F.W. Dalley Papers)*.
35. The most comprehensive account of its structure is contained in Pang Cheng Lian, *Singapore's People's Action Party*, OUP, 1971.
36. Singapore Legislative Assembly Papers No.Cmd.31 of 1956, *Report on Singapore All-Party Mission to London*.
37. D.S. Marshall, *Singapore's struggle for nationhood*. Unpublished talk given at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Singapore, 12 July 1969.
38. *Report of Singapore Constitutional Conference London*, HMSO, London, 1957.
39. Marshall *op.cit.*, claims that his succession had been arranged by Lennox-Boyd during the constitutional conference in 1956.
40. The ISC was to have five voting members, two British, two from Singapore and one nominated by the Federation Government.
41. See R. Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution in Singapore and Malaya*, Faber, London, 1973.
42 Perhaps the best example was the Hock Lee bus strike of April-May which began as a lock-out by the employers. The workers were joined by students

in a series of massive demonstrations which soon developed into bloody confrontations with the police. An official inquiry by the new LF Government resulted in the dispute being settled in favour of the workers.

43. See Singapore Legislative Assembly No.Cmd.53 of 1956, Singapore Chinese Middle School Students' Union.
44. See *ibid. Hsueh Hsih* were study groups designed to increase revolutionary consciousness.
45. See R. Clutterbuck, *op.cit.*, pp.116-7 for a detailed description.
46. All but one were shot dead. No shots were fired at the police or troops, and none of them were seriously injured.
47. Lim Chin Siong, Fong Swee Suan, S.T. Bani, Jamit Singh, Sandra Woodhull and James Puthucheary.
48. For example in December a Singapore General Employees Union was formed for those workers who had previously been organised in the SS&FWU. A few months later came the first moves to revive the STUWC.
49. T.J.S. George, *Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore*, London, Andre Deutsch, 1973. George's conclusion is based on interviews with those detained during 1956. He even suggests that as early as 1956-7, Lee may have been *actively* co-operating with the police against the Left. See particularly Chapter Three.
50. See Pang Cheng Lian, *op.cit.*
51. See T.J.S. George, *op.cit.*, pp.43-4 and 163-4; T.J. Bellows, *The People's Action Party of Singapore*, Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1970, p.35 and notes on a conversation between Lee and F.W. Dalley dated 17 December 1955 in *F.W. Dalley Papers*. At the time Dalley was on an official mission on behalf of the British and Singapore Governments.
52. It won 13 of the 14 seats it contested with 62 per cent of the vote in those constituencies. The Labour Front managed only four from 16 with 35 per cent of the vote in those constituencies.

From 'Emergency' to 'Independence', 1948-57*

Malcolm Caldwell

Not least of the consequences of the abortive Malayan Union scheme, which the British had attempted to foist upon the peoples of Malaya after the war, was formation of the United Malay Nationalist Organisation (UMNO) early in 1946. Today, as I write, thirty years on, UMNO still constitutes the solid core of the ruling coalition, as it has done since shortly after its formation. It arose, by the merger of numerous small, local Malay associations, in implacable oppositon to the "liberal" proposals of the Malayan Union – "liberal", that is, from the perspective of the other communities. The fact that the British emissary had succeeded in obtaining, by one means or another, adhesion of all the Malay sultans to the terms of the Union scheme meant nothing. When Sir Edward Gent, first Governor of the Malayan Union, arrived for his formal installation, appropriately enough on the 1 April, 1946, he found that the ceremony had been totally boycotted by the leaders of the Malay community, including the sultans. Malayan Union was dead.

Whitehall was realistic enough to accept the verdict; far too much was at stake to risk doing otherwise. Accordingly, new talks were opened with the Malay rulers and UMNO leaders – a backward step, apparently, in the sense that spokesmen for the other communities were excluded from the discussions. But things had changed enough for there to be agreement on both sides that there must, at a minimum, be a stronger central administration for the whole of Malaya, and some prospect for

*There were good reasons for the British to describe their 1948-60 war in Malaya as merely an "emergency" – see footnote 99, below. From the point of view of the Malayan Races Liberation Army the struggle is correctly known as the Anti-British National Liberation War. However, use of the term "the Emergency" to describe these years has not only become so entrenched in the (admittedly overwhelmingly bourgeois and reactionary) literature, but also has the merit of brevity, that I shall use it here, at times in a straight, and at others in an ironic, way. But readers should bear in mind that I regard "Anti-British National Liberation War" as the correct, just, and historically vindicated appellation.

citizenship to all those who had, whatever their race, clearly made Malaya their home and intended permanently to reside there.

From the conversations there emerged agreement on a new Federation of Malaya. As with Malayan Union, Singapore was excluded. Embraced in the new scheme were all the states of the peninsula, together with Penang. At the top was a British High Commissioner, entrusted with sufficient financial powers to ensure his effective ultimate authority. The Federal legislative council consisted of officials and appointed non-officials ostensibly representing all the various communities and interest groups, though – of course – in practice Europeans and upper- and middle-class Malays predominated, and even the leaders of other communities who were given places were selected for their conservatism, docility and subservience to imperialist objectives. A federal executive council – consisting of civil servants and unofficial members (often Malay State Chief Ministers) – advised the High Commissioner, who, however, had the final say (subject, that is, to the need to accommodate as happily as possible to strongly felt positions promoted by interests represented on the executive and legislative councils). All this – with the accompanying apparatus of committees and conferences – was designed to train for power an elite of Malays, together with enough top people from the other communities to present a plausible facade of multi-racial rule and harmony.

A complicating factor, but one which was not to prove an insuperable obstacle to British purposes, was that the High Commissioner was obliged to show all draft legislation to the nine state rulers before submitting it to the federal legislative council, and there were other matters upon which he had to consult their wishes. More importantly, from the point of view of efficiency and expeditiousness, was the separation of financial decision-making from the authorities (in practice mostly the states) responsible for implementing administrative decisions. But the states now had, in contrast to the pre-war dispensation, a standard structure: each had a Malay chief minister *(mentri besar)* and a Malay state secretary, and a British Adviser; and, granted the common educational experience of the former, and the unanimity of purpose of the latter, and the ties of each to the central apparatus, most differences could be ironed out by consultation. Besides, when – as frequently during the course of prosecuting the "Emergency" – the British felt frustrated or impeded by the formal constitutional provisions, they simply side-stepped them by setting up *ad hoc* offices and channels.

Indeed, it is vital to recall how closely all these manoeuvres intermeshed. Everything achieved by the British in moving towards installation of a puppet regime in "charge" of an "independent" Malaya hinged upon success in the simultaneous ferocious repression of the Malayan

people's anti-imperialist national struggle. No member of the Malay elite – or of the Malayan elite generally – was going finally to quibble at any British infraction of constitutional niceties and polite fictions if it was seen to be essential for containment and defeat of the common enemy (the Malayan masses), for nothing can be more certain than that Britain's chosen puppets would have quickly been swept into historical oblivion had it not been for the massive military intervention in their defence by the colonial power. Conversely, of course, the British had a real propaganda interest in shepherding its nominees as rapidly as possible towards the optimum *appearance* of independence compatible with preservation of *real* colonial economic and political power; the brouhaha about *Merdeka* provided the finest "psywar" tool imaginable, and naturally those upon whom independent authority was thus ostensibly conferred were only too happy to oblige by taking the appearance as reality and publicly acting accordingly.

But the actual struggle for independence lay of course between the British and the progressive and patriotic forces. The Federation of Malaya was duly inaugurated in February, 1948, but for more than a year beforehand there had been vigourous protests not only against the terms of the scheme as they became public but also against their origin in exclusively Anglo-Malay dialogues. Ranged against the British colonial authorities and the Malay oligarchy in the period from the end of 1946 to the end of 1947 was a heterogeneous collection of uneasy allies, ranging all the way from the MCP and the left-wing Malay Nationalist Party, to the Straits Chinese and other conservative Chinese affronted by the stringency of the citizenship regulations, but all nonetheless united in opposition to undemocratic Malay privileges, which were in reality nothing more nor less than blatant privileges for the upper reaches of the Malay hierarchy – awarded them for allegiance to the British cause. By mid-1947, most of the disaffected forces had managed to assemble under a common umbrella – a PMCJA-PUTERA[1] coalition, with the MDU (see previous chapter) at the heart of it. But a combination of selective British suppression – of leftist and labour components – and uneven determination on the part of the allies to press home opposition by every available means, led to its break up. Right-wing Chinese and Indian community spokesmen, however bitter they might be at the deliberate underrepresentation of their fellows written into the Federation proposals, understandably drew back when it came to confronting colonial troops and police physically in the streets. By the end of 1947 the resignation of this section to the inevitable, coupled with the steady depletion of the leadership of the left by imprisonment, banishment, or the need to evade these by going into hiding, led to the collapse of the PMCJA-PUTERA coalition.

The real battle lines were now to emerge inexorably from the utter intransigence of the British to any opposition, however conducted, unless it was prepared meekly to be herded into the Federation framework and thereafter firmly contained within its tight constraints. But all that was going on at this "constitutional" level was only part of the story, for, as Anthony Short concedes in discussing this period,

> ". . . a good case can be made out to support the argument that government was never properly re-established after the war . . . Over much of Malaya . . . not only was government unable to maintain law and order but it was, in fact, sharing power and in some areas was certainly no more than first among equals. In particular its problems centred on the police force which had practically disintegrated in Malaya at the end of the war and after initial and almost crippling disabilities, not least being the loss of its agents and its criminal records, was only slowly and painfully being rebuilt. It was, therefore, barely equipped to deal with the politics of violence . . . In all of this the MCP may be seen as the principal beneficiary . . . "[2]

Such a situation could not be permitted to continue. But from the British point of view, satisfactory means had to be found of masking – at least for external consumption – outright suppression as a 'defence of freedom and democracy", while concentrating every resource of force, decree law, intimidation, and propaganda upon crushing the Malayan people's struggle.

In turning to the origins of the declaration in mid-1948 of a state of emergency – on 16 June for central Perak and west-central Johore, and on 12 July for the whole Federation – we should first of all discount the view, still put forward in some accounts, that it was a reaction to an insurrection launched by the MCP on the orders of Moscow as conveyed through the Calcutta conferences of the Communist Youth and, immediately afterwards, of the Communist Party of India, in February that year.[3] It is much more relevant and revealing to look at the developing climacteric in the no-quarter struggle between the British authorities and the labouring masses of the peninsula, and at the growing crisis of the British economy. In August, 1947, Whitehall had had to impose wartime controls on the British economy after the disastrously premature implementation of convertibility in July, US$700 million of the reserves having been lost before the end of the month.[4] In return for the concession of being allowed by the US to suspend convertibility, Britain was forced herself to make concession after concession, and only just succeeded in warding off a very determined attempt by Washington to compel her to dismantle the sterling bloc altogether.[5] Moreover, it was not only Washington which was pressing a beleaguered Britain, for the countries of the continent resented her import controls. The Labour government had gone as far as it dared do in paring back the welfare measures – which it had been

elected to carry into effect – in order to placate the United States and the other OEEC countries, and pressure for devaluation of the pound was building up by the end of 1948. In the circumstances, no threat could be tolerated to maximum production of dollar-earning rubber and tin in Malaya.

But, in practice, by the end of 1947 and the beginning of 1948 labour troubles in the colony were mounting to a new crescendo of incidence and violence. As we saw in chapter six, above, the British were perfectly conscious of what was required: to muster sufficient man- and fire-power to enforce low wages, the acceptance of harsh working conditions, and labour discipline. On the side of management, there was evident an eagerness to bring things to a head, for the new militant mood of the labourers was proving a stubborn obstacle to restoring "normality". But government had to bide its time until the appropriate moment to strike presented itself. In several areas, management was confronted with sit-ins and work-ins on the part of the labourers. The *Thondar Padai*, a military-style Indian labourers' organisation harking back to the INA, was particularly troublesome. Strikes, shut-outs, and work-ins increasingly culminated in violence – violence against property and person. Where managers and foremen were attacked, and on occasion killed, the police retaliated by cutting down, and on occasion killing, strikers. Violence was particularly marked at the end of May and the beginning of June, 1948. On 12 June the PMFTU (Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions: see chapter seven, above) became illegal and was disbanded. But already by 21 May the first of a series of administration conferences on the timing of the announcement of a state of emergency had taken place.[6] The stage was being set by first discussing and then preparing extraordinary enactments by-passing what were seen to be impediments in formal law (for instance, the ban on banishment of British subjects – in effect British Indian labour leaders).

As Anthony Short, who had access to the official records, makes clear,[7] British intelligence actually had no evidence that the MCP was preparing to go over on its own initiative to all-out armed struggle. On the contrary, there was every reason to believe that the Party would wait until resort to arms could be presented as an unavoidable defensive reaction to stepped-up government persecution. Nevertheless, the closing vice which British planners had been deliberately applying since the days of the BMA were designed to make either total surrender or armed resistance the only options open to the left, and, as McLane argues, the MCP would have been on this intolerable fork by late-1948 – with or without the declaration of a state of emergency – anway, and it most certainly would never have even considered surrender. In

fact, from the March, 1948, Fourth Plenum of the Party, stress had been put on abandoning surrenderism and on the urgency of *preparing for* armed struggle.[8] Be that as it may, it was the murder of three European estate managers on the morning of 16 June which gave the British the pretext for which they had for some time been seeking, and later in the day the first emergency proclamation was promulgated. Immediately, arrests of leading activists and militants of the MCP, the New Democratic Youth League, and the MPAJA Ex-Service Comrades Association began, and in July all three organisations were banned. The tempo of deportations accelerated; in all, tens of thousands of suspects were unceremoniously uprooted, packed into boats, and shipped out of the country.[9] A ". . . comprehensive system of Emergency Regulations which have now become a model for controlling . . . population in the face of a widespread and organized revolutionary movement . . . "[10] was rushed into effect.

Since the emergency regulations have become the envy of, and model for, counter-insurgency operations (i.e. reactionary repression) all over the "free world", it is worth looking at them for a moment.[11] As finally revised, these drastic decrees occupied 149 printed pages. The basic principle informing them was that they must be ". . . wide enough and strict enough to ensure that police, soldiers and all other government officials can do what they need to do to maintain or restore order without having to act outside the law".[12] They covered ". . . subjects as diverse as possession of firearms, powers of arrest and detention, control of food supplies, and clearing of undergrowth"[13] and indeed left no aspect of the lives of the people of Malaya untouched. Every inhabitant over the age of twelve was issued with an identity card (ID). Each ID bore the holder's photograph, thumbprint and other relevant information, including place of residence. The latter point was important, since anyone wishing to move had to change his ID card for a new one, thus enabling the authorities to keep track of everybody. So that people would preserve their ID cards jealously, government tied a whole series of other day-to-day necessities of life – such as food rations and housing – to possession and production of the all-important document. Moreover, there were constant police checks, much as in South Africa today. Frequently police would throw a surprise dawn cordon round an entire village or squatter settlement, moving in on the unsuspecting inhabitants to demand their ID's.

Closely linked to this police state apparatus went unbridled powers of arrest, search, detention and – in certain cases – execution. All these unrestricted authorisations were employed to full effect. Police, security forces and Special Branch detectives could detain anybody at any time, any place, on suspicion. Indefinite imprisonment without trial faced

those accused of possessing MCP propaganda or "assisting" it; there was, of course, no limit to administration ingenuity in interpreting the latter condition. In certain "black areas", security forces were empowered to shoot on sight if their suspicions were aroused, and to ask questions afterwards; these were, in effect, "free fire" zones. Unauthorized possession of firearms, explosives or ammunition was punishable by death. Curfews of any duration could be imposed by edict. Assemblies of persons could be speedily dispersed. Until August 1952, anyone found "consorting" with the guerrilla faced the death sentence. Until 1953, the authorities were given the power of levying collective punishment on "unco-operative" villages, squatter settlements, or towns:

> "After Gurney's assassination [see below], the (government) closed the nearby small town of Tras and incarcerated all its 2000 inhabitants. In 1952, after a nearby ambush had killed the British district officer and 11 others, Templer [see below] himself imposed a strict 20-hour house curfew and reduction of the adult rice ration by more than half on the town of Tanjong Malim. This lasted two weeks, till information was forthcoming from the people."[14]

The extent to which detention was resorted to may be judged from the final estimate that, from 1948 to 1957, nearly 34,000 people had, at one time or another, and for a longer or shorter period, been imprisoned without trial on detention orders; at the height of the struggle, 11,000 were held at one time (in 1951). (Detention for less than 28 days is not counted in these figures: there were hundreds of thousands of further cases in this category.) In an attempt to starve out the guerrillas, the authorities completely banned the carrying of food in many areas, under the threat of the severest penalties. In short, the British and their local collaborators had armed themselves with every conceivable power and authority they deemed necessary to the task of stamping out the Malayan people's resistance to imperialism and domestic reaction. And contrary to the impression many commentators on Britain's "successful counter-insurgency" seek to convey – that the civilian authorities were never subordinated to military necessities – Short shows that on occasion civil government was not informed of what was going on under army auspices, while army directives could "order" civil departments to do their bidding.[15]

I shall not here attempt a detailed chronological narrative of the 12-year course of the British-styled "Emergency".[16] But it is important to raise and deal with a number of significant aspects of the long war, for they are to this day subject to official and establishment distortion, misinterpretation, silence, or sheer lack of information and understanding. It is essential for an understanding not only of the 1948-60 period itself but also of the present developing revolutionary struggle

in Malaya to confront and "de-mystify" these obfuscations and reticences. I have for convenience dealt with the various aspects in turn, but all should be seen as interlocking components of a carefully elaborated and implemented oppressive structure. The British authorities could not afford to take chances – nor, on the whole, did they.

It may be as well briefly to set the scene. At the time the emergency was declared, the High Commissioner was Sir Edward Gent, but he was shortly recalled and died in an air crash near London.[17] He was replaced by Sir Henry Gurney, whose immediate background was in the British Administration in Palestine, which fortuitously (?) was brought to an end just in time for the opportune transfer of key personnel from one trouble spot to another (Malaya).[18] At the same time a new Commissioner of Police, Col. W.N. Gray, was appointed; he, too, curiously enough, had been bloodied in "counter-terrorist" operations in Palestine. British former Palestine Policemen played a prominent role in the early part of the emergency. This "Palestinisation" of Malaya was, of course, viewed somewhat ruefully by the Malay community, but it was an expedient to which its leadership rapidly accommodated.

The earliest phases of the struggle were characterised by fairly large-scale more or less "orthodox" military movements against the guerrilla. These proved to be highly frustrating and produced sparse results for tremendous effort. It took thousands of hours of rewardless "jungle-bashing" for each "terrorist" surprised and killed. Politically, and militarily, Malaya was slipping out of British control: "By the Spring of 1950, though we had survived two dangerous years, we were undoubtedly losing the war . . . "[19] At this point, Sir Harold Briggs arrived as the new Director of Operations. He came to the conclusion that the key to containing, and ultimately eliminating, the guerrilla was to deprive it of its civilian constituency by rounding up the scattered rural population and concentrating it into a limited number of prison camps (called "new villages"); some 600 new settlements were thereafter established. The "Briggs Plan" (*Federation Plan for the Elimination of the Communist Organisation and Armed Forces in Malaya*) is generally regarded as the key component in Britain's repression of the Malayan people's struggle.

In 1951 the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, was ambushed and shot. "This murder," it has been pointed out, "also coincided with a change of government in Britain and the new Cabinet could not at that time have been aware of the Communist change of plan and must have imagined the military situation to be at its 'all-time worst'."[20] Gurney was replaced by Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer, who was accorded the distinction of combining, for the first time, in one person responsibility both for the direction of military operations and for the

civil administration. It now seems clear that by this time both the British and the MCP had come to the conclusion that the operations typical of the first part of the armed confrontation were costly, pointless, and indecisive. Britain hereafter concentrated upon policing the civilian population and relied upon intelligence, propaganda and sheer attrition and inanition to account for the communist main forces. The MCP for its part reverted to smaller-scale guerrilla activity linked to, and subordinate to, political struggle. From 1951 to 1955, total recorded "incidents" fell from 6,082 to 781.[21] By 1960, the authorities felt confident enough ceremoniously to end the emergency formally. With so much by way of introduction, let us now turn to the most important themes which require explicit consideration.

It is perhaps best to start with the burning question of the communal composition of the guerrilla, and with the equally crucial question of the degree and spread of popular support forthcoming from the various communities. The conventional view of the MCP's Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA), heavily influenced by official British propaganda of the time and since, stresses the overwhelming predominance of Chinese participants and supporters. The following extract may be taken as a fairly typical summary of this established view:

> "The Emergency began in 1948 and lasted for twelve years. A Chinese communist minority attempted to take over the country by force. Though they identified themselves with a form of nationalism – during this period when Asian Nationalism was much in vogue – the Malayan Communist Party was, in fact, an extension of the Communist Party in China; it was China, and not Malaya, with which they identified themselves."[22]

A recent book by an academic specialising in modern South East Asian history records of the Emergency that ". . . it was essentially a Chinese rebellion against the existing government in which the Malays, the people of the country, played no part."[23] An even more recent "modern history" of South East Asia has this to say:

> "Although, through a combination of disaffection and fear of reprisals, numbers of Chinese were prepared to give aid and encouragement to the MRLA, the Malays – comprising nearly half the total, and the larger part of the rural, population – saw the war as pre-eminently a Chinese attempt to gain control of the state, and consequently not only remained loyal (sic) to the colonial power but also fought actively against the MRLA."[24]

(It is worth noting at this point that although, publicly, the British colonial authorities and their journalist and scholar apologists lauded Malay "loyalty" and courage in fighting the guerrilla, their private view of the matter is better expressed thus by a Londoner who fought in the Malayan Police Service during the Emergency: "Malay troops . . . have neither the stamina nor discipline needed for jungle combat.

It took the British Army [aided by the Gurkhas, Australians and New Zealanders] twelve years to put down the first Emergency. Malay battalions on their own would find the task of containing a second one far beyond their capabilities.")[25]

How accurate is the stereotype of the Emergency in standard accounts? The short answer is not very. Both Malays and Indians joined the guerrilla ranks and fought with the MRLA. Shortly before the Baling talks (see below) in 1955, the MCP made it known that the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Party was Musa bin Ahmad, a Malay, and the Vice-Chairman was R.G. Balan, an Indian. Moreover, Chin Peng was accompanied at the talks by another prominent Malay MCP member, Rashid Maidin.[26] More significantly, the British in practice acted on the assumption that large-scale Malay participation in the liberation struggle *was* a possibility, and that the consequences of not scotching that possibility by every means available would be disastrous – indeed fatal – to the whole counter-insurgency programme. Prompt and particular attention was therefore given to tracking down and destroying Malay guerrilla units and organisations. Indeed, the British GOC in Malaya in the early years of the struggle (Major-General Sir Charles Boucher) ". . . thought a dead Malay terrorist was worth seven or eight Chinese . . . ",[27] and despite the special steps taken to eliminate Malay "CT's" ("Communist Terrorists"), Malay guerrillas remained active until the end of the Emergency, particularly in the east coast states.[28]

British fears were fanned by the exploits and tactics of the Malay Tenth Regiment of the MCP's MRLA in Pahang in the first eighteen months of the war. In the first place, whereas the British and British-directed forces developed in time effective means of driving the main units of the MRLA into remote and isolated jungle encampments and hide-outs, which in turn were made vulnerable to detection and destruction by follow-up operations, they found it much more difficult to deal with Malay guerrillas, for they were able to merge unobtrusively and inconspicuously with other Malay villagers in the *kampongs* scattered throughout the rural areas. In the *kampongs* they had, according to Short (who – as remarked above – had unrestricted access to Malayan government confidential and secret papers while writing his book), ". . . a reasonable number of active sympathisers and supporters in most . . . who . . . provided a first-class intelligence service."[29] At the height of the fighting involving Malay guerrillas in Pahang, the District Officer, Temerloh, was convinced that ". . . if a number of bandit (sic) incidents over the past three months were analysed his district would show up as one of the two worst in Malaya."[30]

British forces being powerless to combat this widespread Malay

revolutionary rising, situated in a state where conditions of grinding poverty and deprivation were experienced by the rural poor, special measures were called for. Carefully selected Malays were sworn in on the Koran to ferret out and kill their Malay cousins who had gone over to the armed struggle. The Sultan of Pahang, a fanatical anti-communist and arch-reactionary, threw his whole weight behind this campaign, invoking traditional allegiances, and gladly co-operating in spreading the "psy-war" line that Islam and communism were totally incompatible. In August 1949, one of the Malay guerrilla leaders, Wan Ali, was duly killed; and the following February another prominent Malay guerrilla, Wahi Annuar, surrendered. While the government's Malay hunter-killer squads were at work on the Malay component of the Pahang guerrilla, the British-officered Gurkhas were striving to eliminate the Chinese cadres who had worked and fought with their Malay allies in the state, ruthlessly rooting them out and pursuing them without let. The double hammer blow concentrated on Pahang, precisely because here there had developed multi-racial class struggle, severely mauled the Tenth Regiment, to the point – according to Short – that after 1950 it ". . . practically ceased to exist".[31] Elsewhere, prevention rather than drastic surgical cure was what was called for to forestall a similarly alarming perspective of communal solidarity against alien occupation and indigenous exploitation and repression emerging.

But, in fact, the ferocious suppression of 1949-50 was not the end of the Pahang revolutionary story. In the years 1951 to 1955, the predominantly Malay guerrilla regiment remained a sufficient threat in the state to force a later Prime Minister of Malaysia, Abdul Razak, to disguise himself as a chauffeur – in bush-jacket, khaki slacks and a *songkok* – when making the journey by car (as he had frequent occasion to do) between Kuala Lipis, in Pahang, to Kuala Lumpur, the Federal capital, so that ". . . if stopped on the way by terrorists he could claim that he was merely a driver taking the car into the next state in order to pick up his employer."[32] As late as the Federal election campaign of June-July, 1955, Abdul Razak's Semantan constituency in Pahang was a stronghold of the Tenth Regiment, which was still capable of mounting armed sorties. Explaining the situation, or rather trying to explain it away, Tun Razak's biographer wrote that the "majority" of the men of the Tenth Regiment were not "real communists" but ". . . disgruntled local boys opposed to the Colonial Administration because they felt that under it their race was being deliberately impoverished and deprived of its birthright . . . They were not alone in this view and so enjoyed such widespread support, or at least tolerance, in the surrounding countryside, that they were able frequently to visit their families and friends with little fear of being betrayed to the security forces."[33]

"As Abdul Razak moved around the area electioneering," his biographer adds, "he knew that sometimes there must have been armed guerrillas included among his audience, listening to what he had to say about the amnesty that the Alliance proposed to offer them were it returned to power. This did not make for easy speaking. After the election was over, when he was working to get these Malays out of the jungle and back into their villages, one of them told him: 'we could have shot you many times, but we felt it was just possible that you meant what you were saying and one day would try to help us'."[34]

Two further points are worth making. The first is that the British and the Malay aristocracy alike had striven ceaselessly to keep the Malay masses in a state of political torpor and anaesthesia, isolating them from education, non-agricultural employment, and the stimulus of urban life. A significant number of those who *did* succeed in surmounting all the obstacles placed in their way and thus bursting out of the constricting framework of peasant subsistence agriculture *did* become radical. Many were radicalised by identifying with the Indonesian nationalist movement, by reading progressive Indonesian books, pamphlets and newspapers, by personal acquaintance with Indonesian activists, many of whom had perforce to spend much time in exile in Malaya to evade the Dutch and/or Japanese authorities. Others, especially those educated in the Middle East, were influenced by radical currents of thought in the Arab world. Yet others formed their ideas through experience in wage employment and the labour movement.

The second point is that defeat of the Malayan Union scheme, formation of UMNO, and rapid progress in the early 1950s towards independence on terms guaranteeing Malay political dominance, all combined to sway the majority of the Malays towards a conditional acceptance of the *status quo*, which appeared to be evolving in a direction favourable to them, and held the promise of delivering even more in the post-independence future. After 1957, the Malay masses were fairly quickly disillusioned, finding their hopes blighted, betrayed by their community leaders, and condemned to continued poverty and neglect. Within no more than a decade, significant numbers of Malays were joining socialist and revolutionary parties, such as the Party Raayat.[35] With the failure of left parliamentary politics after 1964, and on top of that the catastrophic elimination of Indonesian radicalism in 1965-66, Malay recruitment to the MCP and the Malayan National Liberation Army[36] greatly accelerated, and sympathy and support for revolutionary politics grew. Scholars and journalists interested in Malaya will be taken as much by surprise by development of the Malayan revolution as they were by the swift germination and blossoming of the Cambodian revolution, in both cases prisoners of their own myths of "contented," "tradition-oriented," "devout," South East Asian peasant people.

Looking at the matter from another viewpoint, the Chinese in the

MCP fully appreciated the necessity of recruiting Malays, of winning support in the broader Malay community, and more generally in proving that the Party was the only genuine non-communal political organisation in Malaya. In mixed guerrilla camps, care was taken to provide for the religious and dietary needs of Muslim guerrillas, and "(t)he choice of language for communication was Malay though the Chinese guerrillas outnumbered the Malays and Indians. Malay was accepted as the common language by the MCP."[37] Party statements and programmes repeatedly stressed the compelling necessity of non-communalism and the essential role of the (Malay) peasantry in the "new democratic revolution" which was taking place.[38]

At the same time, it was recognised that the British would strive in every way open to them to convert as large a segment of the Malays as possible into police, "home guards" and the like and to poison their minds with repeated indoctrination about "alien" Chinese Communism directed and manipulated from abroad and for foreign purposes. The official view, at least for public consumption (for there was naturally some ambivalence in the administration's stance),[39] was expressed thus in the *Official Year Book, Volume Two, 1962*:

> ". . . the communist movement here was almost entirely confined to those Chinese who in 1948 looked to China. The Malays, being Muslims, regarded the atheistic materialism of Marx and Engels as completely anathema and rejected it out of hand as an undisguised attack on their religion. The Indians likewise were hardly influenced. In short, the whole communist movement was entirely alien and could in no sense be described as a national movement."[40]

The MCP accepted the fact that many poor, politically backward, Malays would succumb to British blandishments and serve as their mercenaries, but argued that

> ". . . such soldiers and police will prove unreliable, especially at a time when the influence of the Communist Party is expanding, when the active character of the broad masses of the population is growing . . . As a result, the essential differences between the British imperialists and the soldiers and police will become more and more obvious and acute . . . This is because each and every soldier and policeman is himself an integral part of the very land the British Imperialists seek to destroy and because there is a basic urge in all of them for national liberation, for a people's democracy and for the betterment of living conditions."[41]

The MCP view of the matter was undoubtedly the correct one, as numerous experiences in the post-war period have demonstrated; until their total and final collapse is obviously inevitable and imminent, even the most reactionary regimes can press forces into the field – one need only cite the cases of Chiang Kai-shek, President Thieu, and General Lon Nol as examples. The Party view will surely be vindicated in due course. But as far as the 1948-60 struggle was concerned, the British

just succeeded in warding off the point of critical loss of confidence in their ability to "win".

There is little dispute about the scale of Indian backing – wholehearted or surreptitious – for the MCP and the MRLA. As noted above, many Indian labourers had fought for, or backed up, either the MPAJA or the INA during the Japanese occupation, and after the war Indians played a prominent role in the trade union and labour struggles. With the outbreak of fighting after mid-1948, many Indian cadres joined up with jungle detachments of the MRLA or volunteered to work for the guerrilla above ground. British security naturally worked assiduously to wipe out this evidence of revolutionary co-operation across the communities. Two leading Indian communists, Veerasenan and S.A. Ganapathy, were accounted for within the space of a couple of days in May 1949; the first was shot dead, and the other hanged for possessing a revolver. However, captured Indian cadres confirmed – if any confirmation were indeed necessary – that the basic reason for Indian sympathy with the guerrilla remained the appalling and abyssmal living and working conditions on the estates where the majority of them were employed. Urban Indians were renowned for their enthusiasm for trade unionism, a tendency which opened for many the opportunity to make acquaintance with socialist and revolutionary political doctrines (but for others, equally, the opportunity of self-advancement at the expense of the rank and file).[42]

One very important, though numerically seemingly negligible, source of support for the MRLA was among the aborigine hill peoples, usually referred to in a derogatory way as *sakai* (slaves). These, the original inhabitants of the peninsula, had been driven back into their jungle and mountain fastnesses by later waves of immigrants who peopled the lowlands propitious for padi cultivation. They lived by *swidden* (slash and burn) agriculture and hunting and gathering. Estimates of their number were, at the outset of the Emergency, very uncertain, for by the nature of things they did not present themselves for counting. But when the authorities became concerned about their support for the MRLA, they took more trouble to find out and came up with a figure of 100,000 plus, scattered in remote regions all the way from southern Pahang and Negri Sembilan right up to the crucially important Thai border (which served the guerrilla as supply and sanctuary threshold).

The guerrilla had several sterling advantages in their dealings with aborigines. Several MCP cadres had had business relations with them even before the war, as itinerant traders, and during the war others had gained their confidence in resistance to the Japanese. Besides, Party policy was to reverse the establishment policy of contempt and neglect: they formed *Asal* clubs aimed at raising the material and cultural level

of the peoples, and in the clubs, as in all their relations with them, treated them as equals. (*Asal* – origin – was an acceptable epithet, in contrast to the deeply resented official *sakai*.) On the other hand, government was – until alarmed into belated remedial action, occasioned more by military necessities than genuine concern – noticeably callous and insensitive in its treatment of them. To begin with, official policy was to "re-settle" aborigines in guarded concentration camps, or to disperse them by "capture/stampede" policy (chasing them "around and probably out of the country").[43] "Hundreds" (by official admission) died when subjected to these traumas.[44] In addition, knowing that the guerrillas were obtaining plentiful food supplies from aboriginal plots the productivity of which had been raised by guerrilla advice and assistance, it was – to begin with – government policy to bomb and chemically defoliate aboriginal clearings, a policy which was continued until mid-1954, and which rapidly alienated the victims. It was only subsequently that more intelligent and calculating policies were seriously inaugurated, though it is interesting that when the MCP started moving south in strength again in the late 1960s and early 1970s their cadres had no difficulty in re-establishing rapport with the hill peoples and in again winning their confidence and co-operation.

The great advantage of having the aborigines on their side, as far as the MRLA was concerned, was that they were superb and unrivalled jungle trackers and scouts who could signal the presence of security forces long before these could make contact:

> ". . . probing military patrols could penetrate, and for days traverse and reconnoitre an area in which there were terrorists (sic), and return to base having found no signs of them; only 'friendly' aborigines. They had perfected an early warning system, a 'screen' of aborigines which surrounded their bases which was so efficient that it reported every move of the 'enemy' and enabled them to take evasive action long before the soldiers arrived on the scene."[45]

Before turning to a consideration of British policy, we may attempt to summarise what can be gleaned about the actual state of popular support for the guerrilla (though it is important to remember that British policy was so thorough-going and all-pervasive that there are serious impediments to accurate reconstruction of the realities of the earlier period of the Emergency at this late date). I have deliberately chosen to ignore both sources mindlessly pro-British and MCP sources; this is not to denigrate the latter, I should add, but merely to seek an uncontentious middle ground which may serve as the basis for a *minimum* estimate of popular backing for the armed struggle launched in 1948. My own view is that MCP assessments are, on the whole, much more incisive and realistic than those of the apologists for British

imperialism, one of whom distinguished himself by writing that, in 1948,

> ". . . Malaya was not only beautiful; it had achieved a rare distinction: it was a *contented paradise* in which men of many skins and creeds lived in harmony, enjoying the highest standard of living in all Asia as the country moved quietly but firmly – and without any strife – to the day when it would be granted independence from the British . . . " (emphasis added).[46]

Anthony Short's book is ideal for this purpose, since he makes no bones about his own anti-communist and pro-Establishment position, and yet – having had access to all the relevant official documents – cannot help revealing glimpses of the official grasp of realities which lay behind their public rhetoric. To begin with, it was accepted by the authorities that, with respect to the Chinese, ". . . almost the entire population of many rural areas were guerrilla supporters."[47] This would mean a minimum of half a million people – out of a total population of five million. In Perak, in 1950, it was reported that rumours that the security forces had suffered a severe reverse were sufficient to bring people out on to the streets to jeer the police: "It is far worse politically than July 1948. Most people were then still on the fence. Now there is little doubt whose side they are on."[48] Even when squatters were "re-settled" in "new villages" (see below), it was officially conceded that every Village Committee had a *Min Yuen* (MRLA "masses organisation") representative, and that in some ". . . it was said that practically the whole Committee was on the MCP side . . . ".[49] Nor, despite ruthless harassment and decimation at the hands of vastly superior forces, did the MRLA find it hard to replenish ranks with new recruits:

> ". . . when the MCP casualty rate had risen (1953) to about 140 a month, it did not appear to be too difficult for them to obtain recruits, at the rate of some 1,600 a year, in order to replace the lower ranks of the guerrillas in all areas . . . The fact was that 7,000 guerrillas had been eliminated from the beginning of the insurrection up to the end of 1953 – killed, surrendered, captured and those who had repatriated themselves – but there were still 5,000 armed guerrillas charted on the Special Branch wanted lists. Combined Intelligence Staff analysis suggested, however, that there should be an upward revision of this figure by 20 per cent which meant that at the beginning of 1954 there was an estimated guerrilla strength of 6,000 plus."[50]

Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Malayan Prime Minister, gave as his reason for refusing MCP demands for acceptance as an above-ground political party after attainment of independence ". . . the strength and support of Communism in Malaya . . . " which would make it ". . . impossible to control the MCP if it were to come out of the jungle and be allowed to organise as a *bona fide* political party."[51]

Leaving aside other kinds of evidence, which are examined below,

we should take note of the artificiality of "peace" and "law and order" reimposed by sheer overwhelming military superiority and unprincipled psychological warfare. A good example is presented by the declaration in August 1958, that north Johore was finally accepted as a "white" area – freed, that is, of the "terrorist" presence and entitled to a partial restoration of civil liberties:

> ". . . the Defence Minister of the newly independent Federation of Malaya, Dato Abdul Razak, visited Yong Peng to make the announcement. Only 100 of the 6,300 villagers turned out to hear it. Razak said 'Although we are making this place White, it is not because of any help from you'. The *Straits Times'* headline recording these events must have given some grim satisfaction to Communist die-hards – *'No thanks to you – Dato Razak lashes out at Yong Peng'*."[52]

Moreover, when the armed struggle was re-activated in 1969-70, a man arrested for supplying guerrillas with rice commented that "there was no need . . . to organize propaganda work . . . since the majority of the settlers in the area were already staunch (Communist) supporters."[53] Enforcing superficial compliance in the face of state violence, bribery and general coercion is, ultimately, a poor and powerless way of "winning hearts and minds".

British tactics have been exhaustively analysed[54] – mostly from an admiring, reactionary, perspective – so I will restrict myself here to highlighting essential elements in the pattern. Integral to the plan were: assemblage of overpoweringly superior numerical and technical military strength; wholesale re-settlement of suspect populations in concentration camps; and employment of every kind of intimidation, liquidation, atrocity, brain-washing, and inducement against suspect or vulnerable individuals and groups.

British policy, in effect, was to polarise the entire population of Malaya, and to put at the disposal of those who chose, for one reason or another, to identify genuinely or opportunistically with British aims a crushingly massive military machine, the hard core of which consisted of British, Dominion; and non-Malayan colonial troops armed with the most up-to-date equipment available to the British government. Since, as we shall discuss further below, the United States had a vital interest in preservation of Malaya as a pliant colonial-type economy and polity, there were, in practice, no limits to what Whitehall could have commanded, financially and in terms of equipment, in order to ensure the desired unchallengeable military hegemony. As it was,

> ". . . British imperialism was able to deploy the means and the troops required for suppression (totalling no less than 400,000, they were perhaps the largest armed force in proportion to population used in a colonial war, testifying both to the support the liberation forces gained and to the degree of the imperialist suppressive effort)."[55]

Taking peak MRLA fighting strength at 8,000, this gives a superiority ratio in favour of the imperialists of 50 to 1. In fact, however, Pomeroy gives a wrong impression, and the true situation was, in a way, even more total than he suggests. To begin with – taking peak strengths – there were over 31,000 British and Commonwealth (Australian, New Zealand, Fijian, Gurkha, East African) troops, 28,000 regular police, 40,000 Special constables, almost 250,000 home guards, nine battalions of the Malay Regiment, and after independence the Federation Regiment, the Sarawak Rangers, and sundry irregulars.[56] These had varying functions and varying degrees of effectiveness, with the Malays generally discounted[57] while the Gurkhas and Fijians were particularly prized for their skills in "hunting down" guerrillas.[58] So total was the co-option of the population, in one way or another, that the *British Survey* of June 1952, was able to record that "(i)n some areas there is an armed man to police every two of his fellows, and more than 65 for every known terrorist . . . ".[59]

Despite this militarisation of Malaya (and the total population of the peninsula – it had been under five million at the census of 1947 – was still under seven million in 1960, at the Emergency's end), the war could not have been won without ruthless government control over the totality of the population. The most conservative and pro-British observers are agreed upon this.[60] The key element was unquestionably "resettlement" of the squatters. But the whole operation formed one whole, dedicated to physically separating the non-combatants from the combatants among the Malayan masses – or, in the terminology of the administration, separating "the people" from the "communist terrorists". As Victor Purcell, for long a distinguished British colonial civil servant himself, observed:

> "There was no human activity from the cradle to the grave that the police did not superintend. The real rulers of Malaya were not General Templar or his troops but the Special Branch of the Malayan Police. What General Templar had ordered was virtually a levy en masse, in which there were no longer any civilians and the entire population were either soldiers or bandits. The means had become superior to the ends. Force was enthroned, embattled and triumphant."[61]

The squatter problem dated back to the depression of the 1930s. When rubber and tin prices plummeted after the Wall Street crash of 1929, tens of thousands of Chinese and Indians opted for repatriation,[62] but a significant number by that time thought of Malaya as home. Thrown out of work in a country devoid of even the rudiments of a welfare safety net,[63] thousands – especially from the Chinese community – moved to the jungle fringes, cleared land, and planted food and/or cash crops for their support. Technically illegal as this move was, those who opted to squat had no option, for government had no inten-

tion of spending money on alleviating unemployment and no policy much beyond washing its hands of responsibility; it is interesting to compare this laissez-faire attitude with the legislative and financial assistance eagerly extended to European interests when they wanted land and money.[64] The Japanese occupation greatly accelerated the movement; by the war's end and after the troubled year or two that followed an estimated 300,000 Chinese had settled on the land, while perhaps another 100,000 to 200,000 Malayans of all races[65] were resident in such isolated, scattered, communities – up-country or on remote plantations – that close day-by-day supervision and control of their movements, behaviour and opinions could not effectively be exercised by the all-pervasive police and Special Branch totalitarian apparatus envisaged and in course of creation.[66] The British authorities saw the whole operation as double-bladed. Their aim was to seal off the Malayan Races Liberation Army from its popular mass base, in order then to concentrate upon smashing the regular effectives by overwhelming military power ruthlessly deployed and applied, while indoctrination and the financial encouragement of quislings in the controlled civilian areas permitted a gradual transfer of functions to a Vichy-style regime, ultimately to be granted "independence" "on a golden platter", as the British cynically put it.[67]

That callousness and brutality were involved in the herding up of squatters and in their "re-settlement" is not in dispute. But of course the term is relative. Massive deportation was originally contemplated.[68] Another "solution" at first favoured by British civil servants in Malaya was to "burn out" the offending human beings who had been forced to squat by the failure of British rule to provide them with employment before or immediately after the war and by its supine collapse before the Japanese invader.[69] The British Adviser in Kedah reported that

> ". . . the answer appears to be to destroy squatters' huts and leave them to fend for themselves – this is unpleasant in every way but it seems to me that there is no other way out."[70]

Needless to say, there were Malays of the aristocratic rank who enthusiastically endorsed such suggestions. One such was the Mentri Besar of Kedah who wrote:

> "(t)here is in my view one answer only and that is that the Police and Military take the line which has, I believe, been followed elsewhere, e.g. Palestine and N.W. Frontier, etc., of burning out squatters and leaving them to work out their own salvation, i.e. by going into settled areas, towns and so on, or into other and temporarily less objectionable squatter areas or, best of all, slipping over the Siamese frontier."[71]

(It should be recalled that British police sergeants from the demobilized

Palestine Police played a prominent part in training and giving leadership to local police forces in Malaya during the Emergency.) Ultimately, however, other counsels prevailed, and the enormous evacuation of population entailed by re-settlement was set afoot in 1950 under the then "Director of Operations", Lt.Gen. Sir Harold Briggs.

Particularly in the earlier phases of the operation, it took on the aspect of an all-out assault on a whole people. Bewildered squatters were rounded up without adequate warning and without being given time to contact absent relatives, and packed on to lorries. Frequently they were limited to taking with them but one or two pathetic bundles of what they could quickly grab of their possessions. Their shacks, standing crops, and remaining household objects were destroyed and strewn around. Livestock were slaughtered or turned loose and agricultural implements were smashed or abandoned. *Some* received some compensation, but the majority did not. Others were given promissory chits at the time of their "arrest" (interestingly enough, the word is used in official reports), but these were never subsequently honoured.[72] The early "new villages" were badly sited, ill-prepared, damp, dank, lacking all amenities, and well deserving of the epithet of "concentration camp" soon applied to them. The involuntary inhabitants were, in effect, prisoners – surrounded by high barbed wire, the forbidding perimeter punctuated by powerful floodlights strategically situated, the whole complex dominated by the firepower of police posts which could rake the whole area with machine-gun fire and regularly patrolled by policemen with unlimited powers of search, intimidation, denunciation and detention. Exit from, and re-entry to, the new villages was through a controlled road block, at which humiliating and bitterly resented searches were made of all villagers in transit.[73] Those found with food on them when leaving were automatically considered to be aiding "terrorists" and were liable under Emergency Regulations to penal servitude or death. (Able-bodied camp inhabitants were expected to leave the barbed wire perimeter in working hours to cultivate neighbouring fields or to work in nearby plantations or other enterprises.) One of the most evocative pictures of what the "new villages" meant to those arrested and locked up in them is that given in Han Suyin's brilliant novel, . . . *And the Rain my Drink*.[74]

The whole point of this brutal exercise was to endeavour to sever the links which bound the MRLA cadres to their support organisation embedded in the people of Malaya – the *Min Yuen* (masses movement). Naturally, Chinese food producers working on the fringes of the jungles inhabited by the guerrilla were particularly well-placed to service and supply them. A further factor strengthening the ties of guerrilla and squatters was that squatting agriculture was adapted to dispensing with

the labour of the head of household and even other young adult males. At the outset of squatting, during the depression, young male earners having seen the elderly, the women, and the children installed on an adequate plot of land, had frequently themselves returned to urban, mine or plantation wage employment. When the call came to fight, first against the Japanese (and then against the British), such young men were able to join the resistance, knowing that their families were provided for, and moreover that communication with them would be possible thanks to their dispersion in sites remote from regular Japanese supervision and control. (The Japanese did not have the time nor the resources to implement a "re-settlement" programme.)

The "Briggs Plan" was eventually enforced to such good effect that half a million Malayans were behind barbed wire by 1953. However, no authority on the period disputes that, despite everything, communications and contacts between those locked up in the "new villages" and those in the jungle persisted to the end. Moreover, however often "eradicated" in official rhetoric, MCP organisation always re-appeared in a village after it had been subjected to concentrated treatment by the authorities: ". . . the communists," in the words of one frustrated British commentator, "always sought to re-establish broken links and their efforts had to be constantly checked."[75] Again, the Home Guard itself was far from "reliable"; as Short notes:

> "(a)s with Village Councils so in Home Guards there was an element of risk. Very occasionally a Home Guard Commander might disappear with his weapon and ammunition. In one New Village in Perak Home Guard members spent their evenings on duty posting Communist slogans in the Village; other New Village Home Guards were either known or strongly suspected to have 'non-aggression pacts' with the local guerrillas; and there was a small but steady trickle of lost weapons. Sometimes the Home Guard post would be overwhelmed by prior arrangement . . . "[76]

When the serving High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, was killed in a guerrilla ambush in October 1951, his successor, General Sir Gerald Templer, boosted at least European morale by a blustering and bullying approach, characterised by his frequent imposition of collective punishment on Chinese villages which, in the words of a British official in Malaya,

> ". . . increased enmity towards the British without effectively denying men or food to the guerrillas. The General would arrive at a village with his squadron of eight armoured cars, summon the inhabitants on parade, abuse them for helping the Communists, cut their rice ration, and then rumble off . . . When the General left Malaya in 1954 there were still as many communists active in the jungle as when he arrived two years earlier and the rebellion still had six years to run."[77]

Many writers, mindful of Templer's high reputation among British "expats" then (and no doubt in retirement now), reject Purcell's implied disparagement as ridiculous and mere sour grapes, pointing to such indices as the fall in civilian casualties from 1,024 in 1951 to 143 in 1953, and of security forces casualties over the same period from 1,195 to 209. But, in fact, the writer criticised is not far from right. It is worth looking at two significant aspects of this.

In the first place, the figures now available (see above) tend to corroborate the ability of the guerrilla to maintain its main force numbers despite the casualties inflicted by security force operations.[78] The all-out onslaught of the peak years of the British-orchestrated counter-insurgency failed completely to deny to the guerrilla the cadres and recruits they needed to sustain their resistance. Now, since the re-activation of armed struggle in the late 1960s, recruitment – and with it operational success – have risen to quite new levels. In the second place, it is sheer ignorance and arrogance on the part of British *gauleiters*, like Templer, to claim the "credit" for demoralising the Malayan masses and driving the active resistance back into deep jungle and the Thai border. Leaving aside the moral question – of what "credit" or "merit" attaches to such barbarous actions as were entailed in Templer-type "counter-insurgency" (warmly admired and envied by the Americans later in Vietnam) – it is important to note that the MCP had itself decided to change tactics in 1951 *before* the arrival of Templer and the geared-up British shooting war. Emphasis was switched from "militarism" to protracted political struggle.[79] The decision was a correct one, and was to yield in due course abundant fruit, bringing final victory – at present writing (December 1976 – after the right-wing *coup* in Bangkok which called forth from the Communist Party of Thailand a stirring summons, backed by student, labour, and other community leaders, to all-out armed struggle)[80] – within sight.

Before leaving the subject of resettlement, it is essential to stress that the operation had a vitally important economic function as well as a military-tactical one. It will be recalled that the inter-war depression, followed by a Japanese occupation regime which, lacking the necessary sea-power to take advantage of the export of their products, had to let the tin mines and rubber plantations go derelict, forced hundreds of thousands of former labourers out into remote jungle fringe areas to grow their own food. For the British when they returned it was imperative to re-assemble an adequate labour force where it was needed, particularly in view of the desperate economic straits in which the "Motherland" found itself. Forcible resettlement had a great deal to commend it. In the first place, most of the squatters had at some time supplied labour to mines and/or plantations, and therefore were

familiar with the tasks to be required of them. In the second place, the great immigration tap had finally been caulked off, and therefore there was no real alternative to re-allocating forcibly the existing labour force inside Malaya. In the third place, American insistence upon low rubber and tin prices meant that wage rates could not be made attractive enough to wean the lost labour force back on a voluntary basis.

And, in fact, ". . . the majority of resettlement took place in areas where the rubber and tin industries dominated the economic life of the communities."[81] Furthermore, once labour had been corralled into "new villages", pressure was exerted to have it switch from food production to serving the export industries upon which the British people depended for their economic recovery;

> "By 1952, the percentage of agriculturalists in New Villages had dropped from 60 per cent to 27 per cent. Had it not been for the increasingly favourable economic situation, destitution might well have been widespread."[82]

The "increasingly favourable economic situation" was, of course, a consequence of the Korean war. As primary product prices soared, so much more became possible to the British authorities in Malaya that the whole situation was transformed. As Sir Gerald Templer was to record in a report in 1953,

> "(a) main weapon in the past four years has been the ability derived from a large Federal income to carry through rapidly the resettlement programme, the sevenfold expansion of the Police and the raising of 240,000 Home Guards and of four more battalions of the Malay Regiment."[83]

The colonial administration had the Korean war to thank for this happy dispensation. The passage of time clarifies more and more precisely how central the Korean war was to the entire post-war economic strategy of the United States, and opens up anew the question of its origin. It is no exaggeration to say that, had it not been for the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950, Britain would have been forced to quit Malaya, with intolerable consequences for the international capitalist structure, headed by the United States of America. It was an unacceptable outcome, and one that was duly averted. British commentators who hail the "counter-insurgency" in Malaya ought to weigh in the balance the atrocious consequences for the people of Korea, for it was these war crimes which in the last analysis made possible "victory" in Malaya.

Another frequently overlooked economic aspect of the emergency regulations was their impact on smallholding rubber production and on food production. "With the dislocation of labour many of the smaller estates and medium-holdings simply went out of production."[84] Most of these were, of course, in Asian hands. Total rubber production went down accordingly, from 697,000 tons in 1948 to 573,000 tons in 1953

– but, thanks to the Korean war, prices were rising, and a greater proportion of the decreased total production was in big (i.e. European) estate hands, thus continuing the process of concentration begun under the inter-war restriction scheme and virtual ban on smallholding replanting. From 1946 to 1952, while 282,234 estate acres of rubber were re-planted, only 20,317 smallholder acres were, and there was a similar imbalance in new planting (42,762 acres to 19,880).[85] Tin production, too, dipped as some mines lost their casual labour. At the same time, as noted above, new villagers were being forced to switch from food production to plantation labour, while the population of the country, despite an end to immigration, continued to rise rapidly. The emergency was costing the country some M$300,000,000 a year. Taking everything into account, the ". . . net result of all this was that there was a rise in the cost of living and a decline in the national income . . . If it had not been for the Korean War, Malaya might have gone bankrupt."[86]

It is time now to turn to a necessarily brief consideration of British terrorist tactics and atrocities during the course of the "long, long war". I say "necessarily brief" because the British "gentlemen of the press" co-operated much more closely with the British rulers of Malaya in suppressing all awkward and potentially damaging news during the conflict than their less well-bred American cousins were to do with the American rulers of South Vietnam in their strife a decade or so later. Perhaps by now the most familiar incident generally known is that which took place at Batang Kali, a village in Selangor, in December 1949. It was reported at the time that 25 guerrillas had been killed by security forces when trying to escape. There matters rested until, 20 years later, *The People*, a London newspaper, challenged a statement by George Brown, a leading Labour Party politician, discussing revelations of the My Lai massacre, that ". . . there are an awful lot of spectres in our cupboard too . . . ". But

> ". . . (a)mong those who read this challenge was a Scots Guardsman who had been a member of the patrol. Eventually, he and three other members of the patrol swore statements on oath to the effect that the 25 Chinese had been massacred and that they were not trying to escape."[87]

The victims, moreover, were all civilians, and "(t)his is just one of the many British My Lai's in Malaya."[88]

A careful scrutiny of the available sources – even limiting oneself to the establishment ones – reveals numerous unsavoury incidents. Noel Barber, in one of the most callous books[89] in a peculiarly callous catalogue, gleefully retells several, such as the shooting of five *handcuffed* women prisoners, ostensibly caught in "cross-fire".[90] In general, Barber glamourises and applauds British thuggery – such as the exploits

of men like "Two-Gun" Stafford, and Evan Davies. The latter is proud of the following exploit, as told by Barber: a woman "CT", whom the Special Branch had been trying to force to turn traitor, had proved loyal to her comrades, so Davies

> ". . . decided it was hopeless to try and convert her. She was so dedicated that she had to be killed and Davies decided to shoot her himself. Charlie Boy [the nickname given by the British to a Chinese informer and quisling – MC] arranged to meet the woman on the edge of a rubber plantation where Davies would be hiding – and as Charlie Boy told Davies, 'I have great faith in you as a marksman'. His faith was possibly bolstered by the fact that if they could eliminate the woman . . . Charlie Boy would be eligible for a big reward. Evan Davies borrowed a new Belgian rifle from Colonel Miers, crept out to the rendezvous at first light – and was successful. Davies picked off the woman, Charlie Boy was unhurt, and Davies promptly bagged his reward."[91]

Comment is really superfluous on such turpitude, though Barber obviously regards it as highly commendable, and even amusing.

Barber also gives a long account of the Lee Meng affair.[92] Lee Meng was a female suspect charged with having possessed a hand-grenade at some unspecified time between 1948 and 1951 in "Ipoh" (a city in Perak); no more detail was offered by the prosecution. Possession of a hand grenade was an offence punishable by death. The trial was not heard before a jury, but before a British judge and two Asian assessors. The latter found her not guilty, but under Emergency regulations the judge could ignore and overturn their finding and call for a re-trial. He did. This time the authorities were careful to ensure that there was one British assessor, who naturally found her guilty, though his Asian colleague endorsed the previous verdict of not guilty. Now the British judge agreed with the British assessor and sentenced her to death. Lee Meng's appeal to the Appeal Court in Kuala Lumpur was dismissed on a split decision, and she was refused permission to appeal to the Privy Council in London. A public outcry, led by 50 British MPs, forced the Sultan of Perak to commute the sentence to life imprisonment, in order to divert the eyes of the world from this obvious case of British disregard for the most elementary principles of justice. Lee Meng eventually was allowed to go to China. Barber casually adds: "The world-wide publicity no doubt helped to spare Lee Meng's life, for five other women CTs whose cases had not attracted any attention had already been executed."[93] Again, one must multiply the case many times over to obtain a realistic picture of what conditions were like in the police state that was Malaya during this period.

We have little space on this occasion to dwell upon such matters as widespread police corruption,[94] use of chemical warfare,[95] aerial strafing by Spitfires,[96] use of napalm,[97] development of pattern bombing[98] and the like. One must recall that this was officially *not* a war, inciden-

tally, merely a civil "Emergency".[99] There is one other incident which deserves describing, however, for it was "an action that was itself considered unremarkable".[100] The details are simple: early one November morning in 1948, the smoke house and rubber store of Dominion estate, half-a-mile from the village of Kachau, in Selangor were burned down. By dawn, Kachau village itself had been burned down – by exasperated police. The villagers were awakened at 5 am and given half-an-hour to collect some possessions, but even these caught fire and went up in flames when the village was burned down. The villagers were then told to go where they wanted and not to return. The authorities tried for years to cover up this atrocity – the Colonial Secretary, Creech Jones, briefed by them, told three lies in reply to a question (by Phil Piratin, the Communist MP) in the House of Commons[101] – but even when, thanks to the persistence of one suspicious officer, the truth emerged, it did not prevent the officer responsible for ordering the action from retiring honourably. Many other villages were put to the torch during this period.[102] The following comment is not far from the mark, therefore:

> "The typical Nazi methods against the resistance movements in Occupied Europe, the methods of terror regulations against assistance to the guerrillas, of wholesale arrests and torture, of collective punishments inflicted on whole communities and of razing villages to the ground, were all repeated by the Labour Government in Malaya and subsequently reinforced by the Conservative Government."[103]

The British were particularly proud of their use of psychological warfare. Great efforts were directed towards persuading the guerrillas to become turncoats and traitors. Apart from the widespread use of leaflets and broadcasts and the like, the authorities made good use of what were known as "SEPs" (Surrendered Enemy Personnel). But two things should be noted about the SEPs: first, the majority of those so classified

> ". . . were captured: and many of them openly said that they came out because they were caught unawares or tricked – *otherwise they would have fought to the last*. The attitude of many after their capture certainly bears this out. Some of them were learning English and Malay in order to prepare themselves for political and trade union activities when they were released; others were enquiring about identity cards, State and Federal citizenship; and a third group took it upon themselves to keep the rank and file true to their principles;"[104]

second, the British used naked bribery on a massive scale to buy people, and it is legitimate to ask the question what honour ought to be paid to those who *did* abandon their ideals and betray their friends and fellow-citizens to an alien occupying power for "thirty pieces of silver"?[105] It is not hard to imagine what the Englishmen running the war in Malaya would have had to say about an Englishman who had betrayed his

country to the Nazis during the second world war for money!

Before we proceed to look at the configuration of British economic interests at this time – the motives which lay behind the suppression of the Malayan Anti-British National Liberation War – we should perhaps pause just to stand back and consider the general unacceptability, indeed monstrousness, of the then situation. Imagine what it appeared like to an inhabitant of Malaya to have East Africans, Fijians and Gurkhas unleashed to hunt down fellow Malayans at the behest and on behalf of another alien and uninvited group of people, the British, who could only balance *British* trade and international payments, and thus bolster the British economy, by owning and controlling the rubber grown *in Malaya by Malayans* and the tin mined *in Malaya by Malayans.* I shall leave it to the reader to invert the situation for him(her)self, and to contemplate what the British historians of the "Emergency" might have made of such an inverted position. It is both interesting and relevant, too, that British "counter-insurgency" "experts", bloodied in Malay, were once upon a time only too keen to press their services upon the Americans to help them suppress what was seen as a parallel "emergency" in Vietnam. But now, since all the revelations about US atrocities there, and especially since the debacle of April 1975, these very same people show even greater keenness to underline and stress the *differences* between the Malayan and Vietnamese struggles, where once they were clamourous in detecting the similarities which they felt entitled them to well-paid posts coaching the Pentagon's amateur butchers.

The near-unanimity of British official and "responsible" opinion on the key importance of Malaya to Britain and therefore on the need to preserve it as a British economic asset was reflected in the House of Commons as well as in Whitehall (though there were a handful of maverick MPs, including the two Communists and a few left-wing Labour members). On the Conservative benches, of course, imperialism was naked and rampant. Many Tory members revealed more than they perhaps intended by linking the British struggle in Malaya with the Dutch fight in Indonesia and the French fight in Indochina. There was a good deal of bloodthirstiness on the part of these armchair adjutants: one serious suggestion was for the raising of a new force of 'Black and Tans' to terrorise the peoples of Malaya into submission.[106] Although most members of all parties conceded the principle of eventual self-government for the colony, there were some conservatives who valued it so highly that they advocated a permanent British presence there – as "an equal partner".[107]

> "On the whole," concludes Short, "Members seemed grateful for the fact that Malaya was still the principal dollar earner for the whole of the Common-

wealth and did not question the continuing British presence or the need to defeat the insurrection before Malaya might attain independence."[108]

A few statistics convey the singularity of the peninsula. In 1950, Malaya produced 37 per cent of the world's natural rubber (and 25 per cent of total world rubber production, including synthetics). In the same year, rubber (61 per cent) and tin (12 per cent) accounted for 73 per cent by value of all exports from the colony. Estates accounted for 54 per cent of rubber production (from 55 per cent of the area planted to the crop); the rest was accounted for by smallholders. Smallholder production was still marginally more efficient than estate production (447 lbs. per acre compared to 427), but the advantage was soon rapidly to be wiped out as the fruits of the discriminatory restriction schemes of the inter-war period – in effect banning re-planting by smallholders – ripened; by 1960, estate yields were averaging 676 lbs. per acre, while smallholders had sunk back to 345, saddled with ageing trees. The extent to which Malaya had become a business dedicated to making money for those with a stake in exporting, as opposed to a homeland providing for the needs of its inhabitants, may be judged from the comparative acreage under rubber and rice: 3.6 million and 900 thousand respectively in 1950 (3.9 million and 950 thousand in 1960).

Apart from the obstacles put in the way of peasant replacement of old and failing rubber trees, there were other aspects of colonial policy that contributed to a deterioration in the position of the Malay rural dwellers. Population increase, in the context of severely restricted availability of padi land (hemmed in by the vast holdings of European plantation companies), and of Islamic inheritance law (scrupulous apportionment of the deceased owner's property among his surviving relatives),[109] continually reduced the individual share of available cultivable land. Temporarily, during the height of the Emergency, this demographic pressure was eased by the enormous call-up of Malays into the security forces, but their return after a short period only exacerbated the problem. The leaders of UMNO might have been expected to be sympathetic to the rural Malays, who constituted their most important political constituency, but class is thicker than race, and – despite much-publicised gestures in the direction of rural reform at a later date (under the threat of competition for the Malay vote posed by the PMIP) – they did little more than the British had before them to alleviate peasant poverty. The following table is based upon official figures,[110] and while its absolute accuracy obviously cannot be guaranteed, nonetheless the trend is unmistakeable:

Period	*Av. consumption of rice per capita per annum (lbs.)*
1935-41	380 (incl. Singapore)
1950-54	291 (excl. Singapore)
1955-59	268 (excl. Singapore)

The series makes a curious comment on the course of British-directed "development" in Malaya.

During the period under review (1945-57), two-thirds of Malayan rubber, 70 per cent of Malayan tin production, and virtually all Malayan palm-oil output was in European, and overwhelmingly British, hands. British banks handled the greater part of Malayan deposits. Malayan sterling balances were held in London, and were available for the support of Britain's international position and of British industry.[111] Something like 15 per cent of Malaya's national income accrued to foreign capitalist concerns, and was siphoned out of the country annually during this period: a high enough share, if properly applied to domestic purposes in a programme of raising the living standards and prospects of the peoples of Malay, to have transformed the true development profile of the country.[112]

Such industrialisation as did accompany British exploitation of the economy was for colonial purposes, and kept very firmly in British ownership or control. As late as 1967, only just over 9 per cent of the Malayan employed population was engaged in manufacturing, and the sector contributed only 11.3 per cent to GDP.[113] Although small enterprises predominated numerically – thus misleading the 1955 World Bank investigators in their assessment of the situation[114] – European (and again mainly British) enterprises, though few in number, dominated the market. In Singapore, only just over 3 per cent of the firms involved in manufacture in the late 1950s were European owned, but they employed 31 per cent of all the workers in manufacturing.[115] In Malaya, the 156 biggest companies accounted for half of sales and one-third of total manufacturing employment, and European capital predominated.[116] It is interesting to observe that the British publicly subscribed to the notion that the Chinese "dominated" the economy – a political feint designed to divert attention from the true situation.

But inevitably, in Malaya as elsewhere in the post-war world, Britain found its economic position increasingly challenged by more powerful and energetic economic powers - notably the United States and Japan. As far as the latter is concerned, the main surge of investment activity came after the period dealt with in this volume.[117] For the United States, however, there was a continuous growth of interest in and involvement in the Malayan economy, and therefore in Malayan politics, from

the pre-war period onwards. As we saw above, the restrictionist policies followed by Great Britain between the wars were a matter of grave concern to American leaders, and pressure was exerted on a straitened post-war Britain to keep down rubber and tin prices – pressure to which, in the circumstances, London could not refuse to yield.

It is worth stressing Washington's interest in Malaya; in the second volume we will see how, over the last couple of decades, Malaya has gradually "changed masters" and moved into the US ambit. Stanley K. Hornbeck, the Political Advisor for Far Eastern Affairs in the State Department (and before that head of the Far East Division), wrote in his "extremely influential" 1940 memorandum on "The Importance of Singapore to the Defence of the British Isles and the British Empire and to the Interests of the United States" as follows:

> "The importance of Singapore to the immediate defence of the British Isles lies in its command of the means of access to the raw materials and the man-power of Malaya, the Dutch East Indies and India. While the British Isles could doubtless do without direct access to these materials and to this man-power, the effect of such a loss upon the economic and financial resources of the British Empire – a vital factor in the defence of the British Isles – would be considerable. Such a loss by seriously weakening our own economy (rubber, tin, jute, quinine, vegetable oils, tungsten, antimony, mica are among the supplies that might be lost to us) would adversely affect the extent of our economic aid to the British Isles."[118]

More bluntly, he had asserted in an earlier paper that year that

> "(o)nly on the lands west of the Pacific, and especially on southeastern Asia is our dependence so vital and complete that our very existence as a great industrial power, and perhaps even as an independent state, is threatened if the sources (of raw materials) should be cut off."[119]

It is a fact that the USA and Canada took two-thirds of the world's rubber in 1940 and three-quarters in 1941, and of world output four-fifths came from Malaya and Indonesia; similarly, two-thirds of the world's tin came from these two countries, and North America took 80-90 per cent of it.[120] And, despite this stockpiling, it was averred in the States that the restriction schemes of the 1930s ". . . actually prevented the United States and its allies from getting enough rubber and tin to meet the needs of World War II."[121]

Understandably, Washington took a keen interest in Malaya during the Pacific war. American units in the southern Philippines co-operated with the Chinese resistance movement in Sabah (where US companies had pioneered oil prospecting in 1912). It was, in fact, American forces that first wrested back from the Japanese part of the territory that is now Eastern Malaysia: US troops were landed at Muara and Labuan by the Seventh Fleet in June 1945, quickly capturing Miri and southern

Sabah. Their primary targets were the strategic oil fields of Borneo.[122] When the British re-took Malaya, Washington contributed relief aid in order to speed up restoration of tin and rubber production. As a matter of fact, America had suggested during the war that Malaya be entrusted to the United Nations, a suggestion unacceptable to Britain; at that time, the United Nations was – as it was to remain for some time – nothing but a tool of American policy, and the suggestion was on a par with President Roosevelt's proposal for a four-power trusteeship over Indochina after the war.[123]

During the Emergency, which was as alarming for Washington as it was for London, the United States gave full support to the British effort, supplying small arms (". . . that it had denied the French in Indochina and the Dutch in Indonesia . . . "),[124] and later helping to arm the police with 10,000 carbines, and ten helicopters for jungle operations. More intriguingly, the United States had a hand in the outcome *via* two "fortuitous" factors: war in Korea and growth of a "free" trade union movement. "The economic recovery of Malaya," observes Gould, "was greatly boosted by the Korean war boom, when American demand for rubber gave employment for resettled Chinese, profits for smallholders and merchants, and revenues for government services."[125] (Actually, the Korean war proved central to the broader US economic strategy of revitalising capitalism throughout "free" Asia, as the Kolkos have demonstrated.)[126] As far as development of a "free" (i.e. subservient) trade union movement is concerned, the United States part should not be underestimated, as recent studies are helping to make clear.[127] US support was underlined by the signing in Paris on 17 December 1952, of a secret agreement

> ". . . by which the British and the French agreed to rid Malaya and Indochina respectively of Communist infiltration, whilst the Americans were to defend Korea at the 38th parallel and prevent any Communist advances into Formosa and the offshore islands. This agreement was signed by Acheson, Eden and Schuman after an Atlantic Council meeting, and it was essentially the result of American diplomatic pressure."[128]

Meanwhile, the US had clearly signalled its intense interest in preservation of economic access to Malaya by despatching to it the Griffin Mission of 1950.[129] The Mission was conceived of as an exploration of how the US might counter its perceived military weakness, lack of political support, and feeble influence in the region (outside Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippines). The countries of the area were seen as susceptible to "subversion and penetration", and the United States was "prepared to help ameliorate these conditions" which were understood to stem from "poorly equipped and inexperienced governments, from serious economic problems, (and) from great social upheaval complicated

by Japanese occupation and Soviet propaganda". The Mission was to "discuss needs for economic and technical aid and to recommend aid programs", with a view to strengthening the capacity for counter-insurgency. Hayes, deputy head of mission, himself summed up its task as follows:

> ". . . to study the needs of the area for 'emergency' economic and technical assistance that would 'quickly' expand economic life, strengthen governments and demonstrate American interest."[130]

Furthermore,

> "(b)asic to the Mission's whole activity and approach was an appreciation of the political, economic, and military significance of S.E. Asia. This underlay the sending of the subsequent Bell Mission (to the Philippines) and the Melby Mission, which was concerned with military aid for the area. This appreciation of the significance of the area was prominent in the discussions with the American diplomatic missions in each country visited."

While Hayes pays the usual lip-service to the obligation to check Chinese communist military adventures in the region, he makes clear that the true American concern is ". . . free intercourse with the nations there – economic, cultural and political . . . (and) influence."[131] Specifically, a number of key economic interests are identified. The first consisted of the many important raw materials of South East Asia (". . . rice, tin, petroleum . . . rubber, oil palm products . . . teak, agave, etc. . .") which sustained industrial activity in the developed countries of the northern hemisphere. In particular, the role of these in enabling Western Europe to recover was emphasised:

> "Beyond commodity availability alone was their importance in the great triangular pattern of international trade involving primarily the US, Western Europe, and S.E. Asia. At a time when Western Europe was struggling to rehabilitate its industry and agriculture and to close the yawning 'dollar gap' that Marshall Plan aid was temporarily bridging, S.E. Asia was very important to Europe as a source of raw materials that could be purchased for currencies other than dollars, as a market for its European industrial products, and as a big earner of the much-needed dollars that tended to flow from Asia to Europe either to purchase these industrial products or as profits, interest, repatriation of capital, or personal remittances. Moreover, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom all had major investments in the area at the time, and their earnings on these investments were large."[132]

No less important was resuscitation of the Japanese economy, which – as the Pacific war had just conclusively shown – needed access to South East Asia as a minimum condition not just for prosperity but for sheer survival. US leaders appreciated this keenly, and since integration of an economically regalvanised capitalist Japan into an American-dominated international "free world" empire was universally accepted

as an essential part of post-war recovery,[133] Tokyo had to have the assurance of access to South East Asian markets, investment opportunities, and raw materials:

> "The US had an additional, specific interest in the nations of the area as promising trade partners for Japan. Then still occupied by the US, Japan required heavy American aid to rebuild its economic industry and rehabilitate its economy. If it could sell its services and capital goods in S.E. Asia, and if it could buy rice, coal and raw materials cheaply there, its dependence on American aid would be lessened."[134]

When the Mission turned its attention specifically to Malaya, it noted that without the country's tin and rubber the industrialised countries of the West would be severely embarrassed, particularly with regard to tin for, deprived of Malaya, ". . . the world would be markedly short of the amounts critically needed for essential purposes, both civilian and military. There is no satisfactory substitute for tin."[135] It also noted that the colony was vital to the economic survival of the United Kingdom:

> "Exports to the US were valued at US$215,426,831 in 1948, and US$182,809,000 in 1949. The area is the largest net dollar earner in the whole sterling area. Malaya's exports, especially of rubber and tin, to dollar markets are of critical importance in the effect to achieve a balance of payments between the sterling area and the dollar area. Without these dollar earnings, the United Kingdom would have to depend much more heavily than at present on financial aid from the United States or face a noticeable reduction in its already austere standard of living. Malaya's imports, which come primarily from the United Kingdom, provide important markets for sterling area production, helping the United Kingdom maintain its arduously achieved over-all balance of payments. Economic deterioration in Malaya, resulting either from terrorist activities or from a decline in world demand and prices for its chief exports would adversely affect the United Kingdom both in its over-all balance of payments and in its dollar earnings."[136]

In the longer run, the mission detected in Malaya a possibly lucrative market ". . . important for the maintenance of prosperity elsewhere".

However, for the time being, in the view of the Mission, responsibility for preservation of the colony should be left to the British, and a very moderate scale of aid was accordingly recommended.[137] But even this modest allocation was turned down eventually by the State Department, on the grounds that Britain could undertake whatever was deemed necessary (such as "[reducing] the pro-communist orientation of teaching in Chinese-language schools"). It was recognised that Britain's sensibilities had to be taken into account, and that Whitehall would

> ". . . prefer to get technical and economic aid through the Commonwealth Plan and through the UN and specialised agencies, only calling on the US for assistance when these sources are believed unable to supply it."[138]

The Mission also noted a number of "positive benefits of colonial interest" – and, with the British apparently coping so successfully with the people's struggle (at least compared to the French in Indochina and the Dutch in Indonesia), the State Department believed in letting well alone, embroiled as it was in countless commitments around the world. All this, as we shall see in the second volume, was to change with the British retreat from "East of Suez" after the mid-1960s. The point to note, however, is that Washington had a clear understanding of the significance of Malaya for the prosperity of the "free world"; indeed, successive US Presidents from Truman and Eisenhower to Johnson and Nixon stressed that the importance of Vietnam to America was as a frontier guarding the vital resources of Malaya and Indonesia.[139]

It remains only to sketch the evolution of Malayan politics – or rather that "official" part permitted by and stage-managed by the British. As we noted above, UMNO emerged from Malay resistance to Malayan Union. It commanded, one way or another, the support of all those with a vested interest in perpetuating and extending the kinds of privilege and advantage the British, for their own reasons, had created for, or conceded to, the Malay community. Even the poorest Malay peasants could be rallied to its flag by exercise of traditional feudalistic pressures on the part of the aristocratic-administrator class who formed the leadership.

The counterpart of UMNO among the Chinese was the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) founded in 1948 to act as the representative organ of their community. In fact, its leadership was more or less restricted to rich Chinese businessmen, who could – and did – exert influence on smaller Chinese businessmen and traders, but who were largely alienated from the mass of the Chinese labouring population, except through such pressure as could be wielded *via* various associations of the traditional type, hingeing upon clan, dialect, credit, craft, and/or secret society. Finally, there was a rather ineffectual Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), representing principally middle-class and professional Indians, many of them lawyers and therefore incurably litigious and quarrelsome. In the trade union movement reconstructed by Britain and the United States after the annihilation of genuine trade unionism much of the approved "moderate" leadership was also Indian.

With surprising speed, the British succeeded in fashioning with these disparate elements first a "representative", then a "self-governing", and finally an "independent" political system in Malaya. Communal leaders were entrusted from 1951 with certain government portfolios. Local elections were conducted in 1952. UMNO and the MCA decided to fight them together. UMNO had yielded some ground on admission of Chinese to citizenship, in return for an electoral compact which guaran-

teed Malay ascendancy, though tempered by an agreed quota of Chinese elected by mainly Malay votes. In 1954 General Templar announced that there would be national elections the following year, in which the majority of federal council seats would be at stake. MIC now adhered to what had come to be known as the Alliance (of UMNO and the MCA). In the federal council elections of July 1955, the Alliance scored a signal triumph, winning 51 of the 52 seats at contest, and polling nearly 80 per cent of the vote.

British approval of the Alliance, and the quite unveiled hints that a form of "independence" would shortly be entrusted to the ultra-conservative leaderships of the three communal allies, certainly played a part in this victory. But we should note, too, that barely a quarter of the few Chinese eligible by the penal citizenship restrictions to vote bothered to do so. But Chinese money and Malay subservience to aristocratic dictates saw a reasonably varied spread of communities on the Alliance benches. Tunku Abdul Rahman proceeded to form an Alliance government, with Col. H.S. Lee, the MCA leader, as Minister of Transport. Dyarchy, however, still prevailed, with the British retaining certain key responsibilities such as defence, economic affairs, public finance and the civil service.

The new government arranged talks at Baling with MCP leaders, headed by Chin Peng, in December 1955, but nothing came of the effort to wheedle the guerrillas out of the jungle and into political suspension and frustration. The next step was to be seen to "demand"and "wrest" "independence" from a Britain which had from the beginning rehearsed the whole show:

> "In compliance with UMNO pressure Tunku Abdul Rahman decided to demand full independence within two years of the assumption of office by the Alliance Ministers. The Tunku and other Ministers went to London in January 1956 expecting some hard bargaining on this issue. To their surprise and gratification their demand was immediately met (sic) and August 1957 fixed as the date of independence."[140]

A constitutional commission, whose members were drawn from the white Commonwealth countries, now sat and made recommendations. It should be noted that Britain took very good care to ensure that questions of defence and internal security should remain within her own sphere of influence and competence,[141] at least until the essential burden could be passed on – as it ultimately was – to another neo-colonial master.[142] The formal recommendations of the constitutional commission, as adopted with modifications, were briefly as follows:

> "1. The rulers of the Malay States would choose one of themselves to be Paramount Ruler (*Yang di-pertuan Agong*) and sovereign of the Federation of Malaya for a period of five years; thereafter another of the col-

lege of rulers would fill this office.

"2. The Paramount Ruler of the Federation and each ruler within his State would be a constitutional ruler acting on the advice of his Ministers chosen from the majority party in the fully elected federal or State council.

"3. The federal parliament would comprise a Senate (partly nominated) with limited powers and a House of Representatives all of whose members would be elected for a term not exceeding five years.

"4. Legislative and executive powers would, as heretofore, be divided between federal and State governments. The federal government would be headed by a cabinet of Ministers, under a Prime Minister, chosen from the majority party in the House of Representatives. The State governments would be headed by Chief Ministers (*mentri besar*) who would be chosen from, and supported by, the majority group in each elected State council.

"5. The settlements of Penang and Malacca would cease to be British territory and would become constituent 'States' of the Federation. Their constitutional structure was to be assimilated as far as possible to that of the Malay States by the appointment of a Governor as Crown representative in each State.

"6. The citizenship rules were to be modified again to admit more Chinese and Indians to the franchise. All children born in the Federation after independence would be citizens (i.e. *ius soli* was conceded but not retrospectively). The concept of Malayan nationality was developed and defined.

"7. Malay would be the national language but English would be a second official language for ten years. Islam would be the state religion but freedom of worship was guaranteed to all creeds. Special Malay rights in land tenure, entry to the civil service, award of government scholarships, etc., were to continue without time limit but the Paramount Ruler, who was charged with responsibility for preserving these rights, was also enjoined to review them from time to time."[143]

How well these propositions, as summarised by a leading bourgeois scholar, were observed will constitute a major part of the substance of the second volume. We should only here note that Britain had carefully steered things to a point at which it seemed imminently safe to delegate to the well-trained and well-constrained puppets cultivated for many years the responsibilities of "independence". The elected legislative council, produced in 1955, was to remain in power until 1959 when the first elections under the new constitution were scheduled to take place. Meantime, on 31 August 1957, "Merdeka" (Independence) was officially proclaimed, to the satisfaction both of the elites of the Malay and Chinese communities and of the cream of British businessmen so deeply entrenched in the economy of this hand-made neo-colony. The latter could enjoy the freedom celebrations with particular gratification: at independence, 75 per cent of all rubber plantation acreage was in European (mostly British) hands, along with 61 per cent of all tin production, and 75 per cent of all services and trade.[144] The expense and ferocity of the "Emergency" had paid off.

FOOTNOTES

1. PMCJA = Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action: PUTERA had been formed as a successor organisation to the Japanese-encouraged PETA/KRIS organisation (see chapter five, above).
2. A. Short: *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948-60*, Frederick Muller, London, 1975, pp.26, 27. The author, Anthony Short, was commissioned in 1960, while teaching in the History Department of the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, to write the official history of the Emergency by the Malayan government. He was given unique access to all confidential and secret official papers covering the period. The manuscript was completed in 1968 and submitted to the Malaysian government, which sat on it for three years before deciding not to authorise its publication. Mr Short tried to reverse this decision by cutting "sensitive" material from the first three chapters (of which the second and third are "Towards a Revolutionary Situation" and "The Onus of Responsibility"). But the Malaysian government was preoccupied with the threat posed to it by the renewed MCP armed offensive in the peninsula, and refused to budge, considering that anything critical of official actions in the first "emergency" in the book would be used against it in the second. The MS was then submitted to OUP, accepted, but subsequently rejected on a legal technicality. It should be recalled that OUP has a press in Kuala Lumpur and an extensive market in Malaya, and that a government licence is required for all printing done in the country (besides which "undesirable" literature can be withdrawn from circulation). Finally, seven years after completion, the book appeared under the imprint of Frederick Muller, London. Mr Short was born in Singapore, and did his National Service in Malaya. He was with his battalion in Singapore when the emergency was declared, and subsequently served in Johore.
3. See discussion in Short: *op.cit.*, pp.44 *et seq.*; see also C.D. McLane: *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1966, pp.357 *et seq.*, and pp.385-6; and Ruth McVey: *The Calcutta Conference and the Southeast Asian Uprisings*, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., 1958; and M.R. Stenson: *Repression and Revolt*, Athens, Ohio, 1969, pp.13 *et seq.*
4. Joyce and Gabriel Kolko: *The Limits of Power*, Harper and Row, New York, 1972, p.365.
5. *Ibid.*, p.366; the authors quote an outraged *Economist* commentary: "American opinion should be warned that over here . . . one has the feeling of being driven into a corner by a complex of American actions and inconsistencies which, in combination, are quite intolerable. Not many people in this country believe the Communist thesis that it is the deliberate and conscious aim of American policy to ruin Britain and everything Britain stands for in the world. But the evidence can certainly be read that way. And if every time that aid is extended, conditions are attached which make it impossible for Britain ever to escape the necessity of going back for still more aid, obtained with still more self-abasement and on still more crippling terms, then the result will certainly be what the Communists predict . . . "
6. Short: *op.cit.*, pp.65 *et seq.*
7. *Ibid.*, pp.77 *et seq.*
8. McLane: *op.cit.*, pp.385 *et seq.*
9. There are marked discrepancies on the figures for deportations: c.f. R. Clutterbuck: *Riot and Revolution in Singapore and Malaya 1945-1963*, Faber and Faber, London, 1973, p.169; L.A. Mills: *Malaya*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1968, p.65; Federation of Malaya: *Annual Report 1950*, p.16; the vast majority of deportees were Chinese.
10. Clutterbuck: *op.cit.*, p.168.
11. There is abundant evidence that the boasting of such men as Clutterbuck, Sir Robert Thompson, and their like, on their adeptness at "controlling"

populations has been listened to, at least by such envious would-be emulators as the American imperialists, whose frustrations in Indochina led them assiduously to study the Malayan experience. See, e.g. R.W. Komer: *The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of a Successful Counter-insurgency Effort*, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, 1972; see also American studies specifically on the emergency regulations cited in Clutterbuck: *op.cit.*, p.295, fns. 12, 20; P.B.G. Waller: *A Study of the Emergency Regulations in Malaya 1948-1960*, 1960 (Draft), Stanford Research Institute, Bangkok (sic), 1967; P.B.G. Waller: *Notes on the Malayan Emergency Strategies and Organisation of the Opposing Forces*, Stanford Research Institute, California, USA, 1967; R.D. Rhenick: *The Emergency Regulations in Malaya*, Master's Thesis, Tulane University, USA, 1964.

12. Clutterbuck: *op.cit.*, p.168. However, as High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney said: ". . . it is paradoxical but none the less true that in certain circumstances any authority charged with the duty of maintaining law and order must itself break it for a time. In other words, innocent people who now remain inactive are bound to suffer but we have to act quickly." (excerpt from speech at a Press Club dinner, Kuala Lumpur, 29 November 1948).
13. R. Clutterbuck: *The Long, Long War*, Praeger, New York, 1966, pp.36-37.
14. Komer: *op.cit.*, p.36, citing H. Miller: *Menace in Malaya*, Harrap, London, 1954, pp.206-10; see also Short: *op.cit.*, p.305, and pp.340-41. Short writes of Templer and the Tanjong Malim incident as follows: "The place was Tanjong Malim, some 55 miles from Kuala Lumpur and the event was a particularly bloody ambush of a party repairing a water pipeline that had been cut by the guerrillas. As on so many other occasions, no one in Tanjong Malim had heard anything, seen anything or knew anything of the event. Descending on the town, Templer attacked its inhabitants with a violence of language which was to become typical but which has probably never been used, at least habitually, by Commissioners, high or low, in this century. The mildest charge was that of cowardly silence; and in retaliation Templer imposed a *22-hour curfew* of indefinite duration. No one was to leave the town, schools and bus services were closed, the rice ration was reduced from five to three *katis* per person. Ten days later the prolongation of Tanjong Malim's punishment was made to depend on the result of a questionnaire addressed to the head of each household. More letters were distributed containing an assurance that reprisals need not be feared since absolute secrecy of information was assured (secrecy which may have been observed in principle but not always in practice in the past). The letters were placed in sealed boxes, the boxes were later opened by Templer in the presence of representatives from the town and desultory arrests were made. The curfew itself was lifted on 9 April." Emphasis added: note that Komer contradicts Short on the severity of the curfew. One kati = 1 and one-third pounds. In his book *Economic Change in Thailand, 1850-1970* (Stanford University Press, 1971), Prof. James Ingram cites studies accepting a "normal" requirement of 2.3 to 2.4 piculs of cleaned rice per capita per annum, and he himself accepts this range of estimated "normal" requirements. One picul = 133.3 lbs., so that 2.4 piculs = 319.92 lbs. It will be seen that the "normal" British ration was apparently adequate, but the reduced "punitive" ration is a mere 208 lbs. No doubt Templer continued to dine well throughout these "unfortunate" incidents.
15. See, e.g. Short: *op.cit.*, p.189.
16. There are bibliographies in Clutterbuck: *Riot and Revolution*, and in Short: *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*. Missing from both, however, is any reference to the various periodicals, in English, Malay, Tamil and Chinese, which appeared – some fairly regularly and over lengthy periods, others sporadically or for a few issues only – both during the Emergency and for a time afterwards (some to this day) and which took a position sympathetic to the MRLA. A partial listing of some of the Chinese periodicals can be found in McLane: *op.cit.*, p.399, fn.86. One of the difficulties for the re-

searcher is that certain sensitive documents in the British archives are on permanent loan to "F. Atkins" – presumably the War Office! Another is in the shortage of collected verbal material from ordinary Malayans who lived through the period. In speaking to these, a far different picture of the MRLA emerges from that projected by the administration as "CTs" (Communist Terrorists). Many recall active help from the guerrillas – for instance in intervening in labour disputes with planters and mine owners to warn the latter not to sack or victimise workers, and in general in trying to turn aside official terrorism. In time, the true story will emerge; no one now expects the McNamaras and Westmorelands of this world to supply us with the true story of the Vietnam war.

17. Short: *op.cit.*, pp.114-121.
18. Short writes: ". . . it was remarkable that the end of the British commitment there (Palestine) was followed so soon by the beginning of a similar commitment in Malaya." (*ibid.*, p.121). Those sceptical of this conjuncture being mere coincidence will have had their doubts confirmed by the British government's suppression of relevant documents, despite their due release under the 30 years rule (see *The Sunday Times*, 2 January 1977).
19. R. Clutterbuck: *The Long, Long War*, London, 1966, p.55.
20. V. Purcell: *Malaya – Communist or Free?*, Gollancz, London, 1954, p.233.
21. Short: *op.cit.*, p.507.
22. J. Slimming: *Malaysia – Death of a Democracy*, John Murray, London, 1969, p.5. (It should be noted that Slimming was himself badly wounded while operating as a police officer in Malaya during the Emergency; he subsequently became an Assistant Protector (sic) of Aborigines. Two other books by him are worthy of note: *In Fear of Silence*, London, 1955 (a novel); and *Temiar Jungle*, London, 1958, an account of his work in aborigine country. See also further references in Short: *op.cit.*, p.446, fn.9) Hanrahan, *op.cit.*, p.80, puts the (assumed) Chinese connection as follows: "While the Malayan Communist Party openly acknowledges Chinese Communist leadership in almost every official pronouncement, the actual working of the chain of command from Peking to the Malay jungle is not clear. No doubt the Committee on Overseas Chinese of the Chinese People's Republic has much to do with the Chinese in Malaya as in other Southeast Asian areas. But there is no indication that it has any direct ties with the high command of the MCP itself. According to one usually reliable source, the real command of the Malayan struggle is now based in Nanning, South China, functioning under a so-called 'United Operations Department' of the Chinese Communist Party. This organization reportedly directs the activities of Communist organs in Burma, the Philippines, Indochina, and Thailand, as well as in Malaya. *There is as yet, however, no official acknowledgement of this organization's existence by either Chinese or British authorities.*" (emphasis added) Hanrahan's speculations concerning the Committee on Overseas Chinese are shown to be hollow and ill-informed by the sound research embodied in Stephen Fitzgerald's *China and the Overseas Chinese*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972. (In any case, Hanrahan's assumptions run counter to the whole logic of Chinese revolutionary theory and practice as encapsulated in the writings of Mao Tse-tung.) One is reminded of the immortal words of then US Assistant Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, in 1951: "The Peiping (Peking – MC) regime may be a colonial Russian government – a Slavic Manchoukuo on a larger scale. It is not the government of China. It does not pass the first test. It is not Chinese. It is not entitled to speak for China . . . " (cited D. Horowitz: *From Yalta to Vietnam*, Penguin, London, 1967, p.108) – namely, the imperialists will never accept that resistance to their occupation of foreign countries stems from local outrage and not the "subversive" interference and manipulation of "aggressive" and "expansionist" (other) outside powers, Russia in the case of the Chinese Revolution (an obvious standing of truth on its head!), China in the case of the Malayan. See also

McLane: *op.cit.*, pp.400-1: ". . . the possibility exists that Peking was at this juncture considering a more active role in Malaya . . . on the pretext of defending the overseas Chinese. If this was for a time Peking's intent, nothing came of it. Active Chinese assistance to the Malayans during the period of their greatest need does not emerge in retrospect as significant . . .".

23. Milton Osborne: *Region of Revolt*, Pergamon Press, Australia, 1970, p.72.
24. D.J. Steinberg (ed.): *In Search of Southeast Asia*, Pall Mall Press, London, 1971, p.367.
25. Slimming: *op.cit.*, p.63.
26. Short: *op.cit.*, pp.462-3.
27. *Ibid.*, pp.208-9.
28. *Ibid.*, p.210.
29. *Ibid.*, p.209.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. W. Shaw: *Tun Razak – His Life and Times*, Longman, London, 1976, p.87.
33. *Ibid.*, p.97.
34. *Ibid.*
35. See R.K. Vasil: *Politics in a Plural Society*, OUP, London, 1971, for an analysis of the Partai Raayat (pp.166-182); see also his chapters on the Labour Party (pp.93-166) and on their temporary alliance in the Socialist Front (pp. 183-221). This book is essential reading on the various attempts (outside the MCP) that have been made to form non-communal parties in West Malaysia.
36. This ground will be covered in the second volume, which will cover the period 1957-1977; see also documents on the MCP carried from time to time in the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*.
37. G. Raman: "The 'Emergency' in Malaya", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol.VI, no.3, p.341.
38. See documents reproduced in Hanrahan: *op.cit.*, pp.85-133; Short: *op.cit.*, 310-321; and comments in footnote 79 below.
39. The ambivalence had, however, been more pronounced for the British before 1957 than it was for their appointees thereafter. It was decidedly difficult for the British who had argued, when pressing Malayan Union upon the reluctant Malays, that the Chinese in Malaya were good loyal citizens worthy of being extended Malayan nationality to turn round and brand the same people as the supporters of an "alien" force, the MCP. Still, even for the Malay rulers after independence, it was a political necessity *both* to brand the MRLA as Chinese Communists (i.e. alien) *and* to retain a minimal working relationship with the Chinese community *via* the MCA.
40. Cited in J. Bastin and R.W. Winks: *Malaysia – Selected Historical Readings*, OUP, London, 1966, p.359.
41. Cited Hanrahan: *op.cit.*, p.104.
42. No more shining example need be cited than that of C.V. Devan Nair, Secretary-General of Singapore's National Trades Union Congress, and President of the Asian Regional Organisation of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (a CIA-supported outfit – see Lenny Siegel: "Asian Labour – The American Connection", *Pacific Research*, Vol.VI, no.5, July-August, 1975); he was Lee Kuan Yew's spokesman at the Bureau meeting of the Socialist International when expulsion of the PAP was being discussed in May, 1976, and – after departure of the PAP from the SI – editor of an astonishing collection of tendentious and unrepentantly apologetic articles entitled *Socialism That Works . . . The Singapore way*, Federal Publications, Singapore, 1976.
43. Short: *op.cit.*, p.441.
44. *Ibid.*, p.443.
45. *Ibid.*, p.448; Hanrahan writes: "The Communists . . . also . . . made a studied effort to win over the Sakai aborigines. With their keen knowledge

of the jungle, the Sakai, according to British intelligence officers, now form a 'human radar screen' around the guerrilla strong points. Guerrilla ingenuity and determination have cost the British dearly in this deadly game of hide and seek." (*op.cit.*, p.75).

46. Noel Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, Collins, London, 1961, p.14. This extraordinary judgement merely betrays the smugly self-satisfied ignorance of the *colons* and their mouthpieces like Barber. Even conservative, academic, observers with some knowledge of Malayan realities at this time would dismiss with scorn the view of the country as a "contented paradise" (except, of course, for the *colons* – who no doubt were content with their high living standards, constant *stengahs*, servile *amahs*, *keburs* and *sais*, and luxurious bungalows). T.H. Silcock described the rural sector – accounting then for some 60 per cent of the Malayan population – as ". . . an economy of poverty and chronic debt, relieved only in years of exceptional prosperity . . . and normally at levels not much above the appalling poverty of most of Asia." (*The Economy of Malaya*, Singapore, 1957, p.1) Equally appalling poverty was to be found in the urban slums, in the coolie labour lines, and in general throughout Malayan society below its more elevated levels. Contrary to the conventional wisdom of the well-fed and the prosperous (such as Barber), people violently thrust down into abject poverty and chronic uncertainty and harassment do *not* regard their condition as one of "paradise", and are *not* content with it. The power of the post-war revolt stemmed from the suppressed anger of the damned of the earth for justice. It is, incidentally, of great significance, as revealing the racist bias of Barber, that he captions one of his photographs of Sir Robert Thompson (the British counter-insurgency expert, who became a mercenary of the Americans in Vietnam) as ". . . one of the few men who lived in Malaya throughout the war (sic) . . . "; naturally, Malays, Chinese, Tamils, and other non-whites who lived in Malaya throughout the 1948-60 period were not really men – perhaps *Untermenschen* is what Barber had – consciously or unconsciously – in mind in denying the "lesser breeds without the law" the full status of men?
47. Short: *op.cit.*, p.184.
48. *Ibid.*, p.220.
49. *Ibid.*, p.411.
50. *Ibid.*, p.350.
51. *Ibid.*, p.467.
52. Clutterbuck: *Riot and Revolution*, p.206; Shaw: *op.cit.*, p.113.
53. Clutterbuck: *op.cit.*, p.262; it is fascinating now to see how the beleaguered reactionary regime in Kuala Lumpur is – in its hysterical arrests of even hitherto "top people" – giving credence to the thesis that the MCP and MRLA had support throughout the population of Malaya (witness the detention of Abdul Samad Ismail, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad and Abdullah Majid in late 1976 on account of – alleged – Communist United Front activity; Samad Ismail, a distinguished journalist and managing editor of the *New Straits Times* at the time of his arrest, had at one point in his career been an advisor to the late Premier, Tun Razak, despite the fact that he had been detained once before – briefly, during the first Emergency: Abdullah Ahmad, Deputy Minister for Science, Technology and the Environment, had been Tun Razak's political secretary, and as the man responsible for UMNO's relations with the media was in a position to give instructions to Samad Ismail; Abdullah Majid, Deputy Minister for Labour and Manpower, had been Tun Razak's press secretary, and was a member of UMNO's Information Sub-committee and therefore also had dealings with Samad Ismail; after his arrest, Samad Ismail went on TV to "confess" that he was a communist agent charged with penetrating UMNO upper circles, but such "confessions" are viewed with as much cynicism and scepticism today as they were during the British period as a result of popular understanding of how the "confessions" are extracted or exacted).

54. See footnote 16.
55. W.J. Pomeroy: *Guerrilla Warfare and Marxism*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1969, p.33.
56. For the last, see J. Macdonald: *My Two Jungles*, Harrap, London, 1950; the estimate of Home Guards is from Short: *op.cit.*, p.412, and is much higher than the peak figure quoted in most sources (e.g. Komer: *op.cit.*, p.41).

The order of battle on outbreak of the emergency was:

Gurkha Rifles	6 battalions
Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry	1 battalion
Seaforth Highlanders	1 battalion
Malay Regiment	2 battalions
26th Field Regiment (Artillery)	3 battalions

Reinforcements included:

Royal Inniskillin Fusiliers	1 battalion
2nd Guards Brigade	6 battalions
Kings African Rifles	contingents
Fijian Regiment	contingents

In addition there were four RAF squadrons:

no.45 (Bomber)
no.60 (Fighter)
no.81 (Photo/Reconnaisance)
no.52 (Transport)

There was a total of about 100 aircraft plus helicopter forces plus elements of Bomber Command plus no.41 (Transport) squadron from the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

(Source: A.H. Peterson, G.C. Reinhardt & E.E. Conger (eds.): *Symposium on the Role of Air Power in Counterinsurgency and Unconventional Warfare: The Malayan Emergency*, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, 1963. This study was in fact sponsored by the United States Air Force – and note should be taken of the significance of the date, coinciding with intensification of America's [and Kennedy's] "special war" in Vietnam.)

Distribution of Special Constables on 31 December, 1949:

State	*no.*
Perak	8,468
Kedah/Perlis	2,853
Selangor	5,366
Negri Sembilan	2,918
Malacca	1,239
Penang/Province Wellesley	659
Johore	5,255
Pahang	2,237
Kelantan	516
Trengganu	479
	29,984

Distribution by race:	
Europeans	1
Malays	28,026
Indians	1,240
Chinese	575
Eurasians	57
	29,899

(Discrepancies in the original.)

Distribution of Auxiliary Police on 31 December, 1949:

State	*no.*
Perak	9,125
Kedah	909

Distribution by race:	
Europeans	1,845
Malays	30,998

Perlis	51	Indian	1,143
Selangor	1,752	Chinese	3,648
N. Sembilan	7,409	Eurasians	346
Penang	281		37,880
Johore	10,272		
Pahang	4,817		
Malacca	549		
Kelantan	1,178		
Trengganu	1,537	(Discrepancies in the original.)	
	37,880		

(Source: Federation of Malaya: *Police Force Annual Administrative Report, 1949*, KL, 1950, pp.14-16.)

57. Short: *op.cit.*, p.226.
58. Hanrahan: *op.cit.*, p.75.
59. Cited in V. Purcell: *Malaya – Communist or Free?*, Gollancz, London, 1954, p.97.
60. "By the spring of 1950, though we had survived two dangerous years, we *were undoubtedly losing the war.* The soldiers and police were killing guerrillas at a steady 50 or 60 a month, and getting 20 or 30 surrenders, but the Communists were more than making up for this by good recruiting. The soldiers were killing about six guerrillas for every man they lost in the jungle, but the hard-pressed police posts were losing more men than the Communists. The guerrillas were murdering more than 100 men a month, and the police seemed powerless to prevent it. There was a growing danger that the police and the civilian population would lose confidence in the government and conclude that the guerrillas in the end must win. *The main reason why we were losing was that the guerrillas could get all the support they needed – food, clothing, information, and recruits – from the squatters.* It was quite impossible to police . . . them. The squatter areas, insofar as they were governed at all, were ruled by the Communist parallel hierarchy, which the squatters accepted . . . Thus, the Communists were fast building up their strength and their support, and at the same time, stocking up arms and ammunition by raiding or *corrupting* the village police posts." (emphases added) (Clutterbuck: *The Long, Long War*, pp.55-56; a couple of points to note: the security forces *kill guerrillas*, the MRLA *murder men*; "corrupting" in this context undoubtedly means police sympathisers passing arms and ammunition to the MRLA).
61. V. Purcell: *Malaya, Communist or Free?*, London, 1954, cited G. Raman: *op.cit.*, p.342.
62. The government offered assisted passages to unemployed Indian labourers and "decrepit and destitute" Chinese labourers, while others of course returned to their homelands as straight paying passengers. In the four years from 1930 to 1934, there was a net efflux of 243,539 South Indians at Penang. In the three years 1931 to 1933 there was a net efflux of Chinese at Singapore of 241,661. (See J.N. Parmer: *Colonial Labor Policy and Administration*, J.J. Augustin, New York, 1960, pp.236, 270, 271.) Nevertheless, taking the decade of the 1930s as a whole, there appears to have been a slight net influx. Official policy was to take some of the load off employers by providing *some* employment in public works for able-bodied labourers, especially Chinese, to keep them in trim for the expected economic recovery, but the numbers involved were insignificant in relation to the magnitude of unemployment.
63. This situation contrasts strongly with that faced by British workers flung out of employment, for even in the 1930s there existed the rudiments of a welfare state, and harsh though life was for the workless, few sunk to the levels of utter destitution endured by many jobless labourers in the Malaya of the 1930s.

64. From the 1890s on, the (British) government in the FMS empowered itself to give free grants of (Malay) land to any (European) planter who guaranteed to establish a perennial crop; it also gave loans to "substantial" (i.e. European) planters as a further inducement. When it came to providing tiny plots and minimal support to unemployed Chinese and Indian labourers in the depression – and later, after the war, to re-settled squatters, the British, naturally, showed much more sensitivity to Malay interests!

65. Estimates vary, and accuracy is, in the circumstances, unobtainable. See: Gullick: *op.cit.*, pp.114-5; Clutterbuck: *Riot and Revolution*, p.187; Komer: *op.cit.*, p.54; Short: *op.cit.*, chapter 7 ("The Squatter Problem"), esp. pp.175-6 giving the various categories of squatters, and pp.202 *et seq.* Kernial Singh Sandhu ("The Saga of the 'Squatter' in Malaya", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol.V, 1964) states that about 1,000,000 rural dwellers (86 per cent of them Chinese) were resettled during the Emergency, and that there were about 400,000 Chinese squatters in 1945 Not all those resettled were squatters, and not all squatters were Chinese.

66. "Briggs realised that before the Army stood much chance of making contact in significant numbers with the guerrillas, their major source of supply, the Chinese peasant farmers, would have to be denied them. To do this it was not sufficient to issue directives or even to round up or transport the inhabitants of a given area, put them down in a new 'village', surround them with a single strand of barbed wire and call the finished job 'resettlement'. To seal off a community of a thousand or more Chinese, many of whom might be expected to have husbands, sons or brothers with the guerrillas ultimately involved their *subjection to totalitarian processes of observation, searching and control if not the creation of a totalitarian state.* To achieve it would mean villages of optimum size – those whose perimeters could be effectively patrolled – the building of chain link or double barbed wire fences, the trimming of vegetation or standing crops to a standard height, the replacement of paraffin pressure lamps with floodlights driven by electric generators, constant night patrolling of various kinds and, perhaps most onerous and distasteful of all, enough policemen and women to search most of the adult population every morning." (emphasis added) Short: *op.cit.*, pp.291-2.

67. In 1955, when the Alliance delegation went to London to talks about the timing of independence they were met at London Airport by Sir John Martin, the Permanent Under-Secretary to the Colonial Office; when Tunku Abdul Rahman asked "Are you going to make things difficult for us?", the British official replied "No, we are going to give it to you on a golden platter". "Unfortunately, this chance remark was overheard and later reported in the Malayan press. It became a verbal brickbat with which the opposition parties were, for some years, occasionally to pelt the Alliance." (Shaw: *op.cit.*, p.106).

68. For some insight into the ruthlessness with which the British authorities carried out deportation, and into the sufferings of those up-rooted and shipped abroad, see the extracts from a dissenting report by a British civil servant in Malaya (and later Secretary for Defence there) reproduced in Short: *op.cit.*, pp.190-2. Those arrested frequently did not know what was happening, and so took no possessions with them. What they left behind was destroyed, sold off for a song, purloined or otherwise "lost". No compensation was paid for this sudden loss of the fruits of a life's hard work. Most families when arrested were incomplete, and often remained so when shipped, resulting in the permanent break up of families in a totally arbitrary manner sprung upon the victims without notice. Most deportees were women and children, headed for China's ports, and then for God knows where in a China wracked by civil war and revolution, and devastated after decades of murderous strife. Once crammed into the boats, though, British responsibility virtually ceased; that many died destitute and starving in China on arrival was a matter of indifference to the British police and mili-

tary who saw it merely as a military matter, facilitating the hunting down and killing of MRLA guerrillas.

69. Some idea of the panic of the white population as the Japanese advanced, and of the depths of deceit and bribery they were prepared to resort to to escape, can be gleaned from Noel Barber's *The Fall of Singapore*, Fontana, London, 1970, although he writes from the European perspective. In fairness, many showed great personal courage, and some chose to stay behind with their "loyal subjects". The overwhelming impression is of stupidity, incompetence, complacency and rigid colonialist buffoonery among the top brass.
70. Short: *op.cit.*, p.179.
71. *Ibid.*, p.180.
72. *Ibid.*, p.98.
73. For the Semenyih "new village" incident, see *ibid.*, pp.406-11. Incidentally, any squatter refusing the "privilege" of settlement or resettlement was liable to "repatriation" (i.e. deportation). (*Squatter Committee Report*, 1950, cited Kernial Singh Sandhu: *op.cit.*, p.155.)
74. Jonathan Cape, London, 1956, and many times reprinted.
75. Allen: *op.cit.*, p.97; it is interesting how much this gives away of the real situation.
76. Short: *op.cit.*, p.414.
77. V. Purcell: *Malaysia*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1965.
78. Clutterbuck: *op.cit.*, p.195 flatly contradicts Short (and Purcell) on this point, arguing that under Templer "two-thirds of the guerrilla force was eliminated". Short is to be preferred as a source, in view of the unique access to the relevant material he had.
79. It would not be edifying to indulge in prurient politico-scholarly "impartial" analysis of the MCP's tactics and strategy; in due course, the Malayan people will write their own history, with information, knowledge, experience and authenticity unattainable by the "academic" observer. We need only recall the dismal record of Western "experts" on Vietnam and the revolutionary forces there, and the contrasting wealth of Vietnamese writing on their struggle, to be sure of the comparative worth of the two streams of comment and explanation. However, the interested reader should consult Short: *op.cit.*, pp.309-21; McLane: *op.cit.*, pp.389 *et seq.*; Clutterbuck: *op.cit.*, 169 *et seq.*; Hanrahan: *op.cit.*, pp.73 *et seq.*; etc.
80. The situations in Malaya and Thailand are obviously intimately linked. For background see the following: M. Caldwell: "Thailand: towards the revolution", *Race and Class*, Vol.XVIII, no.2, 1976; M. Caldwell: "Indonesian 'Sub-imperialism' and the Kra Isthmus", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. VI, No.3, 1976; "Coup in Thailand", special number of *AMPO* (Vol.8, no.3, 1976).
81. R. Stubbs: *Counter-Insurgency and the Economic Factor. The Impact of the Korean War Prices Boom on the Malayan Emergency*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1974, p.32.
82. *Ibid.*
83. Cited *ibid.*, p.15.
84. Kernial Singh Sandhu: "The Saga of the 'Squatter' in Malaya", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol.5, 1964, p.170.
85. F. Lee Soo Ann: *Economic Growth and the Public Sector in Malaya and Singapore, 1948-1960*, OUP, Kuala Lumpur, 1974, p.49.
86. Kernial Singh Sandhu: *op.cit.*, p.170.
87. Short: *op.cit.*, p.168; as the author points out in his account of the incident and the subsequent suppression of all details of the circumstances (pp.166-7), what, on the face of it, was one of the most spectacular security forces victory of the whole war, and what would normally have been publicly acclaimed with jubilation, was in fact treated by the authorities with "reticence", and an inquiry into the whole affair was set in train by the police. The authorities stuck to their version of the matter until – after

The People revelations – the incoming Conservative government in London said the matter had been "dropped". It appears that only 24 Chinese were shot, but some mystery surrounds the fate of the 25th. No photographs were taken, we have no names, and there never was any evidence offered that they were guerrillas. Local oral tradition (Short: p.167) links the atrocity to an earlier ambush and killing of a security lieutenant and special constable in the same area.

88. G. Raman: *op.cit.*, p.341.
89. Noel Barber: *The War of the Running Dogs*, Collins, London, 1971.
90. *Ibid.*, p.57.
91. *Ibid.*, p.246; readers should picture the whole thing in reverse to savour its full nauseous odour – i.e. with an occupying force of Malayans in Britain, stalking and "picking off" British patriots with the help of quislings and traitors bought for cash to betray their country and their countrymen. Justice was, however, at least in part, done. While 'Charlie Boy' was holding a celebration dinner, a member of the MRLA walked in, accused, sentenced and beheaded him. The killer, Davies, unfortunately went unpunished, scot free.
92. *Ibid.*, pp.171 *et seq.*; see also Short: *op.cit.*, pp.384 *et seq.*
93. Barber: *op.cit.*, p.175.
94. Short: *op.cit.*, p.356, n.12: "An article in the *Singapore Standard* (28 February 1952) was a reminder that other than heroic virtues were called for if the police were to become effective. Not only, it alleged, was the police force largely untrained, but it was largely corrupt and was regarded by the people as something to keep away from."
95. *Ibid.*, p.456. The "food denial" programme included detection of jungle gardens by the use of infra-red sensors to penetrate tree cover and subsequent destruction of identified or suspected crops by application of chemicals; see Peterson *et al.*: *op.cit.*, p.23.
96. *Ibid.*, p.103, fn.3.
97. See J.B. Perry Robinson: *Transformation in Malaya*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1956, p.212.
98. H. Miller: *Jungle War in Malaya*, Arthur Baker, London, 1972, p.124; V. Purcell: *op.cit.*, p.13.
99. "It *was* a war, but there was a curious reason why it was never called one. As the author John Gullick, an authority on Malaya and one-time member of the Malayan Civil Service, points out: 'It was a war – though out of regard for the London insurance market, on which the Malayan economy relied for cover, no one ever used the word.' This misnomer continued for twelve years, for the simple reason that insurance rates covered losses of stocks and equipment through riot and civil commotion in an emergency, but not in a civil war." (Barber: *op.cit.*, Author's Note.)
100. Short: *op.cit.*, p.168.
101. *Ibid.*, p.163, fn.9; Creech Jones said that the inhabitants had been warned; that they were given ample time to remove their belongings; and that the relief measures of the social welfare department were not required 'because the people found shelter with their friends'.
102. *Ibid.*, p.162.
103. R. Palme Dutt: *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1957, p.186; it is only fair to give Short's own assessment: ". . . in the early stages of the campaign, and indeed wherever contact took place in incidents or information pointing unmistakably in the presence of guerrillas in a particular area, how, in the few seconds of confusion when figures are running from huts into jungle does one decide to open fire or not? If one does not, the best that can happen is that a possible enemy may escape. With a small patrol, what is equally likely is that they themselves will be attacked if they have, in fact, succeeded in surprising a guerrilla group. But, unless they are uniformed or obviously armed, there is no guarantee that the people who are running are guerrillas or wanted

criminals rather than very frightened men and women who may or may not be willing or unwilling guerrilla supporters. Almost every other situation report at the beginning of the emergency recorded the shootings of men who ran out of huts, were challenged and failed to stop. Too often, no weapons, ammunition or anything else in the least way incriminating, either materially or in oral evidence, was ever found . . . the CPO (Chief Police Officer) Johore was particularly concerned with the situation in which suspects were shot while attempting to escape: "I can find no legal justification for the shooting, whether under the normal laws or the emergency regulations, unless the incident occurs in a protected place or during curfew hours." So far it seemed that magistrates had brought in verdicts of justifiable homicide; but the CPO thought that would not always be the case and that some major scandal might occur. Later . . . at the CPO's conference in Kuala Lumpur, the CPO Johore again raised the matter with the Commissioner of Police and added that *in many cases* he considered *a small number of rounds of ammunition were planted on the bodies afterwards to justify the shooting. Sometimes this small act of meanness was unnecessary. Some coroners . . . declined to hold an inquest under the emergency regulations and merely accepted the military statements and recorded a verdict of justifiable homicide.*" (pp.160-1) (emphasis added). The attentive reader will note here all the problems of waging a "counter-insurgency" war against a hostile population, deemed to be "friendly". True, Short says he does not think the Malayan campaign was as brutal as the one fought in Vietnam, but that isn't saying much, and is to damn by faint praise. He does point out, though, that ". . . what is remarkable . . . is that in Malaya there are so few accounts of atrocities . . . in the vast quantities of captured and surrendered Communist papers." (p.160)

104. Short: *op.cit.*, p.491.

105. There was a regular tariff: "For casual information of value, the police were authorised to pay fairly small awards – perhaps $50 to $100 (two weeks' or a month's earnings) . . . If, however, the information led directly to the killing or capture of a guerrilla on the wanted list the rewards were very generous indeed. In 1951, the scale of rewards was as follows:

Secretary General (Chin Peng)	$60,000
State or Town Committee Secretary	30,000
State or Town Committee Member	20,000
District Committee Secretary	14,000
District Committee Member or MRLA Company Commander	10,000
MRLA Platoon Commander	6,000
District Committee Member or MRLA Section Commander	5,000
Cell Leader	3,000
Others	2,000

Later, these figures [all in Malayan $ – MC] were doubled, and for some of the higher ranks quadrupled, and a 30 per cent bonus added if the quarry (sic) was taken alive." (Clutterbuck: *op.cit.*, pp.180-1.)

106. Short: *op.cit.*, p.327; the 'Black and Tans' ". . . hold a place in Irish memory in much the same way as the Nazi Gestapo has a place in European memory." (P. Berresford Ellis: *A History of the Irish Working Class*, Gollancz, London, 1972, p.251.)

107. *Ibid.* A number of Conservative MP's had, of course, direct financial interests in Malaya. There are a number of reference books through which one may, if so inclined, trace and document these interests. Among these should be mentioned the annuals *The Stock Exchange Official Year Book*, the *Straits Times Directory*, and *Who Owns Whom*. Andrew Roth's parliamentary profiles are also invaluable. I shall restrict myself here to airing

one example: that of Sir John Denman Barlow Bt. . . He was Conservative MP for the Middleton and Preston Division of Lancashire from 1951 to 1966, and served during this period as Chairman of the Conservative Trade and Commerce Committee of the House of Commons. He also ". . . led a Commonwealth Parliamentary Assocation Mission to Malaya in 1959 and led a Parliamentary Association Mission to take a Speaker's Chair as a gift from the House of Commons to the new Malaysian Parliament in 1963." (*Kelly's Handbook, 1971*). The significance of Sir John Barlow is that, in addition to being director of a number of big institutions active in Britain – for instance Barclays Bank – he was also a director of some of the wealthiest and most influential companies operating in Malaya, notably the private merchant bankers known as T.B. Barlow and Brother (Sir John was the brother) and its numerous subsidiaries, owning 126,000 acres of rubber and oil palms in Malaya (one company alone in this complex – The Highlands and Lowlands Para Rubber Co.Ltd. – was valued at £21.1 million by *The Times*, 13 February 1972). But this is only the start of the matter, for through one arrangement or another (interlocking directorates, cross-company investments, holding companies, and the like) the Barlows were linked to all the major agency houses and other powerful British economic interests operating in the colony. No more than a handful of men linked thus controlled , managed and exploited 1,685,850 acres of Malaya in the early 1970s, using excellent political connections to extract concessions from the "independent" Malaysian government. In the immediate post-war period, of course, such politician-businessmen as Sir John Denman Barlow formed an important link between Westminster, Whitehall, and planting interests in Malaya, ensuring that official British policy coincided with the long-term interests of the latter.

108. Short: *op.cit.*, p.327.

109. See S. Husin Ali: *Malay Peasant Society and Leadership*, OUP, Kuala Lumpur, 1975, Appendix II, pp.174-5.

110. See Department of Agriculture, Kuala Lumpur: *Malayan Agricultural Statistics*, and Department of Statistics, Kuala Lumpur: *Rice Statistics*; see also footnote 14 above.

111. See W.M. Corden: "The Malayan Balance of Payments Problem", in T.H. Silcock and E.K. Fisk (eds.): *The Political Economy of Independent Malaya*, Angus and Robertson, London, 1963.

112. Some estimates of the flow of investible funds out of Malaya follow. (The term 'investible funds' is used ". . . to indicate funds which were not used for consumption purposes in the Federation, and were not invested there either, but were sent out of the country for investment and consumption overseas. Such funds, or at least a part of them, were potential funds for investment in the Federation, if they could have been induced to stay there, and appropriate channels of investment found for them.") ". . . the sums involved are very large, amounting to more than the total of gross domestic fixed capital formation over the (1955-61) period, or 12.9 per cent of gross domestic product. Outflows of funds would be expected in the context of Malaya's political situation before independence and during the 'Emergency', and Puthucheary's calculations for the whole of Malaya during 1949-53 show a net outflow of funds equivalent to 14.8 per cent of gross national income (see J.J. Puthucheary: *Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy*, Eastern Universities Press, Singapore, 1960, p.159). However the outflow appears to have continued since 1957, although at a slightly lower rate, for 11.4 per cent of gross domestic product went out of the Federation, or the equivalent of 116 per cent of gross domestic fixed capital investment. It is worth pointing out that the net outflow for the five years 1957-61, $3,018 million, was *only slightly less than the total of public investment under both the first and second five-year plans ($1,007 million plus $2,150 million = $3,157 million)*. If the government had been able to tap *only one third* of the private outflow,

and eliminate its own outflow (which is largely under its own control) it would have been able to marshal $1,358 million for internal investment, which would have increased gross domestic fixed capital formation by 50 per cent over the period 1957-61." (E.L. Wheelwright: *Industrialization in Malaysia*, Melbourne University Press, London, 1965, pp.105-6; emphases in the original.)

113. See C. Hirschman: "Ownership and Control in the Manufacturing Sector of West Malaysia", *United Malayan Banking Corporation Economic Review*, Vol.VII, no.1, 1971, and sources cited therein, p.21.
114. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development: *The Economic Development of Malaya*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1955.
115. C. Hirschman: *op.cit.*, p.22, citing Puthucheary: *op.cit.*, chapter five.
116. *Ibid.*, citing Wheelwright: *op.cit.*, pp.6-7.
117. Ryokichi Hirono: "Japanese Investment", in Helen Hughes and Yoh Poh Seng (eds.): *Foreign Investment and Industrialisation in Singapore*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1969.
118. J. Marshall: "Pearl Harbour", *Pacific Research*, Vol.V, no.3, March-April 1974, p.9.
119. *Ibid.*
120. S.W. Kirby: *The War Against Japan*, Vol.I, HMSO, London, 1957, pp.477-8.
121. J.W. Gould: *The United States and Malaysia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1969, p.73.
122. *Ibid.*, pp.74,77; see also the same author's *Americans in Sumatra*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1961, for an account of US regional oil and rubber interests.
123. See G. Kolko: *The Roots of American Foreign Policy*, chapter four; and the same author's *The Politics of War*, chapter 18.
124. Gould: *The United States and Malaysia*, p.82.
125. *Ibid.*, p.83.
126. Joyce and Gabriel Kolko: *The Limits of Power*, Book III.
127. See, for example, Lenny Siegel: "Asian Labor – The American Connection", *Pacific Research*, Vol.VI, no.5, July-August, 1975.
128. R.E.M. Irving: *The First Indochina War*, Croom Helm, London, 1975, p.107.
129. See S.P. Hayes (ed.): *The Beginnings of American Aid to Southeast Asia: The Griffin Mission of 1950*, Lexington, Mass., 1971. Samuel Hayes was deputy chief of the mission headed by R. Allen Griffin, a former US Army Colonel. The mission also visited Indochina, Burma, Thailand and Indonesia.
130. *Ibid.*, p.38.
131. *Ibid.*, p.19.
132. *Ibid.*, pp.21-22.
133. See Kolko references cited above and L.H. Shoup: "Shaping the Postwar World", *The Insurgent Sociologist*, Vol.V, no.III, Spring, 1975.
134. Hayes: *op.cit.*, p.22.
135. *Ibid.*, p.130.
136. *Ibid.*, pp.130-1.
137. The aid recommended for the various countries (US$000's) was: Indochina – $23,500; Indonesia $14,445; Burma $12,228; Thailand $11,420; and Malaya and Singapore $4,500.
138. Hayes: *op.cit.*, p.144.
139. This aspect was more especially stressed in the earlier part of the period, right up to the CIA-staged *coup* in Indonesia in 1965-66, when the Vietnam war was seen as the "shield" making the turn-round of Indonesia possible – see Peter Dale Scott: "Exporting Military-Economic Development – America and the Overthrow of Sukarno, 1965-67", in M. Caldwell (ed.): *Ten Years' Military Terror in Indonesia*, Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 1975. See also L.H. Shoup and W. Mintner: *Imperial Brain Trust*, MR Press, N.Y., 1977, pp.223-253.
140. J.M. Gullick: *op.cit.*, p.135.
141. "(Tunku) Abdul Rahman made no effort to squeeze the British out of the

country . . . convinced that Britain's continued economic and military presence was the best possible insurance for Malayan stability. Today a British officer commands the Malayan army, five senior British civil servants hold key positions in Malayan government ministries, and British businessmen control more than half of the rubber industry, repatriate US$86 million in profits annually. 'It's wonderful how this place has flowered since independence', says one businessman. 'We're really much better off'." (*Time*, 12 April 1963, p.42, cited I. Buchanan: *Singapore in Southeast Asia*, Bell and Sons, London, 1972, pp.322-3.) Military dependence upon Britain was clearly recognised and ratified in the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement of 1957. By it Britain was permitted to retain bases and forces in the country, including a Commonwealth Strategic Reserve (with Australian and New Zealand detachments). Malayan forces, trained and developed by the British, were available to Britain in the event of attack on any Far Eastern British territory or dependency. For internal security, the panoply of special powers devised by the British before and during the emergency were retained, mocking the fine-sounding rhetoric of the Constitution.

142. See the second volume for a full discussion of the American assumption of responsibility; meantime, note B.A. Ngun and Lenny Siegel: "The US in Malaysia", *Pacific Research*, Vol.VII, no.4, May-June, 1976.

143. Gullick: *op.cit.*, pp.135-6. See also Harry E. Groves' *The Constitution of Malaysia*, Malaysian Publications, Singapore, 1964. One of America's most uncritical admirers of Malaysia has this to say about the flaws in the country's "democracy" (carried over from the Federation constitution): "The greatest limitation on . . . democracy lies in the emergency powers which the government can exercise in time of crisis. Even in normal times freedom of movement, speech, and assembly and protection against arbitrary arrest can be waived for the public good. Freedom of the press is restricted by licensing, import controls, and prohibitions against inciting violence and racial hatred. Free speech is limited to the extent that it is forbidden to spread subversive rumors. The right of assembly can be limited if it is considered dangerous. The right of association is controlled by official registration. These restrictions are *potentially* serious." (Gould: *op.cit.*, pp.112-3; emphasis added.)

144. See Puthucheary: *op.cit.*, pp.70, 73, 83; much valuable economic data relevant to this period is to be found in the following works: P.P. Courtenay: *A Geography of Trade and Development in Malaya*, G. Bell and Sons, London, 1972; D. Lim: *Economic Growth and Development in West Malaysia 1947-1970*, OUP, London, 1973; and Lee Soo Ann: *Economic Growth and the Public Sector in Malaya and Singapore 1948-1960*, OUP, London, 1974. The economic threads merely hinted at in this chapter will be picked up for analysis in the second volume.

VOLUME II

MALAYA:

MODEL OF A NEO-COLONY

A second volume on Malaya, covering the years since "independence" in 1957, is in preparation from Spokesman Books. It will include:

A political survey from "independence" to the formation of "Malayasia" and to the present.

Critical analysis of the economic strategy of the neo-colonial regimes.

Assessment of the impact of foreign investments in manufacturing and in the extraction of raw materials.

Elaboration of the role of multinational corporations.

A study of the rural economy and peasant impoverishment.

A survey of inter-imperialist rivalry, and the achievement of US economic penetration and political hegemony.

Analysis of the state and repressive legislation; of the labour, peasant and student movements; and of racial and class factors.

It is proposed to publish this second volume in the very late 1970s, and advance orders for publication-day copies may be placed now.