



FROM
MALAYAN
UNION
SINGAPORE
SEPARATION

POLITICAL UNIFICATION
IN THE MALAYSIA REGION

1945 – 65

Mohamed Noordin Sopiee

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*To Sham
Ibu dan Bapa*

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PREFACE

This is a book on historical phenomena written by a student of political science. The hope is that it will be of interest not only to those interested in the politics of the Malaysia region after the Second World War but also to students of international and state integration — and the layman.

The writer of recent and contemporary history can lay no claim to being authoritative. And no such claim is made. What I have concentrated on is the filling in of the yawning gaps, the presentation of analysis where previously there had been largely description, and the raising of questions where there was consensus and agreement.

This book is a revised version of a Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of London in 1972.

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On the academic side, it is a duty and a pleasure to acknowledge my debt to Dr. Peter Lyon. He provided me much intellectual and other assistance throughout. Thanks are also due to Professor Wang Gangwu who found time, despite a busy schedule, to have a look at the thesis and to proffer kind words and valuable suggestions. A very special debt is owed to my supervisor, Dr. Michael Leifer. He guided each step in the writing with great diligence and even more patience.

I should also like to thank my fifty-eight interviewees as well as countless others who spared their valuable time and who found the inclination to provide information, discussion and debate.

The perspiration put into the preparation of this book (published in record time) by Mrs. Khoo Siew Mun and Mr. Kam Thean Aun should also not go unmentioned.

Lastly, I should like to express my gratitude to my father, a mentor

and a friend. The greatest personal debt I owe, however, is to my wife whose selflessness, understanding and forbearance have been nothing less than an inspiration.

A LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACCC	Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce
AMCJA	All-Malaya Council of Joint Action
BMA	British Military Administration
CJA	Council of Joint Action [of the MDH. Later PMCJA; and after that AMCJA]
IMP	Independence of Malaya Party
ISC	Internal Security Council
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MDU	Malayan Democratic Union
MIC	Malayan Indian Congress
MNP	Malay Nationalist Party
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
MPU	Malayan Planning Unit
MSC	Malaysia Solidarity Convention
MSCC	Malaysia Solidarity Consultative Committee
PANAS	Party Negara Sarawak
PAP	People's Action Party
PKMJ	Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Johor
PMCJA	Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action
PMFTU	Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions
PMIP	Pan-Malayan Islamic Party [or PAS – Parti Islam sa-Malaya]
PMLP	Pan-Malayan Labour Party
PP	Peoples Progressive Party
PUTERA	Pusat Tenaga Rakyat
SCBA	Straits Chinese-British Association
SCCC	Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce
SLF	Singapore Labour Front
SLP	Singapore Labour Party
SNAP	Sarawak National Party
SPA	Singapore People's Alliance
SUPP	Sarawak United Peoples Party
UDP	United Democratic Party
UNKO	United National Kadazan Organization
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
UPP	United People's Party
USNO	United Sabah National Organization

A CONFLICT APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF POLITICAL UNIFICATION

It has been said that those who yearn for the quiet life had no right to be born in the twentieth century. Even in a world which has been hurled from change to change, the political transformations which have altered the face of South-East Asia, especially after the end of the Second World War, can only be described as extraordinary. In as far as post-war territorial integration is concerned, two areas in South-East Asia have experienced the greatest changes. One is Indochina. The other is the Malaysia region, that part of what was once the British realm made up of the territories of Brunei, Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Malacca, Negri Sembilan, Pahang, Penang, Perak, Perlis, Sabah, Sarawak, Selangor, Singapore and Trengganu.

Before the Second World War, there had been ten separate governmental systems in this region; by mid-1946, there were five. In 1963 there were two; two years later, there were three. In the twenty-year period after the war, three new politically-unified systems were formed; two were destroyed. Numerous unsuccessful attempts were made to unify further: and numerous unsuccessful attempts were made to destroy what had already been established.

The post-war trend towards bigger and fewer separate polities was, of course, part of the century-old movement towards greater political unity in the region. For most of that period, it was the imperial power which was the most fervent advocate of unification.

In relation to the territories of the region, Britain did not attempt to divide and rule, but rather to unite and administer. The extension of British rule or 'protection' to the various territories of the region was invariably followed, not necessarily immediately, but sooner or later, by attempts to amalgamate them into a larger whole. Thus in 1824, Britain unified the territories already under her rule (Penang, Singapore and Malacca) into the Straits Settlements. In 1896, she set up the Federated Malay States consisting of Perak, Pahang, Selangor and Negri Sembilan, states which had come under her control between 1874 and 1895. Having brought all the political entities in the Malaysia region under British rule or protection by the time of the First World War, the British High Commissioner in the Malaysia region attempted in the inter-war years to bring all these territories, particularly those in the Malay Peninsula, into one centralized political entity. The movement failed in the face of state parochialism, the intransigent opposition of the Malay Rulers, and the rivalry between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore bureaucrats.

It was only after the Second World War that the British made progress in the direction of greater political unification. In October 1945, barely one

month after the British re-occupation of the Malay Peninsula, a plan to form a 'Malayan Union' encompassing the whole of Malaya but excluding Singapore was announced in London. On 1 April 1946, the unitary state was inaugurated – despite public opposition unprecedented in the historical experience of the region. Almost immediately after its legal implementation, however, the British authorities had to negotiate with the Malay Rulers (who had so recently signed away their sovereign status) and the United Malays National Organization (which had been born out of the Malay struggle against the Malayan Union) on a federal alternative to the Union. The Malayan Union was subsequently dismantled; and a looser federal system called the Federation of Malaya was inaugurated in its place on 1 February 1948.

The Federation of Malaya lived on for a decade and a half despite a major insurrection. Its composition remained unaltered in spite of separatist movements emanating from Penang, Johore and Kelantan, and despite numerous attempts to nullify the 'unnatural' separation of Singapore and to bring the island into the Federation.

The Federation of Malaya was only superseded and the 'inevitable' merger of Singapore with Malaya brought about (within a broader framework) in 1963, when 'Malaysia', (a concept which had existed for a hundred years), was transformed into reality.¹ And less than two years later, on 9 August 1965, the 'natural' relationship with Singapore broke when the island was separated from the rest of Malaysia.

AIMS

This book seeks to present specific case studies of the major attempts at forming, maintaining and destroying politically-unified systems in the Malaysia region in the twenty years after the Second World War. Within a disciplined framework of explanation, an attempt will be made to examine, in each case, the determinants of the resultant success or failure. More specifically, we will examine three cases of successful formation (the successful formation of the Malayan Union, the Federation of Malaya, and Malaysia); three cases of the failure to form a unified system (the non-formation of a United Malaya encompassing the Malayan mainland and Singapore in the periods 1946-8, 1948-54, and 1954-61); four cases of successful maintenance and unsuccessful destruction (the preservation of the Federation of Malaya in the face of the Penang secession movements of 1948-9 and 1953-7, and the attempts of Johore and Kelantan to secede); and two instances of successful destruction and unsuccessful maintenance (the dismantling of the Malayan Union, and the destruction of Malaysia inclusive of Singapore). On the basis of these case studies, an attempt will be made to identify the major determinants of political unification in the Malaysia region in the period 1945 to 1965.

¹ The Malaysia established on 16 September 1963 did not include the state of Brunei.

The object of this particular chapter is to outline the disciplined framework of explanation which will be employed for the study of political unification in the region.

By 'political unification' we refer to the dynamic processes by which new politically-unified systems are formed or are prevented from forming and whereby existing systems are maintained or destroyed. Politically-unified systems are defined as systems possessing a functioning central government. Such systems may, of course, differ in the range of functions effectively carried out by their central governments, i.e. in their degree of governmental centralization or their division of governmental labour. Three types of politically-unified systems are normally differentiated according to the criterion of division of governmental labour: confederations; federations; and unitary states. Politically-unified systems can be differentiated also on the basis of their membership. We say that a new politically-unified system is formed and the existing one destroyed when the membership of a politically-unified system is changed or when (i) a confederation becomes a federation or a unitary state, (ii) a federation becomes a confederation or a unitary state, (iii) a unitary state is transformed into a federation or a confederation. Of course, a politically-unified system is formed when a system gains a functioning central government and it is destroyed if it ceases to have one. It is to be noted that no moral evaluations as such are attached to the concept of formation, non-formation, maintenance or destruction; i.e. unity is not always 'good', 'disunity' not always 'bad'.

THREE POSSIBLE APPROACHES

Before presenting our own approach to the study of political unification in the Malaysia region, it would be fruitful to examine briefly the utility of several approaches already existing in political science literature.

According to Plano and Riggs, with reference to 'political integration' (under which political unification is very often subsumed), 'No one has yet produced a list of conditions claimed to be both necessary and sufficient.'² Two eminent theorists, however, have produced a catalogue of conditions which they claim as essential and which they are tempted to assert as sufficient for the formation and maintenance of systems akin to politically-unified systems. One is Karl Deutsch. The other is William Riker.³

The Deutschean Sociocausal Paradigm

Karl Wolfgang Deutsch, Sidney Burrell, Robert A. Kahn, Maurice Lee Jr., Martin Lichteman, Ramond Lindgren, Francis Lowenheim and Richard Wagenen jointly published a work in 1957 entitled *Political Community*

² J. Plano and R. Riggs, *Forging World Order* (New York, 1967), p. 518.

³ William Riker is the author of *The Theory of Political Coalitions* (New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1962).

and the North Atlantic Area.⁴ While it is a work emanating from the contribution of eight academics, the theoretical ideas of Karl Deutsch are so prominent and overpowering that its findings may be, as indeed they have been characterized as the 'Deutsch sociocausal paradigm of political integration'.⁵

Reporting on it eleven years later, Deutsch states that the 1957 study 'lists twelve social and economic background conditions, within and among the participating units which seem to be necessary (though perhaps not sufficient) if an amalgamated security community is to succeed....'⁶ These are:

- (i) mutual compatibility of the main values relevant for political behaviour;
- (ii) a distinctive and attractive way of life;
- (iii) expectations of stronger and rewarding economic ties or rewards;
- (iv) a marked increase in the political and administrative capabilities of at least some of the participating units;
- (v) superior economic growth of at least some of the participating units (as compared to neighbouring territories outside the area of prospective integration);
- (vi) substantial unbroken links of social communication across the boundaries of the territories to be integrated and across the barriers of some of the major strata within them;
- (vii) a broadening of the political elite within at least some political units and for the emerging large community as a whole;
- (viii) relatively high geographic and social mobility of persons at least among the politically-relevant strata;
- (ix) multiplicity of the scope of the flow of mutual communications and transactions;
- (x) some overall compensation of rewards in the flow of communications and transactions among the units to be integrated;
- (xi) a significant frequency of some interchange in group roles (such as being in a majority or a minority) among the political units;
- (xii) considerable mutual predictability of behaviour.⁷

Several difficulties arise if any attempt is made to utilize Deutsch's sociocausal paradigm. First, Deutsch, like many other theorists in the past, fails to distinguish between the process of formation and the process of maintenance of the unit formed. The dawning realization that the two

⁴ Karl Deutsch, *et al.*, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1957).

⁵ William Fisher, 'An Analysis of the Deutsch Sociocausal Paradigm of Political Integration', *International Organization*, Vol. 30 No. 2 (Spring 1965), pp. 250-90.

⁶ Karl Deutsch, *The Analysis of International Relations* (New Jersey, 1968), p.195. Italics mine.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

processes may be different is clear in the question Ernst Haas put at the 1969 Wisconsin Conference on Regional Integration: 'Do variables explaining the initiation of union also explain its maintenance, as we seem to have assumed?'⁸ Second, one is uncertain whether Deutsch's sociocausal paradigm refers to 'amalgamation' and 'amalgamated communities' (in our terms, the *formation and maintenance of politically-unified systems*, and *politically-unified systems* respectively) or whether they refer to 'amalgamated security communities' (peace systems which have a common government). The terminological confusion in Deutsch's work allows us to make a case either way.⁹

One argument against using Deutsch's sociocausal paradigm may be that it is inapplicable to political unification since it deals, not with how political units come together and stay together in a new governmental unit, but with how they do these things *and* preserve peace among themselves. Many theorists have, however, regarded the paradigm as a theory of political unification.¹⁰

Our primary reason for not utilizing Deutsch's paradigm is not so much that it is inapplicable but that it is theoretically inadequate. First, the Deutschean sociocausal approach is too preoccupied with social and economic background conditions. The linkages between such conditions and political behaviour relevant to political unification are not even stated. Such links are often obscure, and in the Malaysia region, they are often impossible to find. Second, the explanation of the political phenomenon of joining together and staying together under one common government surely cannot be reduced to the extent that Deutsch has done: to an explanation of the social and economic condition of the population or the masses. In the Malaysia region, attempts at formation, maintenance and destruction of political units have to a great extent been elitist in character. The paradigm makes little attempt to explain the linkages between mass attitudes and the behaviour of elites critical to political unification. Further, the approach fails to specify sufficiently which elites, elitist behaviour, elite attitudes and perceptions of mass opinion or sentiments are involved in the processes of formation, maintenance and destruction. It is

⁸ Ernst Haas, 'The Study of Regional Integration: Reflections on the Joy and Anguish of Pretheorizing' in *International Organization*, Vol. XXIV No. 4 (Autumn 1970), p. 622.

⁹ Thus, the section in which the twelve essential and possibly sufficient conditions are dealt with is headed 'Some Essential Requirements for the Establishment of Amalgamated Security Communities'. On the other hand, the existence of superior economic growth is stated to be an 'essential condition for amalgamation' (Deutsch *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 50).

¹⁰ See, for example, A.H. Birch, 'Approaches to the Study of Federalism' in A. Wildavsky, *American Federalism in Perspective* (Boston, 1967) and W. Riker, *Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance* (Boston, 1964).

to be noted also that the paradigm cannot explain timing: when formation, maintenance and destruction attempts will be made and when they will succeed. Nor can it explain membership. Examination of Deutsch's background conditions cannot explain, for example, why Singapore was not included in the Malayan Union and the Federation of Malaya, why Brunei was not a member of Malaysia and why Sabah and Sarawak were. The Deutschean approach also cannot explain the types of politically-unified system established. Why did the British decide to form a unitary state in 1945-6 and a federation in 1946-8? Another serious inadequacy of the sociocausal paradigm is that it cannot explain the formation and maintenance of politically-unified systems by geographically external elites or proponents. This is because the approach concerns itself exclusively with intra-system conditions, factors between the units amalgamated or to be amalgamated. This is a serious theoretical limitation because in the Malaysia region, as in other parts of the ex-colonial world, the imperial power has very often played key, and sometimes crucial, roles.

The Rikerian Approach

According to William Riker, what Deutsch's list of essential 'social and economic' conditions amounts to 'is a set of frequently-observed conditions in which politicians *can* develop a predisposition to unite in some way or other'.¹¹ Riker sets forth a theory 'confined to the political level entirely'.¹² He asserts that the formation¹³ of 'federalisms' (in our terms, politically-unified systems) are the result of *political bargains*. All such bargains require two essential conditions: the 'expansion condition' and the 'military condition.' First, there must be, on the part of those politicians who offer the bargain, a desire to expand their territorial control, usually either to meet an external military or diplomatic threat or to prepare for military or diplomatic aggression or aggrandisement. Second, there must be a desire to accept the union 'because of some external military-diplomatic threat or opportunity' on the part of the politicians who accept the bargain.¹⁴ 'I am tempted', Riker writes, 'to assert that these two conditions are together sufficient [for formation]'.¹⁵

Riker's variant on the contract theory of associations is inadequate for several reasons. First, politically-unified systems, like the Malayan Union, have been formed in the absence of a political bargain.¹⁶ Riker's model is

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ One is not sufficiently clear about what Riker believes are the essential conditions for maintenance to be able to speculate about their validity.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁶ Riker does recognize empires as examples of federalisms.

too consensual, and is inapplicable to cases where a system has been unilaterally imposed. If he can condemn Deutsch for exaggerating the strategic importance of pre-contract relations, and neglecting the process of reaching contractual agreements, he is open to the charge of neglecting the importance of *post-contract* relations and of power. Unified systems or 'federalisms' are formed not only because politicians can agree on their form and content but also because they have the power to actually establish them. Mere agreement between elites is not enough. The Rikerian approach is inadequate also because it is clear from even a cursory glance at the experience of the Malaysia region that unified systems (like the Malayan Union and the Federation of Malaya) have been formed in the absence of a desire on the part of their proponents to expand their territorial control and a desire on the part of the politicians who accepted formation to gain protection from some external military-diplomatic threat or to grasp some external military-diplomatic opportunity.

The Neo-Functionalist Approach

A third approach of possible relevance to the study of postwar political unification in the Malaysia region is what has come to be called the neo-functionalist approach. Neo-functionalists tend to see political unification as a result of incremental changes brought about by technocrats or bureaucrats (of international or supranational agencies entrusted with specific system-wide tasks) often in response to some 'inner logic'. The 'EECentricity' of the functionalist approach is evident. One of its most fervent advocates, Dr. Walter Hallstein, has argued that the tendencies of economic association will spill over into politics until national governments finally will have ceded so much authority that political union will have occurred in fact before it is conceded in principle. 'Political integration', he declares, 'is not a condition of economic integration but its consequences.'¹⁷

No critique of neo-functionalism will be made here. Suffice it to say that in the Malaysia region in the period 1945-65, the formation of politically-unified systems was not of an incremental nature. The Malayan Union, the Federation of Malaya and Malaysia were all the results of high politics: of political decisions taken by politicians at the highest levels of government. It must also be noted that in several instances, the existence of functional amalgamation or decision-making bodies which were entrusted with a particular multi-unit system function served, not to encourage, but to impede the movement towards the formation of a politically-unified system. Thus, the existence of the Internal Security Council between Singapore and the Federation of Malaya (by adequately serving the main security needs of the Federation in regard to Singapore), made it unnecessary for

¹⁷ Quoted in David Calleo, *Europe's Future: The Grand Alternatives* (London, 1967), p. 55.

Kuala Lumpur to seriously consider, still less to agree to, the merger of Singapore with the Federation.

The suggestion of the Europe-centred functionalists that proponents of formation should first seek the economic kingdom is not particularly useful in the context of the Malaysia region. The fact is that it has often been more difficult to integrate economically than it has been to unite politically. The state of Penang never became a member of the Federation of Malaya economic union even after seventeen years as a member of the Federation.

THE CONFLICT APPROACH

We have argued that the Deutschean sociocausal paradigm, the Rikerian approach and neo-functionalism are inadequate and/or inapplicable to the study of political unification in the Malaysia region in the twenty-year period after the Second World War. It is suggested that the formation, non-formation, maintenance, and destruction of politically-unified systems in the region in that period may best be explained not by focusing attention upon socio-economic background conditions, on the process by which functional institutions expand their authority and jurisdiction, or on the ability of political elites to work out elitist agreements. These outcomes are better explained by examining the political conflict between those who propose formation/non-formation/maintenance/destruction and their opponents, and the exercise of power.

We see the process of formation, maintenance and destruction as analytically divisible into four stages:

Proposition \rightarrow opposition \rightarrow conflict \rightarrow outcome

We suggest also that the formation, non-formation, maintenance and destruction of politically-unified systems are functions of three variables:

- (i) policy,
- (ii) political environment, and
- (iii) power.

This conflict approach might appear to the ordinary reader as a commonsensical one. Many of those immersed to their necks or drowned in integration theory will, however, find it a departure, perhaps even a radical departure from the current streams of theorizing in the field. The approach may, in fact, be considered as part of what has been called 'the re-discovery of politics' and a return to common sense, a return based, however, upon a fuller realization of the need for conceptual and theoretical rigour.

Policy

By 'policy' we refer to a programme of deliberate and goal-orientated action.¹⁸ All policies have at least two dimensions: direction and intensity.

¹⁸ An attitude or an opinion does not constitute a 'policy' or a 'commitment' as we

Thus, political actors may be formation proponents, non-formation proponents, maintenance proponents, or destruction proponents.

Proponent groups may vary as to the intensity of their commitment to a particular policy. Here it is sufficient merely to distinguish between four gradings of intensity of commitment: weak commitment, moderate commitment, strong commitment and total commitment. To 'operationalize' these concepts, at least four *imperfect* and only *suggestive* indicators will be used, namely:

- (i) the proponent's persistence in the face of difficulties and setbacks;
- (ii) his investment of time, attention and energy in pursuit of policy;
- (iii) his use of the various instruments of power, and
- (iv) the costs he is willing to bear in pursuit of his policy.

The typical characteristics of weak, moderate, strong and total commitment with reference to these imperfect indicators are suggested in diagrammatic form on page 10.

In assessing strength of commitment, the proponent's statements on the subject will not, of course, be neglected. It is noted that no assumption of a constant, unchanging intensity of commitment is made.

Political Environment

By 'political environment' we refer to all actors who are not members of the proponent group.¹⁹ These actors may be apathetic, acquiescent, neutral or opposed to the policy. The opponents of a policy may be totally, strongly, moderately or weakly opposed. The same suggestive indicators will be used to identify the intensity of opposition as are used to identify the intensity of commitment of policy proponents.

Members of the political environment may also be classified according to their importance to the success of a particular policy. Veto groups are those whose moderate, strong or total opposition will lead to policy failure and whose weak opposition, apathy, acquiescence or neutrality are essential for proponent success.²⁰

The political environment may itself be classified into three types. We define an 'uncompliant political environment' as one in which there is a veto group or several veto groups which are moderately, strongly, or totally

use the last two terms here, because they do not necessarily possess an *action* component. By definition all commitments are active.

¹⁹ 'Political environment' should not be confused with *milieu* which may be taken to denote the whole spectrum of human as well as non-human environmental factors.

²⁰ Individuals and groups may be objective vetoists in the sense that policy cannot succeed in the absence of their support or in the presence of their opposition. They are subjective vetoists if they are in a position where policy proponents will desist from implementing their policy in the presence of their opposition. Robinson Crusoe can objectively veto Man Friday's intention of playing tennis. The wife whose expression of dislike for a particular car makes her husband refrain from buying it is a subjective vetoist.

SEVERAL USUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF WEAK, MODERATE,
STRONG AND TOTAL COMMITMENTS

	PERSISTENCE IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULTIES AND SETBACKS	INVESTMENT OF TIME, ATTENTION, AND ENERGY IN PURSUIT OF POLICY	USE OF THE INSTRUMENTS OF POLICY	WILLINGNESS TO BEAR THE COSTS IN VALUES
WEAK COMMITMENT tends to be characterized by:	willingness to give up in the event of lack of progress or expectation of lack of progress.	unwillingness to invest much time, attention or energy.	unwillingness to go much beyond articulation of policy and singing its praises.	unwillingness to sacrifice much in terms of values in pursuit of policy.
MODERATE COMMITMENT tends to be characterized by:	willingness to continue even when no immediate progress is being made; openness to discussions of going on in the face of setback(s).	willingness to invest a substantial amount of time, attention and energy but not as much as in pursuits having a top priority.	willingness to resort to all instruments short of repugnant ones. (Coercion, unilateral imposition, and lying are usually repugnant).	willingness to sacrifice substantial but limited values. Readily open to discussion of whether the policy is 'worth it'.
STRONG COMMITMENT tends to be characterized by:	dogged determination in the face of repeated setbacks; discouragement of talk of giving up, willingness to give up only when convinced of utter futility of continuing the policy.	willingness to invest as much of these resources or almost as much as are invested in any other pursuits.	willingness to use all instruments including repugnant ones.	willingness to bear heavy costs; discouragement of talk of the costs of policy.
TOTAL COMMITMENT tends to be characterized by:	unwillingness to even consider giving up even when convinced of futility of continuing the policy.	willingness to invest all or very nearly all one's time, attention and energy.	willingness to employ all instruments, including those most repugnant.	willingness to give up all or very nearly all one's values, including one's very existence.

opposed to a particular policy. A 'moderately compliant political environment' is seen to exist when no veto groups are so opposed, or when they are apathetic, neutral, acquiescent or only weakly opposed, and when at least one important segment of the political environment is in moderate, strong or total opposition. A 'permissive political environment' is said to exist when no major sector is so opposed.

Power

Power is defined as the actual ability to achieve the end state desired. It should not be confused with resources or 'power potential'. Two analytically-distinguishable types of power appear to be particularly relevant to political unification: *instrumental power* and *political power*. By instrumental power is meant the ability to actually establish, prevent the establishment of, maintain, or destroy a functioning machinery of central government. Political power is defined as the actual capacity of an actor to generate support for his policy and to reduce opposition to it. A unit's political power is said to be *total* when it can achieve compliance effortlessly; *great* when it can do so without great effort; *moderate* when it has to invest very great effort to engineer compliance; and *little* when it cannot gain compliance however hard it tries.

Classification of the different types of policy, political environment and power allows for two further hypotheses of the conflict approach. It is argued that the concurrent presence of at least moderate commitment to a formation, or maintenance, or non-formation or destruction policy, at least a moderately compliant political environment,²¹ and proponent instrumental power are *essential* for the formation, maintenance, non-formation, or destruction (respectively) of politically-unified systems in the Malaysia region in the post-war period. It is further suggested that the co-presence of at least moderate commitment to any one of these policies, at least a moderately compliant political environment and proponent instrumental power are *sufficient* for the formation, or maintenance, or non-formation, or destruction (respectively) of politically-unified systems in the Malaysia region in the post-war period.

The Implications of the Conflict Approach

The conflict approach has several implications. By emphasizing the role of policy (human will and actions) we first reject those philosophical and historicist notions which have obscured the fact that politically-unified systems have to be constructed. They do not 'sprout' or teleologically 'grow' by some organic process. They are not born: but are formed or created. They do not die: they are abandoned or destroyed. By stressing the need for a maintenance policy for successful maintenance, we question

²¹ The importance of proponent political power lies mainly in relation to the engineering of environmental compliance.

the idea of 'take-off' when it is used to imply that once a particular stage is reached, a process sets in whereby policy and human endeavour become largely unnecessary. A unified system can be destroyed through neglect as well as through the rise of a powerful secessionist movement. By emphasizing the central importance of deliberate policy also, any notion of equifinality or determinism is rejected. The end states, formation, non-formation, maintenance and destruction in the Malaysia region are not accidental. They are not the children of lady luck or devil misfortune but of deliberate human will and effort.

By positing policy, political environment and power as crucial variables and by stressing political conflict, we wish to emphasize that the processes of forming, maintaining, preventing formation, and destroying unified systems are supremely political processes. The applicability of the neo-functional approach to political unification is questioned. By stressing the importance of power, the Rikerian approach is also rejected.

Since the bulk of this chapter has been taken up with outlining a theoretical approach, the impression may have been given that this study seeks to develop a general theory of how territories come and stay together in politically-unified systems. Such an impression would be largely a false one. While one may hope to make a small contribution to theory on political unification in general, such an aspiration is not the prime interest. The main aim is to present a study, in some depth, of the formation and maintenance of politically-unified systems in the Malaysia region in the period 1945 to 1965. It is to an examination of an example in this set of historical phenomena that we shall now turn: the formation of the Malay Union.

THE FORMATION OF THE MALAYAN UNION

'Malaya' before the Second World War was primarily a geographical concept.¹ In an area about the size of England and with a population less than that of London, there were not only nine legally sovereign States and ten sovereign monarchs (nine Malay and one British) but also ten legislatures, seven judicial systems, seven police forces, and seven civil services. Administrative and governmental co-ordination lay in the hands of the top British official resident in Singapore. In his position as Governor of the Straits Settlements, he was in direct charge of the Colony's administration. As High Commissioner, Malay States, he exercised his functions through the British Resident or Adviser in each of the nine States, and in the Federated Malay States, also through the Federal Government in Kuala Lumpur. Legislative uniformity in Malaya required 'separate action by at least six, and in some cases ten, legislatures'.² Such was the 'Gilbertian' situation of Malaya in the interwar years.

Britain had tried many times in these years to build a single politically-unified system in Malaya; but on each occasion, the attempt failed. Barely six months after the British re-occupation of the Malay Peninsula, however, on 1 April 1946, a highly centralized Malayan Union made up of all the Malayan territories except Singapore was established. We shall attempt to explain the formation of this unitary state by examining the development of the Malayan Union policy, the opposition it generated, and the conflict between and the exercise of power by its proponents and opponents.

THE UNION POLICY

The British plan for a Malayan League or Union had been shelved in the mid-'thirties following the abysmal failure of attempts to implement it. The

¹'Geographically one—politically Malaya was a mosaic of governments in various stages of evolution.' P.A.B. McKerron and E.V.G. Day, 'A Note on Some of the Matters to be Considered before Our Return to Malaya', 8 December 1942 (Public Records Office, WO/32/1018). See also a December 1944 memorandum submitted under the aegis of Clement Attlee, 'Constitutional Policy in Malaya', CAB WP (44) 762. Penang, Malacca and Singapore, territories amalgamated in the Colony of the Straits Settlements, were under direct British rule. Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang (which were federated together) and Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu (which were not) were all legally sovereign States under British 'protection' and indirect rule.

²Great Britain, *Malayan Union and Singapore: Statement of Policy on Future Constitution*, Cmd. 6724, London, 1946. This document will herein-after be referred to as the January 1946 White Paper.

question of such a Union was only seriously reopened by the Colonial Office after the fall of Malaya. On the one hand, the swift Japanese conquest had clearly demonstrated the weaknesses and drawbacks of political fragmentation.³ On the other, the expected liberation was seen to provide a supremely opportune moment for revolutionary reform. There would be a *carte blanche* upon which the 'New Malaya' could be built; for the Malay Rulers who had obstructed British unification policy in the 'thirties would be in no position to do so again because they had been compromised by 'collaboration' with the Japanese, and 'none of the machinery of Government as it existed prior to December 1941 will remain'.⁴ Even Roland Braddell, the Sultan of Johore's lawyer who was later to become UMNO's legal adviser in its struggle against the Malayan Union, believed that there was a 'God-sent chance to clear up all the country's troubles when the Japs are put back where they belong. . .'.⁵

Moves towards formal War Office-Colonial Office planning for post-war Malayan reconstruction (which were based on the assumption that Malaya would have to be militarily reconquered and initially administered by a military government) started at the beginning of 1943.⁶ An informal Malayan Planning Committee was set up, and in July 1943, formalized into the Malayan Planning Unit (MPU). In current literature, the MPU has often been attributed a role in policy-making on the Malayan Union which it does not deserve.⁷ A much more important role was certainly played by the Colonial Office and in particular, by Edward Gent, who was later to become the Malayan Union's first (and only) Governor. The plan for Malayan political unification as apparently formulated by the Colonial Office envisaged the amalgamation of *all* the Malayan territories

³ These were pointed out very soon after the fall of Singapore by H.A.L. Luckham in a memorandum entitled 'Some of the Causes of the Loss of Malaya', dated 30 March 1942 (CO 865/1, M101/1). Edward Gent, Head of the Southeast Asia Department of the Colonial Office, expressed agreement on the necessity of political unification. Letter from Gent to J.M. Martin dated 19 April 1943 (CO 865/1, M101/1).

⁴ McKerron and Day memorandum, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

⁵ He continued: '... the people will never stand for a mere restoration of the past'. Letter from Braddell to Gent, 27 November 1942 (CO 865/1, M101/1).

⁶ The attention of the War Office was turned to the problem by a representation from Field Marshal Wavell (Commander-in-Chief, India). On 28 December 1942, he wrote to General Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff enclosing McKerron and Day's memorandum which argued for a start to planning. McKerron later became the deputy head of the Malayan Planning Unit. American enquiries regarding rubber appeared to have spurred the War Office into action also. (WO 32/10182, Register Number 98/4329, Minute 1.)

⁷ It merely worked out the details following policies laid down by the War Office and Colonial Office, and after the War Cabinet decision of May 1944, the 'Directive on Constitutional Policy in Malaya and Borneo'.

except Singapore into a *unitary* state. Notwithstanding the authority and (acknowledged) expertise of this Ministry it should be noted that the crucial political decision to adopt the Union policy⁸ was *not* made by the Colonial Office itself.

The Colonial and War Secretaries submitted a joint memorandum to the War Cabinet in early January 1944 in which they argued that detailed planning for post-war Malaya had reached the stage where 'authoritative guidance on the broad issues of long term policy' was necessary.⁹ The War Cabinet decided on 6 January 1944 to set up a War Cabinet (Ministerial) Committee on Malaya and Borneo with Clement Attlee as Chairman.¹⁰ At its first, and crucial meeting on 22 March 1944, the Committee decided on the Union policy.¹¹ After its decision, the concurrence of the War Cabinet on 31 May 1944 was more or less a formality.¹²

It is uncertain if the Union policy was brought up again for serious discussion at Cabinet level when Labour came into office (in July 1945). It is very important to note that the top Labour Ministers in the War Cabinet held the top Ministries in the Attlee Government and that the Labour Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Malaya and Borneo was one and the same person. Moreover, Attlee had G.H. Hall as his Colonial Secretary, who had probably kept in touch on the Union policy from its seminal stage, and certainly from 1944 onwards.¹³

⁸The 'Malayan Union proposals' put forward at the end of the Second World War contained proposals not only for governmental unity but also for the transfer of sovereignty to Britain, liberal citizenship, the constitution of Singapore, coordination in the Malaysia region and other issues. Since our interest lies in political unification, we will concentrate on the 'Union policy', a term we will use to refer *exclusively* to those proposals relating to the membership and very high degree of centralization of the Malayan Union.

⁹'Directive on Constitutional Policy in Malaya and Borneo', dated 4 January 1944 (CAB 66/45, WP (44)3).

¹⁰Oliver Stanley, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, played a major role in the Committee—with Gent at his elbow. Other members included the Secretaries of State for Dominion Affairs, for India, for War, the Attorney-General and the Foreign Affairs Under-Secretary of State.

¹¹War Cabinet Committee on Malaya and Borneo, Minutes of the 1st meeting, 22 March 1944 (CAB 98/41, CMB 44, 1st meeting).

¹²WM (44) 70th conclusions.

¹³Hall was Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs from 15 May 1940 until 4 February 1942 and Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs from September 1943 until May 1945. He became Chairman of the War Cabinet Far Eastern Committee in 1944 which did discuss the Union policy at its first meeting on 15 November 1944. The Cabinet Far Eastern Committee Minutes (CAB 96/5, FE (44) 1st meeting). (Gent was a member of the Committee for most of its meetings.) Hall was also closely involved with the Committee on Malaya and Borneo and attended its second meeting on 19 December 1944.

*Motivations for the Union Policy*¹⁴

James Allen, who has presented the lengthiest and most sophisticated analysis of the Malayan Union thus far, suggests three motives for British commitment to the Union policy: the desire to prepare Malaya for self government; the desire to create a militarily more defensible polity; and a motive related to 'disillusionment with the Malays'.¹⁵

There is little reason to doubt that the desire to erect a more defensible political entity and to create a state large enough (and therefore viable enough) as to be someday granted self-government were motivations for the Union policy. However, the Malayan Union was probably seen as only a first step (in a long journey) towards independence for the Malay peninsula.

The desire to create the basic political infrastructure allowing for movement towards eventual self-rule was based on a general ideological commitment to granting independence. But it may well also have been related to the desire to please the United States (Britain's most important military and political ally), or at least to ensure against her disapproval. According to Professor Northedge,

Historically by far the greatest issue in Anglo-American relations was the conflict between British imperialism and American ideals of self determination. . . . At the end of the war it seemed as though the dis-establishment of the British Empire was the first object of American policy.¹⁶

In Malaya, the British were in a singularly peculiar position where they felt that they had to colonize in order to decolonize. The Union policy thus called for the legal annexation of the Malay States. Ashley Clarke, representing the Foreign Office at the first crucial meeting of the War Cabinet Committee on Malaya and Borneo, argued (apparently with an eye on possible American reactions) that 'even a slight diminution of the powers of the rulers would have to be carefully presented'.¹⁷

¹⁴ In analyzing the motivations for *the Union policy* we shall largely concentrate on the motivations of the War Cabinet Committee on Malaya and Borneo.

¹⁵ James Allen, *The Malayan Union* (Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, 1967), p. 9. Allen does not spell out whether he believes that Whitehall wanted to punish the Malays but cites 'an anti-Malay atmosphere', 'anti-Malay whispers', 'anti-Malay sentiments' as a 'reason' for British policy.

¹⁶ F.S. Northedge, *British Foreign Policy* (London, 1962), p. 182. From Colonial Office papers, it is evident that the Colonial Office was only too aware of this.

¹⁷ Minutes of the First Meeting, 22 March 1944 (CAB/41, CMB (44), 1st meeting). British sensitivity to American feelings and attitudes as regards the Far East was obvious. It is to be noted that one of the four specific tasks of the War Cabinet Far Eastern Committee was 'To prepare papers describing the attitude of His Majesty's Government towards Far Eastern and Pacific questions for communication to the

The indirect role of the United States in the decision-making on the Union policy, albeit not a central one, has been completely neglected in secondary literature. Nor was the role always a completely passive and indirect one. Indeed one of the factors which prompted the War Office to start serious discussions on post-war Malayan reconstruction was an American enquiry in February 1943 regarding the rehabilitation of the rubber industry in the Far East.¹⁸ It has seldom been recognized that the need to rehabilitate quickly the Malayan rubber and tin industries was a major motivation for constructing a tight, highly-centralized and efficient unitary state in Malaya.¹⁹

Also neglected is the fact that the desire to create a Malayan consciousness and nationalism, a desire related to the British commitment to the ideal of decolonization, was probably a major motive for the Union policy. The decision-makers did not view the presence of a Malayan consciousness as necessary for the creation of a Malayan state but regarded the creation of a Malayan State as a prerequisite of Malayan consciousness. Two obstacles (which had to be strongly counteracted) were apparently seen to be in the path of creating such a Malayan consciousness: 'State parochialism' and 'dynastic pride'. In a confidential statement of fundamental problems in Malaya prepared by the Colonial Office and endorsed by

United States Government . . . with a view to removing misapprehensions as to the intention and objectives of His Majesty's Government. . . . 'War Cabinet Far Eastern Committee: Composition and Terms of Reference', 7 November 1944 (CAB 96/5, FE (45) 30). In the Committee, Gent was very defensive about the British 'acquisition of a share of the sovereignty of the native Rulers' and justified it in terms of 'the interest of the people' and the 'progressive proposals' envisaged. He was not quite truthful for the British Government planned not to share the Rulers' sovereignty but to usurp it. In the Committee on Malaya and Borneo, apprehensions were expressed that the United States might see the Union proposals as a policy of 'territorial aggrandisement' (War Cabinet Committee on Malaya and Borneo, Minutes of the 2nd meeting . . . 19 December 1944, CAB 98/41, CMB (44) 2nd Meeting). The Committee was not unaware of the representations of those 'authorities engaged in Political Warfare and in the enlightenment of the public both in this country and the United States of America [who] have strongly pressed their need for a new Malayan directive which will be based on a *forward policy*. . . .' (Memorandum of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 'Constitutional Policy in Malaya', CAB 98/41, CMB (44) 12).

¹⁸ WO/32/10182, Register number 098/4329, Minute 1 and Minute 42. The British were extremely responsive. Minute 38 (dated 4 May 1943) reads: ' . . . the Americans are on the move and we have been worried of the probable advent of two American [rubber] experts to which the reaction of the Ministries of Production, Supply, WO, CO and Treasury has been the formation of a small body named "Far Eastern Emergency Rubber Committee". It was not intended that our expected visitors would constitute the emergency but that is what in fact has happened.'

¹⁹ See Memorandum by the Chairman of the Committee on Malaya and Borneo, Annex 1, 'Draft Statement of Fundamental Problems in Malaya' (CAB 98/41, WP (44) 762, dated 22 December 1944).

the Cabinet Committee on Malaya and Borneo, it was argued that: 'The Malays cherish a definite loyalty towards their Rulers and this feeling conflicts with the development of any allegiance towards a larger unit than the State. There is no widespread conception among the Malays that they are "Malayans", with common duties and problems; and this is the first problem which must be faced in Malaya if the country is to advance towards nationhood and self-government within the British Commonwealth.'²⁰ It does appear that the radical departure from past British unification policy which was manifested in the rejection of a federal system and the advocacy of a unitary state was to a very significant extent the outcome of the desire to destroy the Malay States as the dominant framework of Malay political activity and loyalty, as distinguishable, separate, political entities. It is very likely also that attempts to create a Malay sense of Malayan consciousness necessitated the eradication of the Rulers' role as the foci of Malay loyalty, the usurpation of their sovereignty and whatever political influence and power they had left, and their reduction to the status of mere social and religious leaders.²¹

Also an important motive for the Union policy was the desire for administrative efficiency. For some reason, Allen does not explicitly cite this as a principal consideration, which it undoubtedly was.²² The desire for administrative efficiency was a more forceful factor than ever before because after detailed and painstaking analysis, the Malayan Planning Committee had as early as June 1943 come to the conclusion that only 10 per cent. of the Malayan Civil Service would be available to resume duties after Malaya's liberation and that 10 per cent. was at the time scattered all over the world.²³

Allen does seem to argue that anti-Malay sentiments were a principal reason for the Union policy. This might conveniently explain the British rejection of the concept of a Malay Malaya which the Malayan Union signified. There is little in the papers of the War Office, the Cabinet Office and the Colonial Office, however, to indicate that there was a significant desire to punish the Malays or that strong anti-Malay feelings significantly affected the political decision-making.²⁴ The Directive on overall policy

²⁰ CAB 98/41, WP (44) 762.

²¹ The usurpation of the Rulers' sovereignty and their political power was also essential for 'the Malay Rulers have always set their faces against any proposals to recognize as their subjects [to grant citizenship to] any persons not of Malay race or Mohammedan religion'. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 'Future Constitutional Policy for British Colonial Territories in South-East Asia' (CAB 98/41, CMB (44) 3 dated 14 January 1944).

²² Draft Directive on Policy in Malaya', Appendix I of 'Policy in Regard to Malaya and Borneo: Report of the Committee' (CAB 98/41, WP 258, dated 18 May 1944).

²³ WO/32/10182, Register Number 098/4329, Minute 53.

²⁴ It does appear that the Committee on Malaya and Borneo was moved neither by

in Malaya decided upon by the Attlee Committee on Malaya and Borneo, endorsed by the War Cabinet and handed to the Malayan Planning Unit, specifically stated that the projected provisions for the non-Malays should be 'subject to a special recognition of the political, economic and social interests of the Malay race'.²⁵

These probably were the major motives for British commitment to the Malayan Union policy. Few decisions however, can be adequately explained (but are almost invariably done so) by examining *only* the 'motives for' or the advantages of a particular course of action. The War Cabinet Committee on Malaya and Borneo were certainly aware of the possible disadvantages of the Union policy—and decided in its favour after balancing its costs and benefits. It is likely that the Committee was initially apprehensive of possible American disapproval of their annexation of the Malay States. It is probable, however, that it was felt that colonization could be justified on grounds of a progressive policy in Malaya. It is certain that the Cabinet Committee was aware of the possible repercussions of the Union policy in terms of criticism from within Britain and *more important*, of adverse Malay reactions in Malaya. In fact, Singapore was excluded from the Union partly in order to ensure against adverse Malay reactions to British policy.²⁶ Apprehensions regarding Malay reactions are also sug-

love nor antipathy towards the Malays. It should not be forgotten that the civil servants in the Colonial Office who influenced Colonial policy in 1942-5 were largely the same men who influenced Malayan policy before the war. In particular, the picture of Edward Gent as 'the villain of the piece', as a person antagonistic to the Malays, does not bear scrutiny.

²⁵'Policy in Regard to Malaya and Borneo': Report of the Committee on Malaya and Borneo (CAB 98/41, WP (44) 258, dated 18 May 1944). At the first meeting of the Committee, the Secretary of State for India specifically endorsed this provision (CAB 98/41, CMB (44) 1st Meeting). While the Cabinet Committee did not seem to have been particularly antipathetic towards the Malays, this could not be said for the Rulers or the Sultanate system. The Committee was, however, split in its attitude. Attlee argued that Britain should not bind itself to reinstating the Rulers or the Sultanate system after the re-occupation because there was no evidence as to the conduct of the Rulers or the attitude of the Malays towards them. Oliver Stanley, springing to the defence, stated that there was no evidence to suggest that the Malays had changed in their sentiments towards the Sultanate and argued that the fact that certain Rulers might be found to have been quislings was not an argument against the institution. Stanley urged the Committee to remember that actions which seemed democratic and progressive in the West might be very differently interpreted in the East. While antipathies towards the Rulers and the Sultanate probably played a part in causing the decision to reduce their status, it is arguable that they were not directly related to the Union policy as such, a policy of forming a unitary state out of nine States and two Settlements.

²⁶According to the Colonial Office memorandum, the suggestions of which were accepted almost *in toto* by the Committee on Malaya and Borneo, Singapore's inclusion 'might adversely affect the Malay attitude towards the proposals for the Union

gested by the fact that throughout, the Committee on Malaya and Borneo stressed, and the War Cabinet re-emphasized, the necessity of secrecy.²⁷ Misjudgment of the Malay passions that the Union policy and proposals would arouse, however, probably ensured that the benefits of the Union policy were seen to far exceed its possible costs.

The fact that the Union policy was felt to be an extremely valuable one explains to a large extent the intensity of British commitment to it. There were two other probable reasons for the British Government's strong commitment to the policy. First, there was an overpowering multi-party consensus behind it with no Jeremiahs to cast a dissonant note and to question its appropriateness. Second, there was little doubt from the beginning regarding its chances of successful implementation. Events subsequent to the British re-occupation provided positive reinforcement of

of the States, which is *the first and foremost object of our policy* and the necessary basis for any more extensive Union' (CAB 98/41, CMB (44) 3, 14 January 1944. Italics mine.) Allen has argued that 'strategic reasons were almost certainly the most important factor' in deciding Singapore's separation and he seems to imply that there may well have been the desire to ensure that Singapore would remain a permanent colony, for military-strategic reasons (*ibid.*, pp. 25 and 26). Three facts strongly suggest, however, that Singapore's separation was not intended to be permanent. First, there was no attempt to create a Singapore nationalism or separate sense of identity and qualified Singaporeans were to be given not Singaporean citizenship but *Malayan Union citizenship*. Second, British officials and documents stated *ad nauseum* openly and confidentially that there was 'no desire to preclude or prejudice in any way the fusion of the two Administrations in a wider Union at any time should they both agree that such a course was desirable' (CAB 98/41, CMB (44) 3, 14 January 1944). Third, this desire to keep options open for future fusion found expression in the Constitutions of the Malayan Union and Singapore. While I do not reject the possible importance of military short-run and longer-run considerations, it does appear that in the Cabinet Committee at least, the desire to ensure the achievement of 'the first and foremost object of our policy', Malayan political union, was probably more important. There may also have been the belief that in a complete union of all of Malaya with the central government in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore's 'special' entrepôt and economic interests might be neglected. During the War, it was decided that the immediate re-establishment of Singapore's and Hong Kong's commerce and trade be given top priority. (Minutes of the War Cabinet Far Eastern Committee, 15 November 1944, CAB 96/5 FE (44) 1st Meeting).

²⁷ The Colonial Secretary noted: 'Our plans might be regarded as less welcome to the Malays than to the Indians and Chinese ... and the Japanese might accordingly attempt to stir up Malay feeling against our plans'. (War Cabinet Committee on Malaya and Borneo, Minutes of the 2nd Meeting, CAB 98/41, CMB (44) 2nd Meeting). Secrecy was also regarded as necessary because the Foreign Ministry was anxious that Chungking should not get to know of the Malayan Union proposals indirectly, and felt that the time was inappropriate to directly inform the Chinese Government. Gent expressed the Colonial Office's fear that the Chinese Government might adversely regard the citizenship proposals as an attempt 'at checking Chinese nationals' in Malaya (War Cabinet Far Eastern Committee Minutes of the 2nd Meeting, November, 1944, CAB 96/5, FE (44) 2nd Meeting).

this latter belief. The only potential obstacle to implementation had been seen to be the Rulers who might refuse to hand over their sovereignty to the British Crown, thus making it legally impossible for Whitehall to establish the Malayan Union by an Order-in-Council. On 13 September 1945, however, merely ten days after the first British soldier stepped on Malayan soil, Whitehall received a telegram from Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia, stating: 'In view of present friendly attitude [of the Rulers] emphasize early arrival of MacMichael.'²⁸

Sir Harold MacMichael, who was entrusted with the task of negotiating the sovereignty-transferring treaties with the Rulers, arrived at Port Swettenham on 11 October 1945. Between 20 October and 21 December, he managed to conclude snap treaties with all nine Malay monarchs.

Also providing reinforcement for Whitehall's policy was the early public reaction to the Union proposals and the British Government's perception of it.

THE OPPOSITION TO THE UNION POLICY²⁹

In the period from the military landings on 3 September to the end of November 1945 when MacMichael still had four more treaties to procure, the British Government could not but have come to the conclusion that they were pleasantly faced with an exceedingly submissive political environment with no serious opposition from any important quarter. Admittedly there were a few 'Old Malaya Hands' (men like Swettenham and Winstedt) who were critical of what little they knew about British plans. But they were opposed by other 'Old Malaysians' like Vlieland, MacFadyen and Maxwell.³⁰ *The Times* (London) saw the British scheme as 'far reaching and courageous',³¹ a view echoed by other British newspapers. In Malaya, there was a smattering of Malay opposition in the columns of the English press and some apprehensions expressed by Malay newspapers. These

²⁸The British were from the beginning aware of the necessity of quickly negotiated treaties 'as soon as feasible after reoccupation' ('Draft Directive . . .' CAB 98/41, WP (44) 258, 18 May 1944). The fact that Hall made the first public announcement of the Union proposals merely one day before MacMichael's arrival suggests that the Colonial Office wanted to give as little time as possible to the Rulers to examine the British scheme or for the mobilization of public opinion.

²⁹Because it has been so well covered by James Allen, we shall only very briefly sketch the development of opposition to the Malayan Union policy and proposals. For an attempt to reveal the blow-by-blow development of the Union episode as seen from Malaya, see M.N. Sopicc (ed.), 'The Battle for the Malayan Union: A Historical Sourcebook' (Kuala Lumpur, 1970, mimeograph).

³⁰Even George Maxwell, who was to become such a virulent opponent of the Malayan Union proposals, initially supported the British scheme (apparently under mistaken assumptions) and withdrew his support only after the January 1946 White Paper (*Straits Times*, 12 February 1946).

³¹Editorial, *The Times*, (London), 12 October 1945.

expressions, not unnaturally, made no significant impact in London.

In view of the fact that Malay opposition was ultimately to reach such proportions as to cause the British to dismantle the Malayan Union, it is important to examine some of the reasons why there was comparatively so little Malay opposition up to the end of 1945. Undoubtedly an important reason was the extent of Malay goodwill towards the British on their return to Malaya. At the same time, there were apprehensions amongst many of the traditional Malay leadership (who were later to be in the vanguard of opposition) as regards the initial tough British attitudes on 'collaboration' and 'collaborators'.³² The Rulers were anxious to be confirmed in their positions, the Malay civil servants to be confirmed in their posts—all were anxious to secure a clean bill of approval. In addition, almost everyone in Malaya was preoccupied with the problem of personal rehabilitation. Further, the Japanese occupation had discouraged political leadership and political activity. There were no active mobilisers of mass Malay opinion, and no organizational leadership to weld and organize whatever elite Malay opposition there was into a coherent, forceful whole. As yet their criticisms had neither been legitimized by the Rulers nor reinforced by their peers.

There were also several more particular reasons for the low level of Malay opposition to the Malayan Union policy and proposals. For one thing, and as a result of deliberate British policy, there was a dearth of facts on what exactly was going on, what the British were trying to do and their implications.³³ For another, the Malays assumed that there would be consultation of Malay opinion on whatever was planned.³⁴ Equally important was the prevailing belief that British policy was not cut and dried or fixed and unalterable, but that Whitehall would be responsive to Malay opinion. This was why several Rulers submitted memoranda only *after* they had signed the MacMichael treaties; why the call made to the Malays was to organize themselves not to oppose British policy but to *represent* Malay interest and to *present* opinions.³⁵

³² Even the extreme anglophile, the Sultan of Johore, was suspected of 'collaboration' (as also was one Tunku Abdul Rahman of Kedah). (CO 717, No. 52035.)

³³ In a telegram to the Colonial Secretary sent on 20 October 1945 immediately after the Sultan of Johore had signed the treaty (of surrender of sovereignty) MacMichael stated: 'The question of publicity arises. I have asked the Sultan *not to inform anyone* that he has signed, but to reply to any enquiries that negotiations *are proceeding* in a smooth and cordial atmosphere. . . . The fact that a treaty or treaties has been signed, will no doubt leak out sooner or later, but I assume that the first formal announcement should come from your end....' (CO 717/148, No. 52038. Italics mine.) The first formal announcement was to come after all the treaties had been signed.

³⁴ See, for example, the editorial, *Utusan Melayu*, 16 October 1945.

³⁵ Editorial, *Utusan Melayu*, 16 October 1945; editorial, *Warta Negara*, 10 November 1945.

By the beginning of 1946, however, the positions of the Rulers, the aristocratic class and Malay civil servants had been stabilized. The Rulers began slowly to come out one by one against the MacMichael treaties; the pre-war Malay organizations were beginning to be revived and new ones formed; and more facts were slowly trickling out about MacMichael's conduct and about British intentions. It was the White Paper published on 22 January 1946, however, which had the greatest significance for the mobilization of Malay opinion. It revealed the British plan in greater detail than ever before and it brought home two crucial facts: (i) there would be no consultation of Malay opinion, and (ii) British policy was not open to change. The Old Malaysans in London slowly stepped up their assault on the Malayan Union policy and proposals. The Malays started to launch a campaign of political mobilization and agitation such as had never before been seen in Malaya.

*Motivations for Opposition to the Union Policy*³⁶

There is little doubt that the Malay and British opponents of the Union policy rejected it primarily for reasons not directly connected with the idea of bringing together nine Malay States and two Settlements into a unitary state. Admittedly, there were some among them who opposed the separation of Singapore, others who criticized the inclusion of Penang. Most of them preferred, some strongly, a less centralized system than a unitary state in which the separate identity and power of the states would be eroded and eventually eradicated altogether. The power and separate identity of the Malay State were often important considerations by themselves. They were also seen, especially by those from the Unfederated Malay States, as the bastion against the encroachment of the other races and ensuring against deculturization. It is certain, however, that had the Union policy been properly introduced on its own, uncontaminated by the other markedly more repugnant proposals, opposition would have been less vehement and less widespread. As it was, opposition to the Union policy was that much the more extreme because it was presented as an inseparable and indistinguishable part of the Malayan Union parcel of proposals; and because of the manner in which the British went about their task of implementation.

First, it was believed, even by some who were in charge of British propaganda,³⁷ that the Rulers had been coerced into signing away their sovereignty. Further, even the Old Malaysans, who only slowly shied away

³⁶For a more detailed analysis of the Malay motivations for opposition, see M.N. Sopic, 'The Malayan Union and the Birth of Modern Malay Politics: the Bases of Agitation' in *Majallah KMUK*, No. 2 (1970), pp. 29-35.

³⁷Interview on 20 March 1972 with Soon Cheng Hor, Penang State Public Relations Officer in 1946.

from British policy, deprecated 'the studied avoidance of consulting Malayan opinion from the start',³⁸ the 'high-handed manner' and the 'indecent haste' with which Whitehall tried to foist their proposals on Malaya.

As regards the proposals which were put forward conjointly with the Union policy, the transfer of sovereignty, the annexation of the Malay States and the reduction of the position of the Rulers to the status of mere social and religious leaders were seen as a terrible blow to Malay prestige and self-respect, and a threat to the Malay character and identity of the Malay States. These, coupled with the very liberal citizenship proposals for the non-Malays, engendered the fear that what had been 'Tanah Melayu' would become 'Chinaya'.³⁹ The liberal citizenship proposals, accompanied by the promise of democratization and self government (which was seen by most Malays as more a threat than a promise), and the reduction of the status and power of the States and of their Rulers were seen to constitute in part a terrible threat to, and in part an actual reduction of Malay political power and authority.⁴⁰ As if these were not enough, the British intended to completely open the civil service to all of Malaya's races and thus cut into what had previously been largely a Malay and British preserve in the Malay States. All these proposals seemed to add up to an overpowering threat to the security of the Malay race and to their survival as a respectable community in their own native land. The Malays and their sympathisers did not want the community to become the Arabs of Palestine or the Red Indians of America, swamped and overwhelmed by the immigrant population.

Because the expected costs of the British scheme as a whole were perceived to be so great and because it was seen to have no redeeming qualities, it is not surprising that the Malays at long last awoke from their deep slumber and burst forth in a frenzy of political activity.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE MALAYAN UNION

The struggle to defeat the Malayan Union proposals (of which the Union policy was seen as an integral part) was carried out by two sets of opponents in two theatres of agitation: by the *Orang Melayu* in London; and by

³⁸ Sir Arnold Robinson, 'The New Constitution in Malaya', in *Malay Mail*, 21 February 1946.

³⁹ Ronald Braddell wrote: 'That Malaya now becomes Chinaya is obvious.' *Straits Times*, 11 February 1946. According to Ratnam, the citizenship proposals would have qualified 83 per cent. of the Chinese and 75 per cent. of the Indians for citizenship. K.J. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya Press, 1967), p. 75.

⁴⁰ It is important to note that Singaporeans (of whom the vast majority were Chinese) were to be given Malayan Union citizenship. On self government, even the left-wing, radical *Utusan Melayu* opposed the granting of independence to Malaya! Editorial, *Utusan Melayu*, 16 October 1945.

the Malays in Malaya.⁴¹ The first salvos had been fired in the correspondence columns of the *London Times* and in every newspaper in Malaya. These were followed by telegrams to Attlee, the Colonial Secretary, the United Nations. In England, the Prime Minister, Colonial Office officials and their political chiefs were repeatedly lobbied. In Malaya, some success was achieved with British officials, particularly at state level. A move was set afoot in Johore to negate the MacMichael treaty by forcing the abdication of Sultan Ibrahim.⁴² Embarrassing questions were asked in the British Parliament; and in a debate on the Straits Settlements (Repeal) Bill in the House of Commons in early March 1946, the Government fared very badly even though it was not carried to a division.⁴³

At home, the Malays set to the task of organizing themselves into a political force to be reckoned with. The real demonstration of Malay power was to come after the date of the Union's inauguration (1 April 1946); but before then the British had been given some notice of its potential. On 15 December 1945, on his arrival in Kota Bharu, MacMichael had been confronted by a mass demonstration reported to have been 10,000 strong.⁴⁴ On 10 February 1946, 15,000 Malays (including 450 women) staged a mass demonstration at the inauguration of the Onn bin Jaafar-led Movement of Peninsular Malays (Johore).⁴⁵ These were revolutionary events in Malay and Malayan politics. Then, on 1 March 1946, 115 representatives of forty-two Malay organizations met in Kuala Lumpur. Twice before the War attempts had been made to form a Malaya-wide Malay political organization. On this occasion and under the guidance of Dato Onn, state parochialism for the first time gave way to national solidarity; the Pan-Malayan Malay Congress resolved to form UMNO, a United Malays National Organization. The Malays became a race awakened.

For their part, the Rulers one by one renounced the MacMichael treaties, announced the withdrawal of their signatures, and gave their own accounts of MacMichael's conduct, accounts which the Old Malaysians in England were able to use to good effect. By early March 1946, they had begun to act in concert with the Old Malaysians and the Malay nationalists. Very

⁴¹While many non-Malays in Penang were critical of the inclusion of Penang in the Union and the small Malayan Democratic Union and many non-Malays in Singapore deprecated the separation of Singapore, they mounted no campaign.

⁴²It fizzled out when its civil servant leaders were suspended from their posts and threatened with dismissal. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁴³The Bill had to be passed before the Union could be established by an Order-in-Council. This was the only occasion the Union proposals were debated in the Commons.

⁴⁴*Utusan Melayu*, 22 December 1945.

⁴⁵*Malayan Tribune* (Singapore), 13 February 1946. Allen (in *op. cit.*, p. 22) inaccurately cites 3 January 1946 as the date of the Movement's formation.

significantly, and at long last, with the inauguration of the Union less than a week away, the Rulers offered to reopen negotiations on the basis of a federation.

Despite the campaign against the establishment of the Malayan Union, the politically-unified system was successfully inaugurated—on April Fools' Day, 1946. Its opponents had pinned their hopes of preventing its formation on effecting a change in British policy. Their failure to achieve this end until after the Union had been established is attributable in part to insufficient commitment to engineering change in the early stages when Whitehall policy was probably more malleable. This cannot, however, be said for the period after January 1946. There was no lack of effort then.

In relation to the period up to 1 April 1946 as a whole, a more probable reason for failure was their deficiency in certain key resources and assets. Up to March 1946, there was insufficient cohesion between the Old Malaysians, the Rulers and the Malay nationalists. Unfortunately also, until late March, their agitation took a negative form. They lacked the capacity to evolve and agree on a set of alternative proposals which could appeal to the British Government. The Pan-Malayan Malay Congress in early March, for example, proposed a return to the pre-1941 system, a system which had been rejected by the British at the very outset and which remained completely unacceptable to Whitehall. In view of the timetable set by the Labour Government and the understandable lateness of serious Malay opposition, the opponents badly lacked the single resource they did not have, time. Time was needed to increase the tempo of the agitation and to mobilize the Malays behind that agitation; and by February 1946, time was running out.

One of the most important reasons for the opponents' failure to change British policy within the time that was left, however, was the difficulty of their task. By the time serious opposition arose, Whitehall's mind (which had never been very open) was already completely closed on the subject of the Union policy. Impatient to bring back civil administration to Malaya, confident of its ability to make the new order a workable and efficient one, certain of the righteousness and correctness of its policy, and unconvinced of the seriousness of Malay opposition, abandonment of the Union policy was probably never even seriously considered by the British Government.

If the opponents of the Union policy lacked sufficient political power to cause a fundamental change to the policy, the British lacked the political power to reduce their opposition once it had got off the ground, an inability which in the end was to result in the undoing of the Malayan Union. The British capacity in the early stages to secure the transfer of sovereignty to the British Crown had been, however, a crucial factor in the creation of the Malayan Union. It is possible that had Britain been unsuccessful in engineering the transfer, there might have been second thoughts in Whitehall. Their success was to a large extent due to their strong com-

mitment to gaining the signatures of the Rulers. The British were thus prepared and MacMichael was empowered to use *force majeure*: he descended upon the Sultans with a treaty in one hand and with the power to confirm or remove any of them in the other.⁴⁶ The Ruler of Negri Sembilan was given twenty-four hours to sign and his request that he be given transport so that he could consult others, refused outright.⁴⁷ According to the Sultan of Perak, 'I was presented with a verbal ultimatum with a time limit, and in the event of my refusing to sign the new agreement . . . a successor, who would sign it, would be appointed Sultan.'⁴⁸

Perhaps a less important but nevertheless a significant factor for British success in securing the legal transfer of sovereignty was their possession of several important resources and assets. While MacMichael did not appear to be a particularly skillful negotiator, the British made the correct decision in tackling the Rulers so soon after the re-occupation, before they had had time to recover and psychologically readjust to a less ferocious imperial master than the Japanese, and while the fear of being accused of collaboration was so real.⁴⁹ The tactics of confronting one Ruler at a time, of securing the agreement of the doyen of the Sultans first (Sultan Ibrahim of Johore), using his prestige and liberating the others from the ignominy of being the first to surrender, were well considered.⁵⁰ The initial successful negotiations with the most amenable Sultans created a bandwagon effect and a feeling of *fait accompli*, provided convenient grounds for rationalization and engendered the belief that resistance was pointless. In addition was the pure and simple fact that Whitehall and no other authority was in a position to bestow on the Sultans, or to deprive them of rulership and all its attendant personal benefits.

Despite the strength of British commitment to engineering the transfer of sovereignty and the resources and assets which accompanied their effort, there is no running away from the fact that the task of gaining the acquiescence of the Rulers was not a very difficult one. The Malaya MacMichael visited was still in an unsettled state where the largely Chinese

⁴⁶ See Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report on a Mission to Malaya, October 1945-January 1946* (Colonial No. 194, London 1946). The Colonial Office has realized from the very beginning that their power to confirm or refuse to confirm the Rulers in their positions would be a useful tool for gaining compliance to British proposals (Co. 717, No. 52001/1/43).

⁴⁷ Cited in Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 171. The Sultan of Perak was also given twenty-four hours in which to sign.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁴⁹ H.C. Willan, the Deputy Chief Civil Affairs Officer, Malay Peninsula, had visited each Ruler in turn to assess whether any of them had collaborated with the Japanese, very shortly after the establishment of the British Military Administration.

⁵⁰ One of the reasons the Sultan of Selangor gave for signing the treaty was that the 'Sultan of Johore had signed it', *ibid.*, p. 171.

Communist Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) was still roaming the countryside, where inter-racial enmity was rife, inter-racial bloodshed not uncommon, and insecurity pervasive.⁵¹ Several of the rulers owed their positions to the British; most of them were anxious to demonstrate their loyalty to Britain and probably all the Rulers felt acutely insecure on their thrones.⁵² There was no great tradition of Ruler resistance in Malay political culture to help engender a spirit of defiance,⁵³ no great pressure from the Malay *rakyat* to stimulate or strengthen their will to resist.

Possessed of the legal authority to found a new order in Malaya and undeflected from their policy by their opponents, the British legally inaugurated the Malayan Union on 1 April 1946 by a simple Order-in-Council.

The seven civil services which had existed before the War were reduced to one. At the top of the executive hierarchy was placed a Governor to whom all government departments were accountable. There were no state governments, only one central government. There was no indirect rule. One police force took the place of seven. No more were there ten legislatures. There were now in fact twelve, but only one, the Malayan Union Advisory Council, had any real power. The other eleven had jurisdiction

⁵¹ The Sultan of Pahang was apparently kidnapped by the MPAJA and held captive for two weeks (*Malayan Daily News*, 17 May 1946). When Willan went to interview the Sultan of Johore, he had to ask a man in the street where the Sultan could be contacted. On going to where he thought Sultan Ibrahim was, he found four Japanese soldiers lounging on the verandah—but no Sultan. When, at the third attempt, Willan eventually found the man, Sultan Ibrahim expressed his nervousness at the activities of the MPAJA and said that if the British would authorize him, he would arm 20,000 Malays to quell the Chinese (CO 717/148, No. 52038-1945). For an account of the racial riots in the immediate post-war period, see M.N. Sopheer, (ed.), 'The Communities Liaison Committee and Post-War Communal Relations in Malaya' (Kuala Lumpur, 1970, mimeograph). For a detailed analysis of the economic dislocation in Malaya, see M.R. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya* (London, Oxford University Press, 1970), especially chapter IV.

⁵² In September 1945, Sultan Musaeddin of Selangor was deposed and detained by the British Military Administration and the 'rightful Ruler' put in his place. On the British return, the Ruler of Perlis (who had been installed by the Japanese) resigned. The new Ruler of Perlis in fact became sovereign the day he and MacMichael met to discuss the treaty of surrender. In Trengganu, another Japanese-appointed Sultan was deposed and his uncle was put on the throne. The Sultan of Kelantan and Kedah had succeeded to the throne during the Japanese occupation and had not yet been legally recognized by Britain (MacMichael, *Report on a Mission to Malaya: October 1945-January 1946*).

⁵³ Many of the Malay States before the British intervention of the late nineteenth century were apparently greatly decentralized polities dominated by territorial chiefs who generally chose their sovereign, and, quite naturally chose weak Sultans amenable to their persuasion. J.M. Gullick, *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya* (London, 1958).

which was narrower than that of most local councils in England today. The assets of the States and Settlements were transferred to the Malayan Union Government. Seven judicial systems were reduced to one.

The Malayan Union was, not only a new institutional order, but also a working one. The laws that were made were enforced and obeyed; the taxes and duties that were levied were paid.

As a functioning unitary state, the Malayan Union was to have a life that was as short as that of Malaysia inclusive of Singapore. But the impact of the whole Union episode on the structure and functioning of the Malayan political system was tremendous. It was a watershed in Malay politics for the Malays were jolted out of their political complacency and galvanized for good into becoming a force to be reckoned with. In their common struggle against the British proposals grew a sense of national ethnic solidarity which could for the first time transcend the force of state rivalries and parochialisms. Out of that struggle was born UMNO, a party which was to dominate Malayan politics for most if not all of the succeeding years.

The Malayan Union was not only a new institutional order but also Malay politics but also the birth of modern Malayan politics. The British were to learn a 'lesson' they never subsequently forgot; that no fundamental political change in Malaya should be attempted without prior consultation of Malay opinion. The episode also raised issues which were to dominate or strongly influence much of Malayan politics for the new two decades, issues such as Malay rights and privileges, citizenship, the ethnic structure of political power, the identity of the country, the position of the Rulers, the place of the non-Malays in Malaya. The principle of citizenship for the non-Malays became settled for good, and all were agreed that there was no going back to a politically fragmented Malaya. The form that Malayan political unity was to take, however, was to be the subject of serious political conflict for the next year and a half and was eventually to lead to the establishment of the Federation of Malaya.

III

FORMATION OF THE FEDERATION OF MALAYA

The Malayan Union was inaugurated on 1 April 1946. It survived as a unitary state until February 1948 when a federation was substituted in its place. In this chapter, an attempt to explain this substitution will be made in terms of one crucial factor: the about-turn in British policy.

THE CHANGE IN BRITISH POLICY

For approximately two months after 1 April 1946, Whitehall's commitment to the Malayan Union was as strong as ever. On 2 April, Creech-Jones, the Colonial Under-Secretary, reiterated the intention of the British Government to stand firm.¹ Two weeks later, George Hall declared in the House of Commons that he could not admit the right of one party, the Rulers, to go back on its word.² In the last-minute instructions given to Malcolm MacDonald before he left London to take up his post of Governor-General, on 16 May 1946, Creech-Jones talked of the possibility of a trial of strength and informed him that there was no possibility of a change in British policy.³

Two factors appear, however, to have played important roles in forcing the British Government to reconsider willy-nilly the Malayan Union question: (i) the perception of great, organized and increasing hostility, particularly Malay hostility to the Malayan Union,⁴ and (ii) the rise of opposition to British policy from those British officials in Malaya whose very task it was to foster and implement that policy.

If Whitehall expected Malay opposition to evaporate once the Malayan Union became a *fait accompli*, they were gravely mistaken. The inauguration of the Union and the installation of Edward Gent as Governor on 1 April 1946 was totally boycotted by the Malay community,⁵ including

¹ *Sunday Tribune*, 5 April 1946.

² *Malayan Tribune*, 19 April 1946.

³ James de Vere Allen, *The Malayan Union* (Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, 1967), p. 52.

⁴ The agitation of the ex-MCS officials in London slowly faded out after their 'Pro-consular Letter' to *The Times* (London) of 16 April 1946. This letter was signed by no less than three former Governors/High Commissioners, four former Chief Secretaries, eight former Residents or Advisers and two former Chief Justices.

⁵ The Rulers' boycott, a singularly unique event in Malayan history, made a strong impression on those British officials long acquainted with Malaya. Alexander Newbould (who was Deputy Chief Civil Affairs Officer in the BMA and Chief Secretary

the Sultans. The paragons of politeness and good manners had shown an unprecedented discourtesy in an atmosphere strained and made tense by talk of *amok*.⁶ No Sultan turned up for the first meeting of the Malayan Union Advisory Council of Rulers on 2 April. Equally dramatic was the refusal of every one of the seven Malay members nominated to the Union Advisory Council to serve in the legislature. The Malay masses too demonstrated their hostility in dramatic and visual form. The demonstrations which followed the inauguration of the Malayan Union appeared altogether more vehement, more likely to lead to a breach of the peace, more organized, and most important, more anti-British.

The importance of Malay opposition in determining the fate of the Malayan Union, however, lay not so much in its direct impact on the British Government in the United Kingdom but in its direct effect on the British officials in Malaya. The immediately crucial factor which forced Whitehall to reluctantly reopen the Union question was the representations of the top British officials on the spot. Edward Gent and Ralph Hone (head of the wartime Malayan Planning Unit) had been intimately associated with the whole Union scheme from the very beginning. Hone, who became Chief Civil Affairs Officer in the British Military Administration (BMA), was in Malaya first. He was the first to crack. Just before the Malayan Union superseded the BMA, he reported to the Colonial Office that the Sultans had not realized the full implications of the MacMichael treaties, and that to ensure the success of the new political order certain alterations should be made to the Union proposals.⁷

Gent, who more than anyone else fathered the whole Malayan Union scheme, arrived in Malaya as determined as Hall and Creech-Jones to push the plan through. The boycott of his installation may well have weakened his resolve; yet by mid-April, he was still recommending only peripheral changes.⁸ Gent then requested for authorization to meet the Rulers in order to convince them of the virtues of the Union.⁹ Hall authorized the move but with the proviso that they were *on no account* to be led into believing that the Union could be abandoned.¹⁰ Gent's meeting with the

of the Malayan Union) purportedly believed that it was the boycott which made Gent 'see the red light.' Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 48 and p. 110.

⁶The word itself is derived from the Malay word *mengamok* (to be mad; to run wild).

⁷See *ibid.*, pp. 46-47. The Colonial Office subsequently deferred the implementation of the citizenship proposals but emphasized at the same time that there was no question of changing them and that the delay was simply in order to allow the Malays time to 'understand' them. *The Times* (London), 30 March 1946.

⁸Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 47. Allen (accidentally) gained access to some official despatches. Some of his statements may therefore be taken as authoritative.

⁹*Loc. cit.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 48.

Malay Rulers in Kuala Kangsar from 2 to 4 May 1946 was a decisive event for it resulted in his complete conversion. With great courage, he wrote to London stating that he favoured an almost complete acceptance of the Rulers' federation proposals.¹¹

The Colonial Office reacted sharply, questioning Gent's capacity to correctly assess public opinion after merely a month in Malaya, and categorically stating that it was too late to change British policy.¹² Significantly, however, the option of policy abandonment was not closed. London asked for detailed answers to three questions: (i) What was the precise attitude of the non-Malays? (ii) How significant were the MCP and the Indonesian Malay political movements? (iii) Were the Malays solidly behind their Rulers? And was there no possibility of satisfying the whole Malay community by a modified version of the Union plan?¹³

Gent replied around 12 May 1946 that the strength and organization of Malay opposition and their free criticism of the Rulers had astounded the Sultans themselves and all who knew Malaya well.¹⁴ The Malay masses were not only solidly behind their Rulers; the Rulers were in fact restraining them. Gent admitted that a small group among the Malays, the Malay Nationalist Party, favoured the Union, but they were, of course, under communist and Indonesian influence.¹⁵ The as yet small number of Malay resignations from the police force, he argued, also provided tangible evidence of what might develop.¹⁶ Gent informed London that senior secur-

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49. Gent also stated in the same despatch (i) that the non-Malays would not be aroused by the change to a federation and by more restrictive citizenship, (ii) that the Malays would be conciliated by nothing less, (iii) that their political cohesion, even in the rural areas, was surprising but not yet disturbing, since at the moment they represented the efforts of the MCP and the Indonesian elements (the MNP) to promote discord, and (iv) that only by taking advantage of this still as yet undisturbing mood immediately could the spirit of cooperation and unity of purpose necessary for progress towards self-government be secured.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹³ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁴ It is to be noted that in 1947 UMNO had roughly 54,000 paid-up members (Ibu Pejabat UMNO Papers). The figures and their breakdown by state are available in M.N. Sopic (ed.), 'The Battle for the Federation of Malaya' (Kuala Lumpur, 1970. Mimeograph), p. 79. By Malaysian standards, 54,000 is a huge membership. As a comparison, the PAP had an estimated membership of less than 2,300 in 1960, even after it had become the ruling party of Singapore. Pang Cheng Lian, *Singapore's People's Party* (Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 60.

¹⁵ Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 51. In a later despatch, Gent informed London that the MNP too was becoming cool towards the Union (*ibid.*, p. 111).

¹⁶ The extent to which the police force depended on Malay personnel is indicated by that fact that on 31 December 1947, out of a total force of 11,500, some 9,764 were Malays (Federation of Malaya, *Annual Report*, 1948, p. 122). There were many

ity and administrative officers were unanimous in predicting the growth of a spirit of *non-cooperation* which west-coast Indonesian elements might well utilize to stir up attacks on the non-Malay communities.¹⁷ Local opinion, he stated, was absolutely agreed that the Malays would never accept the Union but that it was not too late to reach agreement with them on terms which might secure equally well Britain's two essential objectives (the extension of citizenship to the non-Malays and the establishment of some sort of union). Gent stressed that the Malays themselves wanted unification, but on the basis of a federation. As for the non-Malays, they cared not whether there was a Union or a federation. The Chinese and Indians were interested in citizenship but, except for the Straits Chinese, they wanted at the same time to retain their existing Chinese or Indian citizenship. As regards the MCP, Gent suggested that it was greatly feared by the Chinese but that its influence ebbed and flowed according to economic conditions and that it was on the wane at the moment. The Indonesian organizations were powerful and of considerable influence on the west coast. But they would cooperate with the government so long as Britain was sympathetic to Indonesian nationalism and so long as the aspirations of the local Malays were satisfied.¹⁸

The Colonial Office refused to budge; but it must have been finding it more and more difficult to justify policy continuation for by mid-May, Gent and practically every member of the Malayan Planning Unit had come out in support of federation.¹⁹

The final straw that broke the camel's back came in the form of Malcolm MacDonald's recommendations to London. Before he left England, the Governor-General designate had been told by Creech-Jones to bring Gent back to his senses. He was in fact to bring the Colonial Office back to theirs.

states in which the total police force with the exception of a handful of British officers was made up of Malays.

¹⁷The inter-communal warfare of 1945-6 dwarfs the 1969 riots in terms of numbers killed and areas affected. In one small area of Perak, the Telok Anson Relief Committee estimated Chinese casualties alone at 165 killed and nine wounded (Nellie Goh Kim Guat, 'Sino-Malay Relations in Malaya, 1945-54', unpublished B.A. academic exercise, University of Malaya, 1960, p. 10).

¹⁸Allen, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁹The *Sunday Times*, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Spectator*, the *Economist* and the *London Times* (which in October 1945 had praised British policy as 'far-reaching and courageous') had by this time also joined the chorus of disapproval. There had also been criticism from the Conservative Party, especially from Gammans and Oliver Stanley, the Conservative Colonial Secretary who had pushed the Malayan Union proposals in the Cabinet Committee on Malaya and Borneo in 1944. In view of Malcolm MacDonald's representations which he made after merely a few days in Malaya, it seems possible that there were also Labour Ministers who were similarly critical.

MacDonald arrived in Singapore on 21 May 1946. His installation the next day was boycotted by the Rulers. Hone became his Secretary-General. He had discussions with Gent and Newbould, Gammans and Rees-Williams;²⁰ and before his first week in Malaya was out, the Governor-General had written to London advocating the substitution of a federation, a 'Malayan Federal Union', in place of the Malayan Union.²¹

The British Government in London clearly had two alternative courses of action. One was to continue its policy of maintaining the Malayan Union regardless of opposition from Gent, MacDonald, Gammans (and probably Rees-Williams) and the majority of its senior officials in Malaya. The other was to discontinue this tack and to adopt the 'Federation policy', a policy of substituting the Malayan Union with a federation.²² By the end of May 1946, the matter had apparently been settled.²³

BRITISH MOTIVATIONS FOR THE FEDERATION POLICY

According to James Allen, it was 'a summation of propriety and security arguments with the addition of some new international or prestige ones which finally decided the issue...'²⁴

One can never be certain about motivations but there seems little reason to doubt the probability that by May 1946, the great majority of Labour Ministers (though not necessarily the Colonial Secretary or his assertive Under-Secretary) had become convinced that all had not been aboveboard in respect of MacMichael's conduct *vis-a-vis* the Rulers.²⁵ There appears to be little reason to doubt also that general considerations of peace and

²⁰ Gammans (Conservative) and Rees-Williams (Labour) were the members of a two-man parliamentary mission sent to Sarawak to investigate the constitutional problems there. On their way home they spent nearly two weeks in Malaya. Wherever they went, they were met by demonstrations unprecedented in Malayan history. See Sopic, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-116.

²¹ Allen suggests that MacDonald had 'a sort of unofficial mandate from Attlee, Morrison, and others as well as his last minute instructions from Creech-Jones' (*op. cit.* p. 55).

²² It is in this sense that we shall use the term 'Federation policy'. When referring to the Federation policy plus the other proposals that were put forward along with it, we shall talk of the Federation proposals, scheme, or plan.

²³ Allen, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁵ According to E.C.G. Barrett, who was Secretary to the Gammans-Rees Williams mission, the change in policy 'started off at Cabinet level due to doubt about the moral (and political) justification of the "macmichaeling" of the Rulers...' (quoted in *ibid.*, p. 113). As for the Colonial Office, in the briefing Creech-Jones gave to MacDonald, the Under Secretary stated that MacMichael had *not* used threats against the Rulers and that that was the end of the matter (*ibid.*, p. 52). I know of no evidence indicating that Hall or Creech-Jones had come to believe that the Treaties were the result of coercion; but there may well have been doubts.

law and order (still not firmly established in the country by mid-1946), and more particularly, worries about racial peace and anti-government violence, were major factors in causing policy change.²⁶ The Malays had threatened violence in Malaya and the Sultan of Johore had predicted it in London.²⁷ Knowledge of the *amok* was part of the intellectual capital of every Britisher having the slightest claim to knowing the Malays. Parliament knew of the rampant racial tensions and of the numerous cases of Malay-Chinese atrocities.²⁸ The British Government was only too aware of the communal violence in India and of the violent challenge mounted by the Malays' kith and kin against the Dutch in neighbouring Indonesia. And the Colonial Office had been informed of the Malay vulnerability to being stirred up by Malaya's own Indonesia-orientated Malay politicians. Malaya could not be allowed to go the way of Indonesia.

Allen's assertion that international prestige considerations were a major factor causing policy change appears to call for more circumspection if only because it seems to be a highly speculative argument and one based so largely upon MacDonald's May 1946 despatch to London.²⁹ It may well have played a part. It is possible, however, that the desire not to forfeit the existing Malay loyalty to Britain played a more important role. The faithfulness of the Malays might have touched the consciences of some Labour Ministers. It certainly was a value in itself which could not just be lightly cast aside—especially since important elements in the Chinese community led by the MCP were seen to be deliberately fomenting disloyalty and anti-British feelings, with some success.

²⁶ MacDonald gave it as his opinion (twenty years after the event) that it was the security issue which killed the Union (*ibid.*, pp. 64).

²⁷ *Straits Times*, 3 May 1946.

²⁸ Great Britain, *Hansard*, Vol. 421, 25 March – 18 April 1946, pp. 321-2.

²⁹ According to Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 257, 'it is possible to discern three levels at which Malayan developments disturbed the British. . . . The first was the level of morality and propriety; the second the level of Malaya-wide security; and the third, the international level.' As regards the international level, he writes:

MacDonald's arguments, with their central theme of British prestige, were redolent of the arguments of a nineteenth-century pro-consul. . . . Underlying them was the assumption that in spite of her military comeback Britain had a great deal of ground to make up in South and Southeast Asia, and that only by a policy of liberalism, of avoiding coercion, and of destroying the image of a power which would concede change only grudgingly could she regain anything of her former status. All the credit derived from the granting of independence to India... would be dissipated if at the same time British forces were having to be deployed in Malaya to install an unpopular and purely colonial regime (pp. 65-66. *Italics mine*).

One does not know if these indeed were MacDonald's assumptions, and more important, if these were also the assumptions of the decision-makers in London who reversed British policy.

In terms of their vital Malayan interests, the British could not afford to alienate the Malays. Without their goodwill and their active cooperation, not only would it be impossible to achieve administrative efficiency, one of the primary reasons why the British had decided to build a Malayan unitary state in the first place; effective government itself would be severely threatened. The Malayan Union Advisory Council had had to operate with no Malay representation. The entire civil service was predominantly made up of Malays.³⁰ Government in the rural areas, with its dependence on Malay *pengbulus*, would simply be impossible without Malay cooperation.

It is also likely that the decision to adopt the Federation policy was significantly related to the realization that Britain could not afford to let leadership of the Malays fall out of the hands of the traditional and very anglicized moderate leaders of UMNO (who were basically pro-British and wanted British rule to continue) and into the hands of the more 'alien' radical and extremist leaders of the Malay Nationalist Party who wanted immediate independence for Malaya and merger with Indonesia.

The MNP was to argue that UMNO won a victory as regards its federation proposals because the British so desired it—for an UMNO victory did not endanger the interests of the British imperialists in Malaya but helped to strengthen their hold on the country. It is possible that Whitehall was aware that by backing UMNO, the only major political force in the country which was not anti-British, it was securing a solid base of local popular support. It seems likely also that as a result of the serious challenge to British authority and rule mounted by the MCP from September 1945, the British Government for the first time saw the necessity of a local base of mass support to underpin its regime in Malaya.³¹

One other factor may also have played an important role in causing policy change: the desire of the Labour Government, but more particularly of Hall and Creech-Jones, to avoid responsibility for any major mishap in Malaya. Politicians can lessen the load of responsibility by increasing the number of people carrying it. They can also argue as they so often do that 'there was no other choice'. The reasonable suggestion of a federation had put paid to the second course. The disowning of the Union scheme

³⁰ Gent had, of course, made much of the Malay resignations from the police force. In 1947, out of a total of 20,983 employed in public administration and defence (including Britishers), 15,215 were Malays. Federation of Malaya, *Annual Report, 1949* (Kuala Lumpur, 1950), p. 8.

³¹ This has been hinted at by Stenson (see M.R. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948*, London, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 128.) The Colonial Office's apprehensions about the MCP are indicated by the fact that it demanded from Gent a detailed assessment of MCP strength. For good accounts of the communist challenge see *ibid.*, and F.S.V. Donnison, *British Military Administration in the Far East, 1943-46* (London, HMSO, 1956), p. 392ff.

by Gent, Hone, Newbould, Stanley and its rejection by MacDonal, made certain that for what may happen in Malaya, the Colonial Office and Hall and Creech-Jones would be held accountable.

If the Colonial Office and the British Government became cognizant of the important advantages of policy change, they appear also to have been aware of the possible costs. The Colonial Office's specific request for a detailed appraisal of non-Malay attitudes on the Union and federation questions, made after Gent had already stated them, suggests that his superiors were fearful that by abandoning the one and advocating the other, Malay opposition might merely be replaced by possibly more dangerous non-Malay opposition.³² Gent's despatches may well have succeeded in assuaging these fears to some extent but they may well have lingered.

These lingering doubts notwithstanding, it is likely that by the end of May 1946, the decision to abandon the Union had been made. It would be foolish to believe, however, that at this stage British commitment to the Federation policy was irreversible or not contingent upon the successful working out of an acceptable alternative to the Malayan Union. In practice the question did not really arise. Serious negotiations between the British Government, the Rulers and UMNO began in mid-July. By 25 July 1946, agreement had been reached on the basic principles which would govern the talks. On that date, a Working Committee consisting of six government, two UMNO, and four Rulers' representatives was set up to work out the details. By mid-December 1946, more or less complete agreement had been reached.

The progress made in these months no doubt reinforced the initial British commitment. Additional reinforcement was the fact that up to December 1946, the much feared opposition of the non-Malays did not materialize.³³ Had the Chinese and Indians mounted the political campaign in the period after July 1946 that they were to mount a year later, it is not unlikely that the British might have had second thoughts. The causes of non-Malay political inactivity from July to December 1946 and the causes of Malay inactivity in late 1945 are not without parallels. If anything, the

³²The Colonial Office may have regarded Malay opposition as preferable to comparable non-Malay opposition because the Malays were loyal and wanted British rule to continue whereas at least the politically active non-Malays were not loyal and wanted immediate independence and because non-Malay dissatisfaction would provide great scope for the MCP to increase its strength. London was apparently more worried about the communists than was Kuala Lumpur.

³³There was little else apart from a telegram despatched to London on 15 July 1946 by Tan Cheng Lock (then a much respected Straits-born Chinese) on behalf of '42 Chinese associations and guilds' urging Hall not to scuttle the Union (*Malaya Tribune*, 16 July 1946). This came a full ten days after newspaper reports that Whitehall would abandon the Union and substitute it with a federation with a High Commissioner at its head.

non-Malays were probably more pre-occupied with the problem of personal rehabilitation, more relieved at the return of the British.³⁴ There were also no active mobilisers of non-Malay opposition.³⁵ As in the Malayan Union case, there was a dearth of information regarding what was being worked out by the Working Committee. This did not in itself cause great dissatisfaction for it was believed that the Union debacle had taught the British the importance of proper consultation and the futility of *fait accomplis*. A factor which did not have a 1945 counterpart was the quite common belief that the Malays had legitimate grievances, and were making legitimate demands which did not seriously threaten non-Malay interests.³⁶ Constitutional discussions were also seen to be fulfilling the important function of calming Malay passions and tempers.

OPPOSITION TO THE FEDERATION POLICY AND PROPOSALS³⁷

For all these reasons, real opposition to the Federation policy was deferred until December 1946. In anticipation of the expected *direct* consultation of Malayan opinion, however, the small (Singapore) Malayan Democratic Union (MDU) had quietly begun to organize a broad political front under its leadership.³⁸ Then, on 12 December 1946, the Colonial Secretary an-

³⁴ Commerce was more dislocated than the public services or Malay agriculture. The Chinese suffered terribly under the Japanese whereas the Malays were given better treatment.

³⁵ Tan Cheng Lock, who was to be a major leader of the opposition to the Federation proposals, had just returned from his war-time sojourn in India. The MCP was not as yet directly interested in generating opposition to British constitutional policy as such.

³⁶ To many, the Malays seemed to be demanding changes in form rather than substance. *The Straits Echo* editorial of 6 July 1946, for example, was entitled 'What's in a Name?' When Whitehall's *volte face* was leaked to the press in early July, non-Malay political circles in Kuala Lumpur were reported as believing that it was inconceivable that any new plan would not safeguard the 'elementary rights' of the domiciled non-Malays (*Malaya Tribune*, 6 July 1946). On this point, see Tan Hock Seng, 'The Left Wing in Malaya, 1945-51,' B.A. academic exercise, University of Malaya, 1960, p. 21ff.

³⁷ Because the state of knowledge on the development of opposition to the Federation proposals is generally poor, we will devote some space to the subject. As rather extreme examples of lack of understanding of the basic facts, see Tan Koh Ching, 'The Formation of Malaysia: Some Aspects of Political Geography', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1966; and N. Ginsburg and C. Roberts Jr., *Malaya* (Seattle, 1958), pp. 465-6. Even Means's account is replete with inaccuracies. See G.P. Means, *Malaysian Politics* (London, 1970), especially p. 84.

³⁸ The MDU was a radical Singapore party formed on 21 December 1945. It was made up largely of middle-class and English-educated Chinese, Eurasian and Indian intellectuals. Stenson suggests that the MDU was set up by the MCP with the intention of making it a multi-racial, 'broad-based, nationalist political party, emphasizing a moderate programme of democratic socialism leading to independence' (*op. cit.*, p. 60). It

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nounced that the Anglo-Malay Working Committee had completed its discussions and that consultation with 'all the interested Communities in Malaya [would begin] with the minimum of delay'.³⁹ The MDU moved. On 13 December 1946, its Vice-President and most dynamic leader, John Eber, announced a meeting to be held the next day to form a Council of Joint Action. The CJA was duly formed. It is important to note that at this stage the announced aim of the Council was not to oppose but to propose 'to join hands in submitting proposals on the future Malayan Constitution'.⁴⁰ On 22 December, the Singapore-based CJA was expanded and superseded by a country-wide Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action (PMCJA) which retained Tan Cheng Lock as its Chairman and John Eber as its Secretary.⁴¹ PMCJA had, like the CJA, three principal objectives: (i) a United Malaya inclusive of Singapore, (ii) responsible self-government through a *fully elected* Central Legislature for the whole of Malaya, and (iii) *equal* citizenship rights to those who made Malaya their permanent home and the object of their undivided loyalty.⁴²

is probably simplistic to label it a communist-dominated party but there is little doubt that it had several communists on its executive. For more on the MDU see Yeo Kim Wah, 'A Study of Three Early Political Parties in Singapore, 1945-55' in *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. X No. 1 (March 1969), and also M.N. Sopic (ed.), 'The Malayan Democratic Union' (Kuala Lumpur, 1970, mimeographed).

³⁹ *Malaya Tribune*, 13 December 1946.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14 December 1946.

⁴¹ The PMCJA's major component organizations were the leftist MDU and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), the Communist Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Ex-Services Comrades Association and the powerful communist-dominated Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU). Although the MCP was never a member, its influence in the Council was great since it could act directly through the Comrades Association and the PMFTU (which held the Council's purse-strings) and indirectly through the MDU. There was a small and unimportant right-wing element in the PMCJA, the British-oriented Straits Chinese British Associations. Tan Cheng Lock (the pre-eminent Straits Chinese leader) was a rightist although he was capable of going left, right and centre, often all at the same time. One of the greatest disappointments, as far as Eber and Tan were concerned, was the refusal of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the ACCC, the Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce (the confederation of the Chinese Chambers of the Union and Singapore) to join the PMCJA. One of the main reasons for accepting Tan as Chairman in the first place had been the fact that of all the prominent opponents of the Federation proposals, only he had the ear of the Chambers and their respect. The (Singapore) CJA attained a *locus standi* in the Union by expanding to become the PMCJA. In August 1947, it changed its name to the All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA) because the Chinese Chambers objected to 'Pan-Malayan' on grounds that it suggested communist domination while the MNP objected to 'Malayan' as the term was often used by Malays to refer to non-Malays only.

⁴² *Malay Mail*, 23 December 1946. It should be noted that while the Malays opposed the degree of centralization of the Malayan Union, the opponents of the Federation

Between 14 and 22 December enough had leaked out about the Federation proposals and about the method of consulting public opinion to put the PMCJA on the road to out and out opposition. There would be no United Malaya, no elected legislators, and citizenship for non-Malays would be, by Union standards, much more restrictive. Further, consultation of non-Malay opinion would be conducted indirectly through a Consultative Committee made up of five Europeans, two Chinese and two Indian 'stooges', and headed by a British official. The PMCJA saw another *fait accompli*. At its inaugural meeting, it adopted three principles from which it was never to deviate. It demanded 'the rejection of *all* previous discussion and agreements with the Sultans and UMNO', and recognition as 'the *only* body which represents *all* Asiatic communities of Malaya and *with which the Government may conduct negotiations* on constitutional issues'. Third, it declared a boycott of the Consultative Committee.⁴³

PMCJA IN THE FOREFRONT: DECEMBER 1946—FEBRUARY 1947

In the period December 1946 to February 1947, it was the MDU-led PMCJA which held the stage. It bombarded the press with letters and articles. It organized mass demonstrations in Penang, Malacca, Selangor, Perak, Johore, Negri Sembilan, Pahang, Kedah, and Singapore. While these mass rallies often attracted large crowds, the leaders of the PMCJA were under no delusions about their failure to mobilize mass opposition.⁴⁴ Whatever opposition there was existed largely at the elitist and organizational level. The elite mobilized, however, was small; Tan Cheng Lock's attempts to bring in the Chinese Chambers proved futile. And very crucially, the PMCJA failed to gain any significant mass Malay support or even the membership of the small Malay Nationalist Party.

The Council had been inaugurated at the Kuala Lumpur headquarters of the leftist MNP, but the party either did not join the PMCJA or withdrew from it almost immediately.⁴⁵

policy opposed it on grounds of the Federation of Malaya's projected membership, the exclusion of Singapore. At the same time, it is important to notice that like the Malay opposition to the Union policy, the 1947 opposition to the Federation policy, a policy of forming a federation exclusive of Singapore, was part and parcel of the campaign against the Federation proposals as a whole.

⁴³ *Malay Mail*, 23 December 1946. The Consultative Committee had jurisdiction to consult non-Malay views only. The MNP was in the singularly unique position, therefore, of being cut out of the deliberations of both the Working and the Consultative Committee.

⁴⁴ Correspondence between Tan Cheng Lock and Eber cited in Yeo Kim Wah, 'Political Development in Singapore, 1945-1955', unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Singapore, 1967, p. 16.

⁴⁵ Yeo Kim Wah argues that the MNP was initially a member but withdrew in January

It is probable that the MNP was split not only on the question of membership of the PMCJA but also on the question of opposition itself. For in a memorandum written by Ishak bin Muhammad, head of the MNP's Political Department, and published in the pro-PMCJA *Malaya Tribune* in early January 1947, for example, it was argued that the party 'may be prepared, on certain conditions to give the present scheme a fair trial for one or two years'.⁴⁶ The MNP set about organizing its own coalition of Malay organizations. By the time of the inauguration of Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (PUTERA) on 22 February 1947, it had clearly decided on opposition to the Federation proposals.⁴⁷

THE PERIOD OF PMCJA-PUTERA ALLIANCE: MARCH 1947 - JULY 1947

With PUTERA established, PMCJA and PUTERA moved towards closer cooperation. Yet this collaboration was neither as tight, coordinated nor effective as has often been made out.⁴⁸ Before mid-1947, the alliance was not much more than a loose association between political conglomerations. There was no major common and effective structure of decision-making and control. Commenting on this in mid-March, a pro-PMCJA columnist of the pro-PMCJA *Malaya Tribune* sadly noted that 'the forces of reaction are organized and concerted while the forces of progress are disorgan-

1947 to later form PUTERA which then went into coalition with the PMCJA (*ibid.*, p. 17). In an interview with the *Straits Times* on 8 January 1947, however, Dr. Burhanuddin, President of the MNP, clearly stated that the party had not yet taken up membership of the Council and that this was to be decided by the MNP's newly-elected committee within the week. He explained that at the PMCJA's inauguration, the MNP's representatives were 'merely observers with no authority to discuss anything' (*Straits Times*, 9 January 1947).

Whatever the explanation, it seems that if the MNP had been a member, it refused to attend the Council's second meeting of 6 January 1947, its membership lasted for less than two weeks, and the leadership was uneasy and unwilling to admit that it was a member. This attitude was probably due to three facts: the party's disappointment at not filling the post of Chairman; its dissatisfaction as regards what it perceived as the non-Malay image, leadership, and programme of the PMCJA; and its fear that by its membership it might lose whatever little Malay support it had.

⁴⁶ *Malaya Tribune*, 8 January 1947. Tan Cheng Lock was chairman of the *Tribune's* Board of Directors.

⁴⁷ A nicely-rounded 100 Malay Associations were purported to have attended the inauguration (*Sunday Tribune*, 23 February 1947). The inspiration provided by the Indonesian nationalist movement is evident in the name of the organization itself. Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (literally: Nucleus of the People's Energy) was patterned along the lines of the union of political parties formed by Sukarno in 1943 which was also called PUTERA.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Stern, 'Post-war Politics of Malaya, 1945-50,' M.A. thesis, Berkeley, 1951; and a letter from Gerald de Cruz to the editor, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 1 No. 1.

ized....' He argued that the latter, 'without any well-planned programme of action, are muddling through to defeat and disillusionment'.⁴⁹

By the end of March 1947, the PMCJA-PUTERA managed to act in concert in sending a joint letter to the Colonial Secretary outlining six principles upon which they were both agreed.⁵⁰ But in the second week of April, Tan Cheng Lock announced that the PMCJA (not the PMCJA-PUTERA) was considering sending a deputation to London to be headed by himself.⁵¹ In the same month, however, agreement was reached between the two political conglomerations on the formation of a committee to draw up an alternative set of constitutional proposals to that of the Working Committee. The first formal conference of delegates of PMCJA-PUTERA was held in July 1947 and in the following month, a second conference of delegates finally approved the 'People's Constitution'.⁵²

THE PERIOD OF PMCJA, PUTERA, ACCC COOPERATION:
AUGUST 1947-OCTOBER 1947

From mid-May to the end of July, PMCJA and PUTERA appeared to have toned down their public activities, with some of the leaders, including Tan Cheng Lock, apparently going into political hibernation.⁵³ There was a lull. The signal for the storm came with the British Government's announcement on 24 July 1947 that it had accepted the Revised Constitutional Proposals (which did not markedly differ from the Working Committee's recommendations).⁵⁴ Yet the storm clouds gathered slowly and the lightning and thunder came only in September and October.

⁴⁹ N.T.R. Singam, 'United People's Front a Vital Necessity' in *Sunday Tribune*, 16 March 1947.

⁵⁰ The PMCJA had by early January added three principles to its initial three, presumably in an attempt to woo the MNP. These were: that the Sultans be retained but as genuine constitutional monarchs subject to democratic Councils; that special measures be introduced into the Constitution for the advancement and uplift of the Malay people, and that matters pertaining to the religion and customs of the Malay people should be under the control of the Malay people. As late as June 1946, however, the PMCJA refused to accept the MNP stand that Malay be made the official language and that Malaya have a national flag incorporating the colours of Indonesia's flag. It is important to note also that the MCP wanted a Malayan Republic—with no Malay Rulers.

⁵¹ *Malayan Daily News*, 12 April 1947.

⁵² It is to be noted that the People's Constitution was printed only in November 1947, over two months later.

⁵³ Soh Eng Lin, 'Tan Cheng Lock' in *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (March 1960), p. 45.

⁵⁴ Great Britain, *Federation of Malaya: Summary of Revised Constitutional Proposals*, Cmd. 7171 (London, 1947).

The Chinese Chambers of Commerce had long been critical of the Federation proposals but they had refused to collaborate with the PMCJA, to agree to its six points or to join in the boycott of the Consultative Committee. British rejection of their demands regarding citizenship, representation in the legislature and the inclusion of Singapore, however, pushed the Chinese right into the AMCJA-PUTERA camp and made possible a dramatic manifestation of opposition: the 'hartal', a total economic strike which had been effectively used in India.

As a political weapon in Malaya, it was first conducted in Malacca, and then in Ipoh and Taiping (in Perak). Heartened by these experiments in the flexing of Chinese economic muscles, the Chinese Chambers deliberated on the holding of a one-day Malaya-wide hartal. There were two major centres of Chinese right-wing power. John Eber held talks in Singapore with Lee Kong Chian, President of the ACCC, while Gerald de Cruz negotiated with Tan Cheng Lock and other Chinese leaders in Malacca. The Chambers, PUTERA and AMCJA never met conjointly and did not make a joint call for the hartal. They managed, however, to announce the political strike on the same day.

The hartal took place on 20 October 1947. AMCJA-PUTERA's own private (and preposterous) estimate was that it was '90 per cent. effective throughout Malaya', with total support from Chinese of all classes, and with 70 per cent. of Malays and 90 per cent. of Indians observing the hartal.⁵⁵ The *Malaya Tribune* reported the participation of 95 per cent. of Singapore's Asiatic population (including school-children) and estimated that 99 per cent. of Asian businesses (a ridiculous figure) in the Malayan Union supported the hartal.⁵⁶ The *Straits Times* was, however, accurate in stating that in Singapore, the 'organizers of the hartal certainly made a proper job of it'.⁵⁷

On the whole and in the context of non-Malay apathy, the hartal (termed a 'hurt-all' by its opponents) was a tremendous success in its execution. It was, however, a complete failure in its effect. It was intensely counter-productive for in demonstrating the vast economic power of the Chinese, it made the Malays and the British even more intransigent; and in making such a direct and ominous challenge to British power and authority, it made it practically impossible for the latter to back down and surrender without an unacceptable loss of prestige, authority and power.

⁵⁵ Minutes of the Third Delegates' Conference of the PUTERA and AMCJA held on 3rd November 1947. Available in Sophe, 'The Battle for the Federation of Malaya', *op. cit.*, p. 202.

⁵⁶ *Malaya Tribune*, 21 October 1947. It was a completely urban phenomenon and was completely unobserved in Perlis, Kelantan, and Trengganu.

⁵⁷ Editorial, *Straits Times*, 21 October 1947.

THE PERIOD OF 'DIGGING-IN' AND COLLAPSE: NOVEMBER 1947 – FEBRUARY 1948

The October hartal marked the high tide of short-lived Chinese Chambers, PUTERA, AMCJA cooperation. Even at its height, however, there had been a struggle for leadership, the AMCJA-PUTERA Constitutional Campaign Sub-Committee deciding on 29 September to 'use every means to take the leadership of the hartal'.⁵⁸ The 'purely negative' basis of the Chambers' action it held in contempt. The Chambers on their part had found several aspects of the People's Constitution repugnant and had refused to make it the basis of its stand. After the hartal, other differences between the right and the left, especially over the introduction of income tax, arose, and the AMCJA-PUTERA-ACCC front broke.

The AMCJA-PUTERA did not try to cement their relationship with the Chinese right, but concentrated instead on mobilizing support on the basis of the People's Constitution, on internal reorganization, and on filling its empty coffers. They began to 'dig-in' for a long struggle against British rule in general. A News and Information Bureau on Malaya was set up in London. The AMCJA and PUTERA noted that one weakness had come to light in the execution of the hartal: weak guidance from the centre. They decided to formalize the PUTERA-AMCJA Conference of Delegates, and the Joint Working Committee, and to set up an executive five-man Board of Secretaries. They went through the motions of organizing a second hartal; but by the end of 1947, it was becoming all too clear that further struggle against the Federation proposals was futile.⁵⁹ To all intents and purposes AMCJA-PUTERA's serious campaign against the Federation proposals was over.

The opposition of the Chinese right too finally collapsed. The ACCC wrote to the Colonial Secretary in late October 1947 appealing for the panacea, a Royal Commission. Creech-Jones, now Colonial Secretary, took over a month to reply. When he finally did so he outrightly rejected the idea. At its AGM on 18 January 1948, the ACCC agreed on a boycott of the Federation and Singapore Legislative Councils. Tan's suggestion of a second hartal for 1 February, the date set for the inauguration of the Federation of Malaya, was however, overwhelmingly rejected.⁶⁰ In fact, even before the meeting, a breach in the Chinese right had been made. On 10 January 1948, after reaching 'an understanding' with the Governor of Singapore, the President of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce

⁵⁸ *Minutes of the Third Delegates' Conference, op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Stenson, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

⁶⁰ The principal reasons for this rejection were probably two-fold: the financial losses that would be incurred, and the fear of further inciting Sino-Malay bitterness and strife.

agreed to accept the seat offered to the Chamber in the island's legislature. The Federation Chambers followed suit on 3 February 1948.

FAILURE TO PREVENT FORMATION OF THE FEDERATION

The Federation of Malaya was formed in the place of the Malayan Union on 1 February 1948. In explaining this event, we can focus on the proponents of the Federation policy (particularly on the British), on their will, their power and the political environment in which they had to operate. We might thus argue that the Federation policy was successfully implemented because the British Government remained strongly committed to it up to the very end, because their political opponents were in no position to prevent its implementation and because the British did possess the instrumental capacity (which only they possessed) to actually establish a new, effective and working governmental order.

On the other hand, and more interestingly, one may look at the opponents of the Federation policy and examine their failure to frustrate its implementation. The opponents of the Federation policy did not try to prevent the actual formation of the Federation of Malaya as a working government order by seriously attempting to deprive the British of their capacity to establish an effective machinery of central government, or by making it inoperable.⁶¹ Had they tried, they would in all likelihood have failed.⁶² Their main effort was concentrated on making the British abandon the Federation policy. The failure of the PMCJA (later AMCJA), PUTERA and the Chinese Chambers of Commerce to cause a second British *volte face* in effect sealed the fate of the Malayan Union and ensured the formation of the Federation of Malaya.

This crucial failure may to some extent be attributed to deficiencies in commitment to engineering policy change on the part of the main opponents of the Federation policy and proposals. Their campaign against the Federation proposals was mounted not at the most opportune moment, in the early stages when the chances of policy change were greatest, but when British commitment had to a large extent rigidified. When they eventually got off the mark, the opponents of the Federation scheme lacked that sustained single-mindedness of purpose that UMNO and the

⁶¹ The AMCJA did call on its supporters not to accept appointments to government legislative and advisory bodies (*Straits Times*, 20 January 1948). In fact, of course, none of the leaders closely associated with it were nominated to such bodies. Tan Cheng Lock, who had spent over two decades in the Straits Settlements legislature, was passed over. His son, Tan Siew Sin, was, however, nominated and did accept a seat on the Federation of Malaya Legislative Council.

⁶² It is very important to note that as opposed to 15,215 Malays, there were only 1,024 Chinese (and 2,418 Indians) in 'public administration and defence' out of a Malayan Union total of 20,983 in December 1947. Federation of Malaya, *Annual Report, 1949* (Kuala Lumpur, 1950), p. 8.

Malays had shown in 1946. To the MDU, the MNP, the MCP and their leftist comrades, the campaign against the Federation proposals as a whole was part and parcel of their struggle for power and public support and against British rule; and it is doubtful if agitation against the constitutional proposals was ever given a higher priority than these other ends for any length of time. The Chinese Chambers, of course, seriously agitated against the Anglo-Malay proposals only after July 1947 and for only a few months thereafter.

It is probable that a more important factor than any inadequacy in commitment or effort in explaining the failure of the opponents of the Federation policy to cause its abandonment by the British lay in their insufficient resources and assets. The PMCJA-PUTERA lacked leaders who were highly regarded by the British. Tan Cheng Lock was the only man among them for whom the British had any respect. His stock with the British authorities slumped drastically, however, when it became evident that he was consorting and collaborating with 'the Communists'.

Probably a more important factor was the lack of sufficiently skilful leadership. The result was a series of important tactical errors.⁶³ Thus, it was only in August 1947 that AMCJA and PUTERA were able to put forward counter-proposals which had any claim to being constructive. Prior to that, their campaign was almost entirely negative. PMCJA's uncompromising demands that the British completely abandon all previous agreements with the Sultans and UMNO and negotiate only with the Council were grossly unreasonable and unrealistic and doomed to rejection from the start. Unlike the leaders of UMNO, the PMCJA-PUTERA leadership never really tried to convey the impression that they were reasonable men with whom the British could bargain and negotiate.

Another major mistake from the point of view of causing policy change (though not necessarily from the viewpoint of whipping up anti-British feelings), was the way in which the PMCJA-PUTERA approached the British. The Malays of 1946 had declared their loyalty to Britain and demanded the abandonment of the Union policy. The PMCJA-PUTERA, on the other hand, declared their determined opposition to British government and authority and then demanded British surrender. Thus, whereas the criticisms of the Malays came to be viewed as the dissatisfactions of a disgruntled friend who needed to be persuaded and in the end appeased, opposition to the Federation policy was regarded as a challenge and an assault from an enemy; it evoked a strongly defensive and counter-offensive reaction from the British.

Again, the hartal was wrongly timed. It came far too late in the day for the British to abandon their policy. And the fact that it was held for

⁶³ It should be noted that several mistakes (from the viewpoint of engineering policy change) were the result as much of the confusion of priorities and deficiencies in commitment as of the lack of leadership skill.

one day and one day only succeeded in demonstrating the ominous nature of Chinese economic power and the importance of securing a Malay base of power – without providing any real incentive for the British to seriously consider policy abandonment.

Probably as important as any other leadership weakness, however, was the evident lack of cohesion between the non-Malay left headed by the PMCJA, the Malay left under the leadership of the MNP, and the Chinese right under the Chinese Chambers of Commerce. Their apparent incapacity to form a stable coalition which could present a united front and pull together markedly lessened the force of their arguments and the seriousness of their opposition in British eyes.⁶⁴

A significant part of the strength of the opposition to the Malayan Union had lain not only in its solidarity and cohesion but also in the fact that it possessed an active propaganda wing in London which could keep the Union issue alive in Britain and which could directly influence British public opinion and the British Government. The eventual setting up of a News and Information Bureau in London suggests AMCJA-PUTERA recognition of this fact and of its handicap in this respect. Its establishment in early November 1947 was, however, far too belated.⁶⁵ Whitehall for the most part had to depend for its information on official reports from

⁶⁴ The causes of this inability to cooperate and act in concert on a continuous basis are not hard to find. They disagreed over such important matters as leadership, their platform, the correct response to the Federation scheme, the objectives of opposition and over a host of other issues which had nothing to do with the constitutional proposals. Thus, the MIC nearly withdrew from the PMCJA when John Thivy, its President was not selected as its Chairman (Letter from John Eber to Tan Cheng Lock dated 23 December 1946, Tan Cheng Lock Papers). The MNP's disappointment at not securing the post for one of its leaders was probably one of the main reasons it decided not to be a member of PMCJA. Like PUTERA, the Chinese Chambers were loath to accept the leadership of the leftist PMCJA, and *vice versa*. PUTERA's demand that Malay be the official language of Malaya, that 'Melayu' be the title of any Malayan nationality and that the National flag incorporate the Indonesian red and white colours, the PMCJA found unacceptable until mid-1947. The incorporation of these principles in the 'People's Constitution' in August 1947 precluded Chinese Chambers support of AMCJA-PUTERA's comprehensive counter-proposals. Nor was the MCP happy. In 1948, it stated with retrospective regret that 'we gave our support to the People's Constitution though its basic contents were wrong' (*The MCP Review*, June 1948, No. 3, edited by Wu Tiang Wang for the Singapore City Committee of the MCP, p. 7). It is important to note also that whereas the aim of the Chinese Chambers in their agitation was to secure better terms on citizenship and Chinese representation in the Federal legislature and to a lesser extent, the merger of the Malayan Union and Singapore, the PMCJA-PUTERA rejected the Federation proposals *in toto*. Because of this important difference, the Chambers believed that they could not go along with PMCJA-PUTERA's boycott of the Consultative Committee. The vast gap between the capitalist Chambers and the socialist PMCJA-PUTERA ensured that they would violently disagree over issues such as the introduction of income tax and the minimum wage.

⁶⁵ *Sunday Tribune*, 9 November 1947.

British officials on the spot who were determined to frustrate the Malayan left and to push the Federation proposals through.⁶⁶

All these factors notwithstanding, probably the most important deficiency on the part of the opponents lay in the fact that unlike their 1946 counterpart, the 1947 opponents of British policy could offer nothing of great value in return for a British *volte face*. Abandoning the Malayan Union in mid-1946 had been made a valuable line of action to the British because Malay opposition was such that their leaders could credibly promise Malay co-operation and support in return for policy abandonment and very credibly threaten unremitting opposition and non-cooperation if Britain did not back down. The opponents of the Federation policy were precluded from such effective value manipulation, and making another *volte face* worthwhile to the British because they had not been able to sufficiently mobilize opposition to the Federation scheme. In view of the intensity of British commitment to the Federation policy and their power, this failure made the establishment of the Federation of Malaya more or less certain. This failure to mobilize great mass opposition is significant enough to require greater elaboration at this point.

It has been wrongly argued that 'the Federation has been even more bitterly opposed by the Chinese population than was the Malayan Union by the Malays'.⁶⁷ The AMCJA's claim that it represented 400,000 agitated members and PUTERA's assertion that it had a membership of 150,000 are not credible and give a grossly distorted picture of the strength of the

⁶⁶The House of Commons was informed of the hartal on 19 November 1947, one month after it was held. In answer to a question, Creech-Jones stated that he was informed that many of the Chinese who took part were ignorant of the issues involved. The Malays in general took no part, he continued, and although the hartal was widely observed by the Chinese, there was little evidence of widespread enthusiasm. (*Straits Times*, 21 November 1947). He was not challenged.

⁶⁷Stern, *op. cit.*, p. ii. The foreign researcher who has to depend on available printed primary materials is very apt to gain an impression similar to Stern's for several reasons. First, he is likely to rely heavily on newspapers. Newspapers, of course, invariably give much more space to urban as opposed to rural affairs. Whereas opposition to the Union was not only urban but also rural, opposition to the Federation was predominantly urban. Second, he almost invariably relies more on English newspapers than those in the other languages e.g. Malay. Third, the opponents of the Federation were extremely adept at utilizing the only mass media existing at the time. Fourth, they had control over some of these newspapers. The *Malaya Tribune*, for example, gave the impression that practically the whole country was united in opposition — not surprisingly when it is realized that Tan Cheng Lock was a dominating figure on its Board of Directors. Fifth, the opposition relied very heavily upon pamphlets, press releases and statements with the result that such literature existed in significant amounts. Finally, the researcher's subjective assessment may be influenced by the sheer quantity and 'weight' of articulations against the Federation scheme, which clearly exceeded those against the Union. This was to a large extent simply because the period of opposition was three times as long in the case of the Federation as it was in the case of the Malayan Union.

opposition to the Federation scheme.⁶⁸ The opponents of the Federation proposals were far from being as numerous, as widespread, as persistent or as intensely aroused as the Malay opponents to the Malayan Union. The utter failure of the PMCJA, PUTERA, and the Chinese Chambers to exceed the Malay mobilization of support for the Federation plan (for only that would have resulted in a serious reappraisal of British policy) was the sum result of three realities: the inherent difficulty of the task, inadequate commitment on the part of the mobilisers, and their lack of several important assets and resources.

The task of mobilizing the Chinese masses (which was primarily undertaken by the AMCJA) was exceedingly difficult because inherently the community as a whole was pre-disposed against political involvement and activity. The traumatic experience of the Japanese occupation had strongly reinforced their long-existing belief that political activity and public life were not only unprofitable but also dangerous.⁶⁹ A second factor which made the task of mobilizing Chinese opposition difficult was the fact that like almost everyone else in Malaya, they were weary of turmoil and uncertainty. Many Chinese realized also that it was in their interests to see that political stability and calm returned to Malaya; political turmoil was simply bad for business. Third, severe dislocation caused by the War and the atrocious conditions existing in Malaya,⁷⁰ created a near obsession with the problems of securing their livelihood and rebuilding a decent life, a preoccupation which left little time or energy for anything else. Further, it should not be forgotten that a great many non-Malays regarded China or India as their home, not Malaya. Thus what happened in their temporary home was not regarded as being that important. The prospect of a new China in the east and of a new India in the west, of course strengthened these attitudes and orientations. Many non-Malays felt also that since Malaya was 'the land of the Malays' it was only proper that the Malays should decide the country's Constitution.

⁶⁸ These figures were consistently quoted. See, for example, AMCJA-PUTERA's *The People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya*.

⁶⁹ Political activity and public life during the occupation either meant becoming a tool of the Japanese or becoming their enemies. Both could result in loss of life and limb. The sight of a severed head on a street corner was an extremely convincing argument against becoming their foes. Collaboration too had its great risks. According to communist sources, by the end of the War, 2,542 'traitors' had been executed by the MPAJA. In contrast, the guerillas only inflicted a few hundred casualties on the Japanese. G. Hanrahan, *The Communist Struggle in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya Press, 1971), p. 84.

⁷⁰ The Government estimated that the general average of food prices for March 1946 was 5.25 times that of 1939 (*Straits Times*, 26 April 1946). The cost of living in 1948 was 3.17 times that in 1939 (Federation of Malaya, *Annual Report, 1948*, Kuala Lumpur, 1949, p. 17).

The top leaders of the PMCJA-PUTERA lacked not only linguistic skills but also stature and prestige amongst those whose support they had to gain. Chauvinistic Chinese regarded Tan Cheng Lock as a deculturalized *baba*;⁷⁴ the leftist working masses knew that he was an arch capitalist; and many among the Chinese who were sympathetic to Britain (eg. the Straits Chinese) and many associated with the Chinese Chambers looked askance at his flirting with the communists for what were regarded as ulterior motives. Eber and de Cruz were both new faces—and Eurasians to boot. As for the leaders of the MNP, they were generally regarded by the conservative Malay (i.e. the very vast majority of Malays) as traitors to their race, as men who were in league with 'aliens' and the communists. The not quite fair opinion of one Malay that they were 'quacks and charlatans' with 'the ability to ring bells by the road sides, to sell medicines, the craftiness of a broker and the ability to write petitions' was not merely the view of one Malay.⁷⁵ The Malay *rakyat* respected their traditional leaders, not these socialist militants.

The lack of leadership cohesion which affected their capacity to influence British policy also affected the opponents' capacity to mobilize mass opposition. Probably a more important factor, however, was their deficiency in political skill and knowledge and the tactical mistakes they made. First, the top leaders of the PMCJA-PUTERA and especially of the Council were averse to pandering to and exploiting racialism. They tried to mount a multi-racial campaign.⁷⁶ In 1947, there were a great many nationalists—Malay, Chinese, and Indian. *Malayan* nationalists were, however, conspicuous by their relative absence. The progressive forces within PMCJA-PUTERA tried to grow a rubber tree in a swamp. From the beginning, the conglomeration attempted to represent all races. From the beginning they obtained abysmal Malay support; and in the attempt to gain more Malay adherents, the non-Malay left surrendered to many MNP and PUTERA demands some of which were more extremist than UMNO's.

⁷⁴ A *baba* (or Straits Chinese or King's Chinese) was an assimilated Chinese whose ancestors had come to Malaya generations before, who had adopted many Malay customs and elements of Malay culture and who had abandoned much of Chinese culture.

⁷⁵ *Malay Mail*, 3 January 1947.

⁷⁶ The PMCJA had at the outset adopted the position that it represented all the Asiatic peoples of Malaya. In its attempt to win not only Chinese, Indian, and Eurasian adherents but also Malay sympathizers, it could not afford to play only to the non-Malay gallery. Second there was probably the belief especially among the top leadership of the Council that communal politics was not proper and legitimate and that political progress in Malaya required politics based upon class, not upon race. It is also possible, at the beginning at least, that the top leaders of the PMCJA believed that multi-racialism was a workable approach capable of bringing the desired results.

They compromised. Whereas by domination one side may be totally satiated and the other totally aggrieved, compromise may leave both sides unhappy. This was what happened. From the viewpoint of greatest mobilization, the non-Malay left should perhaps have realized that they could not have gained Malay support and outplayed UMNO in a game in which the Organization was supremely skilled and well positioned, concentrating instead on non-Malay opposition. From the angle of getting a United Malaya, the non-Malay left might have been better advised to participate in the Consultative Committee's deliberations—backing its demands with a mass movement. The leadership of the PMCJA erred also in pitching their campaign on the abstract levels of ideology and principle. Tan Cheng Lock was in the clouds with oratorical masterpieces which did not forcefully convince the man in the street that the Federation proposals would deprive him of anything which he particularly valued. The Joint Council of Action tended to be too often merely a Joint Council of Oratory.

Probably as important as any other inadequacies in resources and assets, however, was the shortage of finance. PMCJA-PUTERA was simply a poor organization made up of generally poor organizations.⁷⁷ The alliance had never been even moderately centralized. Yet in April 1948, it was argued that the old structure had been 'based on a high degree of centralization... which proved impractical because it demanded a greater amount of funds than could be obtained'.⁷⁸ At AMCJA-PUTERA's third delegates' conference in November 1947, the meeting had been informed of the 'urgent need of money' and of 'the great difficulties the PUTERA-AMCJA had been undergoing because their cash box was empty....'⁷⁹ To strengthen its financial resources, a 'Fighting Fund' was started. The total amount actually collected by the end of April 1948 added up to a paltry 1,234 dollars and seventy cents. In stark contrast, UMNO, with no major cam-

⁷⁷ In early March 1947, a supporter of the PMCJA-PUTERA noted that the problems of insufficient funds and thus, inadequate full-time workers, was the combination's 'greatest drawback' (N.T.R. Ratnam, 'Why I Advocate a United People's Front' in *Sunday Tribune*, 23 March 1947). The PMFTU was the most financially sound; so it acted as the treasurer of the PMCJA. Its ability to finance opposition was curtailed by the fact that it had to subsidize the MCP. The disappearance of Lai Teck, the MCP's Secretary, in late 1947 with most of the Party's funds, tremendously increased the burden on PMFTU's finances (Hanrahan, *op. cit.*, p. 106).

⁷⁸ Minutes of the Annual Conference of PUTERA-AMCJA, 24-25 April 1948.

⁷⁹ To fill this empty cash box, the MNP guaranteed a monthly payment of merely \$50, the Peasants Union of \$10, AWAS of \$10, the MDU of \$100, the MIC \$50, the MPAJA of \$50, the MNDYL of \$30, the PMFTU (which claimed a membership of 300,000) of \$30, the Women's Federation of \$10; these pledges were capped by the promise of the princely sum of \$50 from the extremely wealthy Tan Cheng Lock! This made a not too grand total of \$390 per month (minutes of Third Delegates Conference of the PUTERA and AMCJA held on 3 November 1947).

paign to mount, collected 27,433 dollars in 1947 in subscriptions alone.

We have argued that the crucial failure of the main opponents of the Federation policy to cause its abandonment was to a large extent due to their deficiencies in commitment and in the resources and assets that they were able to bring to bear on the task or to manipulate. Because their chances of success depended so much on their capacity to mobilize mass opposition and thus effectively value-manipulate, we have also analyzed some of the major causes of their failure in mobilization. The opponents failed to cause the abandonment of British commitment not only because they were insufficiently committed to engineering British compliance and because they lacked sufficient resources and assets. The very important fact and probably the most important reason was that the inherent task of causing policy change on the part of the British was an extremely difficult one.

The task was of Herculean proportions largely because the British determination to stand firm had become strongly anchored by the end of 1946: first, because of their aversion to going back to square one in the constitutional game. In 1946, the Malay opponents had committed the error of demanding a *carte blanche*. In 1947, AMCJA-PUTERA made the same mistake by putting forward a dogmatic demand for total and outright rejection of *all* the agreements already reached between the British and the Malays after six months of protracted and meticulous negotiation. The British did not want to have to start all over again.

Second, by the end of 1947, when serious opposition first arose, the British had probably come to believe that the Federation policy was irreversible. The number of promises and solemn undertakings made to the Malays had been so many and so substantial that breaking them would have resulted in the loss of respect for and trust in Gent and MacDonald personally; it would have forfeited the Sultans', UMNO's and the Malays' support for, faith in and loyalty to the British Government. Paradoxically, the stronger the agitation against the Federation proposals, the greater appeared to be the importance of keeping the support of the Malays.

Third, the desire not to appear weak, which had affected the initial British intransigence on the Malayan Union, had increased in motivational strength by 1947. Having backed down on the Union scheme, it was that much more difficult to back down yet once again. Another change of mind would have had disastrous consequences on the image of the British in Malaya. Another policy reversal would not only seriously damage British prestige but also threaten her position in Malaya. It would have been an admission of the inability to rule. It would also have strengthened the forces of the left at a time when the British were determined to weaken and frustrate the 'communist troublemakers' by making sure that they gained no spectacular victories and by implementing the Federation proposals. They had challenged British authority and were demanding immediate independence; they were thus regarded as enemies to be subdued.

Further, they had angered and frustrated the British authorities in Malaya. Through their continued activity and 'trouble-making,' the communists and their fellow travellers had made more difficult the already difficult task of governing the country and of economic reconstruction.⁸⁰ As for Gent and MacDonald, they had a personal stake in the success of the Federation scheme. It was their baby. Gent could not afford to begin his career as a Governor by twice rejecting his own proposals. MacDonald too would have been severely discredited if he were to again recommend a *volte face*. These predispositions made the idea of policy change repugnant. British perceptions of the extent and nature of opposition to the Federation scheme and of the failure of their opponents to mobilize really serious opposition made a change in policy appear unnecessary.

In view of all these factors and the inherent difficulty of the task of affecting British compliance, the opponents of the Federation policy were to a large extent doomed to failure from the start. Their failure to cause policy abandonment decided the outcome of the conflict over the Federation scheme. The Federation of Malaya displaced the Malayan Union on 1 February 1948.

⁸⁰ In the period April 1946 to March 1947, for example, 1,173,000 man-days were lost through strikes in Singapore, and 713,000 in the Malayan Union (Stenson, *op. cit.*, p. 198).

IV

THE SUCCESSFUL MAINTENANCE OF THE FEDERATION OF MALAYA

The Federation of Malaya formed on 1 February 1948 may be considered a major achievement in state-building in the Third World. It was the successful territorial formula which allowed for British decolonization in 1957. And despite the great stresses and strains which afflicted it virtually from the very beginning, the Federation was able to survive intact until 1963 when it became the dominant part of a larger political entity (Malaysia). Attempts were made in those fifteen years to alter it fundamentally – by changing its membership – through the addition of a new member, Singapore, and through the subtraction of three states, Penang, Johore and Kelantan. The question of Singapore-Federation merger will be dealt with in the next chapter. Here we shall examine, in some detail:

- (i) the first Penang secession movement of 1948 to 1949;
 - (ii) the second Penang secession movement of 1953 to 1957;
 - (iii) the Johore secession movement of 1955 to 1956; and
 - (iv) the less serious Kelantan secession movement of 1955-6;
- and the successful maintenance of the Federation of Malaya in spite of these movements.¹

THE FIRST PENANG SECESSION MOVEMENT: 1948-9

THE SECESSIONIST POLICY

An important challenge to the territorial integrity of the Federation of Malaya was posed within eleven months of its inauguration. That threat arose as a result of the adoption of a policy by dissatisfied elements in Penang to detach the Settlement from the Federation. At a public meeting held in Penang on 23 December 1948, it was resolved 'that the Settlement of Penang do adopt all constitutional means for obtaining the secession of the Settlement of Penang from the Federation of Malaya and [that] the reversion to the Straits Settlements would be to the best interests of Penang and Province Wellesley'.² By that time, the Penang Chamber of Commerce, the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the Settlement of Penang Association, the Penang Indian Chamber of Commerce, the Penang Clerical

¹ Some sense of balance may be lost in the process of dealing with these movements in detail. To counter this let it be stated at the outset that while they are interesting and not without significance, none of the movements gravely threatened the existence of the Federation.

² Petition to the Right Honourable Arthur Creech-Jones, dated 12 October 1949, p. 1.

and Administrative Staff Union, the Penang Eurasian Association, the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA) Penang and Singapore, and the major Penang daily, the *Straits Echo*, had committed themselves to the secessionist policy.

The Penang secession movement of 1948-9 was not a sudden bolt out of the blue. Its roots may be traced to the period even before the Federation of Malaya was formed and to the dissatisfactions revolving around the dismantling of the Straits Settlements, Penang's inclusion in the Malayan Union, her projected inclusion in the Federation, and other issues which were seen to be related to them.

Dissatisfaction with the Situation, 1946-8

The secessionists can be broadly divided into two major groups: merchants and the Straits-born (the vast majority of whom were Straits Chinese).³ In the two-year period leading up to the establishment of the Federation of Malaya, many Straits-born among them had feared that Penang's inclusion in a system dominated by Malay States would entail the loss of their legal status as British subjects. The Federation scheme did specifically provide for their dual citizenship; but it did not succeed completely in allaying their anxieties on this score.⁴ Many also believed that Penang's inclusion and their automatic receipt of Malayan citizenship would reduce their British identity and 'Britishness'. They wanted to be British and nothing more. Heah Joo Seang, a former president of the Penang Straits Chinese British Association wrote: 'I really cannot understand the desirability of donning the mantle of Malayan citizenship *unless I am forced to*.' He pressed the point home: '*It is below my dignity to do so.*'⁵

³The Straits Chinese were a particular social, cultural and political group on the periphery of Chinese society. Many were able to trace their family residence in Malaya back many generations and were angered at being confused with other Chinese, at being referred to as 'Chinamen', often being contemptuous and sometimes fearful of them. Most regarded Malaya as their home, and the most Malayanized of them spoke 'Baba Malay', and preferred Malay to Chinese food. Economically, they tended to be either in commerce, the professions, or in the civil service for which they were specially suited because of their English education. Politically, they owed no loyalty to China and looked to Britain for their ideals. They were British subjects, a nationality gained through birth in the Straits Settlements. For more on the Straits Chinese, see Png Poh Seng 'The Straits Chinese in Singapore: A Case of Local Identity and Socio-Cultural Accommodation' in *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. X No. 1, pp. 115-41.

⁴This was not unrelated to their apprehensions regarding the upsurge of Malay power in the Malayan Union. The Malays had, of course, been able to cause a change in Britain's Malayan Union citizenship proposals. And in 1945-8, the MNP and important sections of UMNO openly challenged the whole idea of dual citizenship. The argument was that what the Malays could do once they could do again.

⁵Heah Joo Seang, 'Federal Misgivings of the Straits-born' in *Straits Times*, 26 February 1948. (Italics mine.)

Further, the dismantling of the Straits Settlements (where the Straits-born, particularly, the Straits Chinese, formed a substantial segment of the population and where they had played a most prominent part in government), and Penang's inclusion in a Malayan state (in which they would be reduced to a small minority and where they could not hope for a major political-governmental role), had quite naturally caused a great deal of Straits-born and Straits Chinese dissatisfaction. The Straits Chinese in particular felt aggrieved too that the British had never bothered to consult them about either the Union or the Federation scheme. The Straits Chinese it was argued, had been 'ignominiously treated and... have been relegated to the background and forgotten'.⁶ They yearned for a return to the pre-war days in the Straits Settlements when they were socially pre-eminent and when their views were given much weight.

As for the merchants, they had been unhappy about the post-war economic partitioning of the old Straits Settlements and had felt frustrated by the trade regulations and restrictions imposed by Kuala Lumpur.⁷ Probably a greater cause of merchant dissatisfaction, however, concerned the loss of Penang's free-port status, a status which she had been conferred in 1827. Penang traders were particularly indignant at having to pay export duties on copra, coconut oil and palm oil. What riled them also was the fact that their rival, Singapore, was truly a free port (where such duties were not levied) and the feeling that they were being discriminated against in favour of Singapore's merchants. Thus Singapore was allowed to re-export textiles; Penang was not. Singapore was also allowed to export certain quantities of coconut-oil to the Netherlands East Indies; Penang was not.⁸ Not unnaturally this state of affairs was often attributed to the trade-conscious dynamism of the Singapore government and the weakness and disinterestedness of the Malayan Union government.

The Penang merchants and Straits-born who were to clamour for secession were not only traders who felt the pinch of commercial discrimination and a community which had previously enjoyed substantial British patronage and a special position; all of them were also Penang patriots and non-Malays. As patriots of the Settlement, they believed that 'the needs and claims of Penang are likely to be drowned in the clamour of the ten other

⁶ *Straits Times*, 26 February 1948.

⁷ By the Prohibition of Export Orders, 1946, for example, Penang merchants were prevented from exporting to lucrative markets in Sumatra and Siam (*Annual Report of the Malayan Union, 1947*, Kuala Lumpur, 1948, p. 27). Penang traders also criticized the system whereby duty on goods was paid on the price which the mainland customer paid and not on the Penang-landed price. This meant that it sometimes was cheaper for the mainland wholesaler to import through Port Swettenham.

⁸ *Malaya Tribune* (Penang), 20 June 1947.

members of the Federation for their own particular needs and claims....⁹ They also disliked 'excessive' control from Kuala Lumpur and wanted greater decentralization and autonomy.

As non-Malays, they were dissatisfied with the prospect of becoming part of a Malay Malaya. This prospect appeared more ominous because of several 'extremist' demands the Malays, especially the Penang Malays, were making, and because of Malay political power. Backed by many of their brethren on the mainland, the island's UMNO leaders were demanding the extension of Malay privileges to Penang and a greater Malay share of the commercial sector.

Resignation to the Inclusion of Penang in the Federation of Malaya

Some of these dissatisfactions had led before 1948 to the demand that Penang stay out of a Malayan governmental system. But these demands were never seriously put forward; and they were never taken very seriously by the builders of the Federation. By January 1948, when the Federation's formation appeared a *fait accompli* and in the few months after its establishment, when the unified system was increasingly regarded as a permanent reality to be lived with and made the best of, Penang's dissatisfaction largely ceased to be articulated publicly. They became dormant in the spirit of compromise which preceded 1 February and in the 'let's give the Federation a fair trial' attitude which pervaded the four or so months after the federation's establishment.¹⁰

Catalytic Events which Led to Active Consideration of the Secession Question

Between June and November 1948, however, several events occurred to fan the embers of dormant dissatisfaction. In early June, the communist rebellion began. In the lawlessness and inter-racial animosity which followed, the strong yearning for Penang's pre-war tranquility came to the surface. One dramatic event had tremendous impact: the assassination of Dr. Ong Chong Keng in September 1948, a leading public figure in Penang and a personal friend of many of the future secessionist leaders.

The Emergency also brought, in its wake, expectations of an economic slump for the Penang merchants.¹¹ The restrictions on trade that Penang suffered could be tolerated in 1946, 1947 and early 1948 because of a

⁹ *Straits Echo*, 30 December 1946. At the root of much of the demands for greater attention was Penang's view of her own importance. She took pride in her motto: 'Penang leads.'

¹⁰ Concern over free-port status was mitigated to some extent by the appointment of Professor F. Benham (Economic Adviser to the Governor-General) in December 1947 to report on the matter.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29 November 1948.

boom in trade.¹² But at a time of trade pessimism they appeared onerous. Pessimism about trade prospects made the issue of free-port status an even more urgent matter. Kuala Lumpur's continued inaction on the matter became exasperating.

The guerilla insurrection, seen by the Malays and the British as a Chinese movement, also generated Malay extremism; more worrying to the future secessionists was what appeared to be the increasing receptiveness of the British to Malay demands. The dramatic visit of Dato Onn to London at the end of October 1948, where he argued for Malay interests exclusively to an apparently sympathetic British audience, had a great impact in Penang.

At a time of growing disenchantment with Penang's membership of the Federation of Malaya, things were happening in Singapore which enhanced the attractiveness of a breakaway. There, the Straits-born were seen to be making much progress in the civil service, and equally important, in politics. In the Singapore Legislative Council elections of 20 March 1948, the Progressive Party won three of the six elective seats. This was viewed as a great political victory for the Straits-born of Singapore signifying their return to their pre-1942 political eminence. Throughout, the traders and Straits-born were to take Singapore as their reference point.

All these factors served to awaken Penang's dormant sense of dissatisfaction. Two events gave direction to it and led to active consideration of secession, and ultimately, to commitment to it. The more important was the election of D.A. MacKay (a committed believer in Penang's non-membership of the Federation) to the post of Chairman of the (European) Penang Chamber of Commerce.¹³ Of importance too, was the step taken by the then president of the Singapore SCBA, T.W. Ong, the most vociferous defender of Straits Chinese rights and privileges. While there is no evidence indicating collusion (and there probably was no collusion) two initiatives for secession came within three days of each other. In letters sent to the Presidents of the Penang SCBA (Lim Huck Aik) and the Malacca SCBA (Ee Yew Kim) dated 18 November 1948, Ong announced that he would propose the restoration of the Straits Settlements at the Singapore SCBA's impending annual general meeting.¹⁴ This initiative was confidential. So too was the feeler sent out by the Penang Chamber of Commerce. But unlike the former, it was leaked to the *Straits Echo*. The first mention of a move for secession went straight to the *Echo's* front page.¹⁵

¹² Editorial, *Straits Times*, 14 April 1948.

¹³ The Chamber had previously supported the Federation proposals in principle in its 1947 memorandum to the Consultative Committee (which had been set up to consult non-Malay views).

¹⁴ According to Ong, he was eventually dissuaded from this course of action by MacDonald (Interview with T.W. Ong).

¹⁵ *Straits Echo*, 22 November 1948.

Lim Huck Aik, N.T. Assomull (President of the Penang Indian Chamber of Commerce), and J.P. Souter (President of the Settlement of Penang Association) came out in immediate open support of secession.¹⁶ The *Straits Echo* wrote in favour of it a few days later. And on 4 December 1948, the Penang SCBA also formally decided on secession.

The Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce had been undecided at its meeting of 26 November.¹⁷ Exactly two weeks later, however, it unanimously agreed to back the movement.¹⁸ On the same day, the Penang Eurasian Association threw in its lot with the secessionists.

In the first week of December, an interim Secession Committee was formed (which included a number of Settlement and Federal Legislative Councillors), with MacKay as Chairman and Ponnudurai (President of the Penang Clerical and Administrative Union) as Secretary. It decided to call a public meeting for 12 December 1948. The issue made the front page of the *Straits Times* (on 7 December) for the first time. The secession movement had ceased to become a parochial issue and had become a national problem.

Motivations for the Secessionist Policy

The most important reason why the separatists adopted the secessionist policy (and rejected the alternative of improving their and Penang's position within the territorial framework of the Federation of Malaya) was the fact that they wanted to secure certain values which they thought could only or would more likely be secured by breaking away from the Federation and re-constituting the old Straits Settlements. The traders believed that only by re-establishing the Straits Settlements could Penang gain economic parity with Singapore, full free-port status, and freedom from the trade regulations, restrictions and encumbrances imposed by Kuala Lumpur. On these issues, the Federation government had been unresponsive. And the idea took firm root that unlike the trade-conscious government of a Straits Settlements, the government of the Federation of Malaya (ten of whose eleven members were primary producers) would always be neglectful of the special entrepot and trading interests of what was only a small part of its domain.

As for the Straits-born secessionists, they believed that their status as British nationals could only be guaranteed in a Straits Settlements in which they were numerically large and politically strong; in the Federation, they would always be at the mercy of Malay political power and 'extremism'. They feared also that if Penang remained in the Federation, there would be

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 November 1948.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 November 1948. It did not oppose secession but argued that it would be better to bring Singapore into the Federation than to take Penang out of it.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11 December 1948.

an erosion of their privileges and rights as British subjects. The Straits Chinese were particularly appalled by the Federal government's proposal to amend the Banishment Ordinance so as to extend the power of banishment to cover the Straits-born;¹⁹ they saw the Malay demands for the extension of Malay privileges to Penang as a grave threat to their right to equality, especially as regards the civil service and scholarships. They wanted this right to be as secure and unchallenged as it was in Singapore and they wanted elections similar to those already held there. Penang's membership in a system of politically 'backward' Malay States was seen to preclude any measure of democratization. This desire for the introduction of elections in Penang was not unrelated to the Straits-born's desire for greater political power. They realized that only in a Straits Settlements could they regain their past political pre-eminence. They felt that Penang's membership in the Federation would condemn them to eternal impotence. The Straits-born wanted also to have a state in which they could have a sense of belonging. They felt that they could not belong to a Malay Malaya and to 'a Malaya for the Malays'; and they felt that they were unaccepted as 'sons of the soil' in the Federation of Malaya.²⁰

As champions of Penang, the secessionists wanted a greater allocation of Federal revenue for the island. Possessed of an insufficient sense of social and political community with those in the Malay States, they resented the fact that the relatively wealthy Settlement was subsidizing and would always have to subsidize the poorer Malay States. By remaining within the Federation, it was also argued, the Settlement 'would be forced to bear ever increasing taxation'.²¹

To a large extent, increasing taxation had been necessary in view of the communist terrorism in the Federation of Malaya. Throughout the Emergency, Singapore (which was not part of the Federation) was free from the military turmoil of the mainland. This fact did not escape the secessionists. Whether because their desire for peace and tranquillity was so great or through some simplistic notion that Penang could somehow escape by severing the governmental bond between her and the mainland states, a surprising number amongst them appeared to have believed that they could run away from terrorism by simply leaving the Federation.

The separatists wanted to escape not only from the troublous times, but also from the meddling bureaucrats in the Federal capital. The demand for greater autonomy became a demand for secession because the Federal Government appeared completely unresponsive and was expected to remain

¹⁹ The idea of banishment to China was a revolting one to them.

²⁰ In reply to references to them as 'aliens', Koh Sin Hock of the Penang SCBA replied indignantly: 'I can claim to be more *anak Pulau Pinang* [a son of Penang] than 99 per cent. of the Malays living here today.' *Ibid.*, 14 December 1948.

²¹ *Malaya Tribune*, 7 December 1948.

so. It became a demand for secession also because the separatists believed that as merely one member out of eleven, Penang had not received and would never be able to receive the governmental attention it deserved.²² A great many parochialists believed also that Penang's voice and power would be much greater in a Straits Settlements of three units than in a Federation of nine Malay States and two Settlements.

These then were the main benefits which the separatists associated with the secessionist policy. They adopted the policy, however, not only because these benefits were of value to them but also because they were not outweighed by what were perceived as the costs. The secessionists were a little apprehensive of the possible economic repercussions if the Federation, deprived of its main port, decided to develop Port Swettenham. There was some fear also of Penang's isolation if the Straits Settlements could not be reconstituted.²³ By far the most important perceived potential cost of the secessionist policy, however, lay in its consequences for racial peace and harmony. By the end of 1948 race relations had so deteriorated that racial peace and harmony had become a scarce commodity treasured as much by those who supported secession as by those who opposed it. The fact that the secessionists feared the racial consequences of the secessionist policy is attested by the fact that they continuously stressed that the secession movement was not anti-Malay and that it was in no way racial. They were not unaware, however, that the Malays would consider it as clearly anti-Malay and certainly racial.²⁴

Despite apprehensions regarding racial peace and harmony and other possible costs, the value of the secessionist policy probably appeared great in November-December 1948 to most of the secessionists. Yet their commitment to the secessionist policy was only moderate.²⁵ This was probably due to the fact that from the very beginning, the probability of successfully seceding and re-constituting the Straits Settlements appeared uncertain to some, and bleak to most of the secessionists.²⁶ They knew, because they

²² Suggestions were made that Penang be made the capital of the Federation in order to ensure against neglect. It was, however, felt that the Malay States would never stand for it.

²³ To allay these fears, MacKay argued and some believed that Penang could stand on its own.

²⁴ The movement was unable throughout to attract even one Malay publicly to its cause.

²⁵ This is indicated by the fact that the secessionists rejected extra-constitutional means of policy advancement from the very beginning; their agitation was not sustained, and it plodded along in very low gear. And before its first birthday, the movement had largely petered out.

²⁶ The committed *Straits Echo* thought success 'doubtful'; and the not totally unsympathetic *Malaya Tribune* called the movement a 'pipe-dream' (Editorial, *Straits Echo*, 15 December 1948; Editorial, *Malaya Tribune*, 7 December 1948).

were informed, albeit obliquely, that to secede, a British Act of Parliament would be necessary, that Parliament would consider their proposals only if the Colonial Secretary put them forward, and that he would only act if requested to do so by the Penang Settlement Council and the Federal Legislative Council, and probably also by the Singapore Legislative Council.²⁷

THE OPPOSITION TO THE SECESSIONIST POLICY

The Penang secessionists had two crucial opponents: the British government of Malaya;²⁸ and UMNO and the Malays of the Settlement and the rest of the Federation.²⁹

The British initially regarded the secession movement as a nuisance. They did not want to be embroiled once again in constitutional issues – especially when their time and energy were better spent on ending the Emergency. Penang's secession would also necessitate the setting up of another complex machinery of government, with all its attendant administrative efficiency and expense drawbacks.

The secession movement soon came to be seen not only as an annoyance, however, but also as a very dangerous phenomenon. It was regarded as certain to sour inter-ethnic relations at a time when they were rapidly deteriorating. And it was certain to increase the difficulties of setting up an inter-community goodwill committee, a means of improving racial harmony which MacDonald had been pushing for some time.³⁰ The British had to oppose the secessionist movement also because Penang was not the only state which had grievances. The secession of Penang would provide a precedent for the dismantling of the Federation of Malaya. It was not only in Britain's interests to preserve the Federation, many of the top British officials were personally committed to its integrity as an end in itself. Malcolm MacDonald, one of its founders, for example, unabashedly pro-

²⁷ *Straits Times*, 8 December 1948.

²⁸ Whitehall kept a watching brief but it seemed to have left matters largely in the hands of Malcolm MacDonald (the Commissioner-General) and Henry Gurney (the High Commissioner).

²⁹ Other public opponents included Tan Cheng Lock of Malacca, many other non-Malay leaders in the Peninsula, the Regional Indian Congress of Penang and the mainland, the Muslim League of Malaya and the MNP.

³⁰ While the desire to improve race relations was in comparison a more forceful motivation for British opposition than it then was in the case of Malay opposition, this one consideration motivated all the opponents of the secession movement. In addition, the mainland non-Malay opponents (including Tan Cheng Lock) opposed the movement because it would 'shut the door' to Singapore's future entry. Tan was at that time attempting to inaugurate the MCA and probably believed that Chinese unity and power would be weakened by the secession of a unit in which the Chinese were so numerous and powerful. It would also substantially weaken the Straits Chinese component and leadership of a Federation Chinese political movement.

claimed that 'the creation of the Federation a year ago was a fine act of constructive leadership by all concerned'³¹ — including himself.

Probably the most important reason for determined British opposition, however, was their realization that anything less would lead to their loss of very substantial Malay support. The loss of power by the undermining or possibly the break-up of the Anglo-Malay political alliance which had been re-established after the Malayan Union episode — at a time when the Chinese were seen to be sitting on the fence in the battle against the Chinese terrorists — could not be contemplated.

As for the Malays, they wanted, first, to safeguard the security and interests of their Malay brethren in Penang who they believed would otherwise be submerged in a Chinese Straits Settlements. Second, the Federation was seen as a natural entity and they were angered at the attempt to 'vivisect' and partition it. Third, the foundation saga of the Federation which was based on perception of a heroic Malay struggle, had contributed to a commitment to the Federation political structure as an end in itself.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECESSION MOVEMENT

In order to succeed, the secessionists had to overcome British and Malay opposition, for the British were not prepared to go against Malay opinion. Because they had few lines of communication with UMNO and the Malays, but more so, because they believed that no headway could be made in that direction, the separatists concentrated their efforts on directly winning over only the British. Their tactics spread over three stages. They tried at first to persuade the British authorities in Kuala Lumpur. When this got nowhere — at least nowhere they wanted to go — the secessionists decided to force the British to agree to secession by introducing motions in the Penang Settlement Council and the Federal Legislative Council. When this too did not bear fruit, they decided to appeal straight to Whitehall.

The interim secession committee set up in the first week of December 1948 organized a public meeting on 13 December. At that public meeting, claimed to be the 'most momentous within living memory in Penang',³² only 216 people (of whom not one was a Malay) attended; the motion for secession was adopted by 204 votes to 12.³³ The mood of real public dissatisfaction in Penang had clearly not been exploited to the full; it was to

³¹ *Straits Echo*, 2 February 1949.

³² *Ibid.*, 14 December 1948.

³³ A fifteen-man Penang and Province Wellesley Secession Committee was set up. The members of the Committee included among others, D.A. MacKay (Chairman of the Penang Chamber of Commerce), N. Ponnudurai (President of the Penang Clerical and Administrative Staff Union), J.P. Souter, (President of the Settlement of Penang Association), Dr. Lee Tiang Keng (Federal Executive Councillor), Lim Khye Seng (lawyer and Federal Councillor), Mrs. B.H. Oon (Federal Councillor),

remain unexploited throughout. Not one mass rally was held to generate mass support. The middle-aged secessionist leaders knew only the type of elitist politics of pre-war days and were neither adept at nor interested in the more mass-based politics of post-war Malaya. T.W. Ong of the Singapore SCBA had called for a plebiscite as an opening gambit.³⁴ The Penang secessionists never took it up.³⁵ Instead, they held discussions with Gurney when he made his first official visit to Penang. They met MacDonald on 2 January 1949 and argued with him for two and a half hours in the intimacy of MacKay's parlour. MacDonald was unprepared to concede secession; he promised to remedy 'some' of Penang's grievances and he suggested another meeting.

On 21 January 1949, the Secession Committee turned down the offer of further discussions and unanimously decided to move a motion demanding the Settlement's secession, first in the Settlement Council (due to meet on 10 February) and then in the Federal Legislative Council. This development was regarded as a serious threat to the steps then being taken to improve communal harmony pursuant to the setting up of the Sino-Malay Goodwill Committee in Penang on 9 January 1949. In a last minute move, three members of the Goodwill Committee broke off from their meeting in Johore Bahru and made a dramatic flight to Penang, arriving on the evening of 9 February 1949. The Secession Committee immediately met, and fissures began to appear. At a second meeting held the next day, the Committee decided, no longer unanimously but by a majority, to continue with the motion. The secessionists then proceeded to the chamber of the Settlement Council where they were defeated by a vote of ten in favour and fifteen against. The Committee proclaimed it a 'moral victory,' and in a sense it was. The *Straits Times* reported that there was 'no doubt that had a free vote been allowed, the motion would have been carried by a convincing majority'.³⁶

While the 'moral victory' was a sop to their pride, the secessionists hungered for more substantial achievement. In the debate on the motion, the Resident Commissioner of Penang had publicly stated, in unequivocal terms and for the first time, the British position: secession, he said, was 'a proposition which the Federation Government cannot accept'.³⁷ There was no use, therefore, in moving a motion in the Federal Legislative Council.

³⁴ *Straits Times*, 11 December 1948.

³⁵ This was wise for the secessionists probably would have lost if a plebiscite had been held. The Malays were solidly opposed. The non-Malays were divided among themselves.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12 February 1949. Up to the very last moment, the secessionists unrealistically believed that the eleven officials might not be forced to toe government policy.

³⁷ *Straits Echo*, 11 February 1949.

The secessionists decided on 15 February 1949 to appeal, over the head of Kuala Lumpur, to the Colonial Secretary. It was a sign of declining fervour, however, that the petition took over five months to draft. On 22 July 1949, it was presented to the Resident Commissioner for transmission to Gurney. Gurney sent back the petition for re-drafting, with suggestions for clarification and better presentation. Nothing more was heard of it until mid-November 1949 when it was despatched to London. The patient was by then clearly dying. By the time the Colonial Office replied in September 1951, the movement was long dead.

THE FAILURE OF THE SECESSION MOVEMENT

The failure of the first Penang secession movement can be attributed first, to the fact that after merely a few months, the secessionists lost their enthusiasm and more or less gave up.

The defeat of the secessionist motion on 10 February 1949 was probably the turning point. The secessionists had refused to have further discussions with the British before it. On 15 February, however, they decided to accept the invitation for a second meeting with Gurney. There then began a steady defection from the movement. Those who remained became acquiescent or were only weakly committed to the secessionist policy. This transformation can be explained in terms of changed perceptions of the value of the policy and the probability of its successful implementation.

The grievances of the traders about the loss of free-port status had been largely removed when the Customs Duties (Penang) Bill, 1949, and the Rubber Excise (Penang) Bill, 1949, were given certificates of urgency and passed in the Federal Legislative Council exactly one week after their Settlement Council motion. Singapore's position remained more favourable but only marginally so. And it did not generate anywhere as much dissatisfaction as it had done in the last quarter of 1948 when a trade slump was expected. In 1949, trade was unexpectedly booming.

The Malays had initially reacted to the secession movement in such a way as to strengthen it. The *Utusan Melayu*, for example, had called for the incorporation of Penang and Province Wellesley within Kedah (and Malacca within Negri Sembilan or Johore).³⁸ They were haughty and arrogant in proclaiming their power to decide the fate of the movement and of Penang. For example, at a massive (by Penang standards) and rousing rally attended by 2,000 Malays, held in Penang on 8 January, Dato Onn had declared: 'If the Malays do not agree to it, there can be no secession.'³⁹

By February 1949, race relations had become very strained; and the view that non-Malays should not be castigated but won over and kept away from the communist camp had begun to take root. Onn seemed to have

³⁸ Editorial, *Utusan Melayu*, 12 December 1948.

³⁹ *Straits Echo*, 9 January 1949.

taken off his champion-of-the-Malays cap and donned the robe of Malayan statesman. Malay moderation seemed to have transplanted Malay extremism. The motivating force of the desire to safeguard the Straits-born's status, rights and privileges, their 'Britishness' and the Britishness of Penang, the desire to escape from Malayization, the desire for equality, and for a home for the Straits-born, diminished significantly.

The Straits-born's fear of the erosion of their personal rights had also been mitigated to some extent when the attempt to extend the power of banishment to them, and less importantly, to allow for double jeopardy, was abandoned. The British also promised elections in the near future.⁴⁰ Elections and the re-grouping of the Settlements had previously been seen as the only methods of re-establishing the political power of the Straits Chinese. By the end of February 1949, however, there had arisen a *realistic* and viable alternative: the Malayan Chinese Association, formed on 27 February 1949. Three prominent Straits Chinese members of the Secession Committee had in fact been on the forming committee of the MCA. They were, therefore, in the unique position of being members of one committee devoted to dismembering the Federation (and thus dividing the Chinese) at the same time they were members of another committee committed to the Federation framework (and to unifying its Chinese). They faced the choice which had faced Tan Cheng Lock when he returned to Malaya: whether to hitch their wagons to a noble steed with a glorious past but a doubtful future (the Straits Chinese) or to mount an untamed elephant, growing in strength but unpredictable and untried (the unassimilated Chinese). Tan had chosen the growing giant. So did the more progressive among the Straits Chinese. Only the arch Straits Chinese conservatives remained to run the SCBA and the Penang secession movement.

What of the arguments about the benefits of the secessionist policy arising out of strong Penang-centric attitudes? By February 1949, the perception of neglect had been lessened a great deal (temporarily at least) by the spectacle of Kuala Lumpur tripping over itself in the rush to deal with Penang's grievances. The desire for greater freedom from Kuala Lumpur interference, about which other states had also complained, was satiated to some extent by the setting up of a Federal committee to look into the question of over-centralization and by the promise of greater decentralization. The other expected pay-offs of secession remained but their motivating force was substantially reduced because by February 1949, the possibility of secession and, therefore, their realization, appeared non-existent.

While the expected benefits of continued commitment to the secessionist policy were diminishing and diminishing rapidly, one particular cost

⁴⁰The Local Authorities Elections Ordinance was in fact passed in October 1950 and less than three months after Griffith's reply to their petition, elections, the first in the Federation, were held for the Municipal Council of George Town.

seemed to be increasing even more quickly. The value of racial harmony had grown with its deterioration — and very quickly too. It was apparent to the secessionists that the secession movement was contributing not only to Penang's racial troubles but also to the Federation's. In view of everything that had been done and promised to satisfy Penang, and of the policy's implications for race relations, the wisdom of continued agitation became questionable.

Commitment to the secessionist policy was abandoned in some cases and significantly reduced in others not only because of a change in its subjective value. The secessionists abandoned or lost their fervour for the policy because after February 1949, the probability of its successful implementation appeared extremely bleak even to the most optimistic. The secessionists simply could not make any headway against the solid wall of determined British and Malay opposition — and they knew it.

Never committed to unilateral secession, and fully aware that they had not the power to unilaterally break away even if they had wanted to do so, the secessionists saw the British as an essential ally and collaborator. Their inability to win over the British doomed the movement to failure. This inability is attributable partly to the fact that the secessionists were not that committed to engineering British support.⁴¹ They were deficient also in values which they could exchange for British compliance. The British had nothing to gain and much to lose by acceding to their demand for secession. When they refused to actively generate any mass backing for their demands,⁴² they in effect condemned themselves to failure. Probably the most important basic reason for their inability to win British support for their cause, however, was the fact that the task of altering British policy was simply an extremely difficult one. On the matter of secession and breaking up the Federation, British minds had closed from the outset. British opposition was also too strongly anchored in core values: racial harmony, (MacDonald's) personal commitment to the Federation, and most important, Malay support for the government and the Anglo-Malay political partnership. It is eminently arguable that when the secessionists renounced the attempt to win the Malays to their cause, they forfeited all prospect of British support — and success.

The attempt to explain the failure of the secession movement may con-

⁴¹ They did not try very hard not because of any unawareness of the necessity of British support but because their commitment to the secessionist policy was not all that strong, and equally important, because they sensed, after early January 1949, that it would all be to no avail.

⁴² They refrained from so doing because they were not sufficiently aware of the necessity of generating mass support for policy success. Elitist politics was all they knew, and before the war, it had been sufficient for their ends. Second, the secessionists were unwilling to bear the cost of indulging in activities which were repugnant to many and alien to most of them.

concentrate on the separatists, on their changed commitment to the secessionist policy, on the hostile and uncompliant political environment they had to surmount, and on their inability to make it compliant. It can also reverse the focus and concentrate on the opponents of the secessionist policy (the proponents of the maintenance of the Federation) and their ability to cause policy abandonment, i.e. their political power. Since it was the British who actively engineered the change in commitment to the secessionist policy, we shall concentrate on them.

British political power is directly traceable to their strong commitment to the policy of opposing the secessionist policy. They were persistent and steadfast; and they were prepared not only to persuade, a relatively 'cheap' method of exercising political power, but also to value-manipulate. They bestowed free-port status, and trading concessions; they promised elections, power devolution and greater autonomy; and they abandoned the attempt to introduce double jeopardy and to extend their banishment powers.

Great British political power is attributable also to the resources and assets which they possessed. The British fortunately possessed or could manufacture most of the values salient to the secessionists, values like free-port status. They also had abundant physical and human channels of communications through which persuasion attempts could be made. They were well supplied with very accurate information on which they could base their persuasion and value-manipulation efforts, and they managed to find the time to conduct these operations despite other pressing matters. Very importantly, they possessed effective leadership. The qualities of leadership which markedly enhanced their political power were their prestige and their knowledge and skill.

A great many of the secessionists had great affection for the British. Most if not all, respected them. The British and especially MacDonald, who had lived in Penang for some time as Governor-General, utilized his great personal prestige to effect.

The British showed great skill in deliberately approaching the secessionists as friends and confidants, not as enemies. They came disarmingly forward, moreover, as friends who had Penang's interests at heart, who were always willing to listen, anxious to be reasonable, to respond and to please. And when the British veto came, the secessionists found it hard to be angry. The use of delaying tactics while appeasement was seen to be in progress was also most effective.⁴³ An important element in British political power lay also in their skill in value manipulation. The values bestowed matched almost perfectly the most salient desires of the secessionists. Of crucial importance from the very beginning, however, was the firm British stand

⁴³ Griffith's very belated reply over the petition was masterful. Had it come in 1949 and not 1951, the movement might have had a second wind.

that the Federation Constitution was *permanent* and not to be tinkered with – with the accompanying statement that it was flexible and allowed for the satisfaction of Penang's grievances. The British manner of saying 'no' by matter-of-factly stating the legal steps necessary before secession could be legally affected was also masterful.

The British success in causing policy defection and reduced commitment can be attributed not only to the fact of strong commitment to defeating the secession movement, and to the resources and assets it possessed, but also to the fact that the task of doing so was not really a very difficult one. Unlike the British and the Malays, the secessionists appeared to have maintained an open mind on the issue of secession from beginning to end. They were thus vulnerable to persuasion attempts. Nor was commitment to the secession policy that strongly anchored. Most of the secessionists regarded secession more as a means than as an end. More important, the secessionists were extremely vulnerable to value manipulation. They wanted values which the Federation government was in a position to grant; and when these values were granted, the Penang secession movement simply petered out.

THE SECOND PENANG SECESSION MOVEMENT, 1953-7

Simandjuntak, in his short account of Penang's secessionist aspirations, sees the 'Penang Secession Movement' as a continuous movement which started in 1948 and ended in 1956. This is grossly inaccurate. To all intents and purposes, the first Penang secession movement had collapsed completely by the end of 1949. From then up to 1953, practically nothing more was heard of it.⁴⁴

The British veto made the secessionist-minded turn their face once again towards the Federation and to the struggle against the communists. In Malaya's political turbulence and racial disharmony, talk of secession appeared a luxury the country could not afford. By mid-1953, however, the insurgency appeared to have tailed off.⁴⁵ By mid-1953 also, independence in the foreseeable future appeared a practical possibility.⁴⁶ Talk of the

⁴⁴ Apart from newspaper reports regarding Griffith's reply to the secessionists' petition in September 1951, little else appeared on the issue of secession in that period.

⁴⁵ The High Commissioner, Sir Gerald Templar, had to remind the populace that 'The shooting war is not over yet...' *New York Times*, 10 March 1953.

⁴⁶ In September 1952, the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) had announced a programme for independence within ten years. UMNO (in September) and the Pan-Malayan Labour Party (in November) had called for a multi-party conference to concert action for the attainment of independence. Indeed, an IMP-Mentris Besar 'National Conference' had been held in April 1953. This was attended by the SCBA but not the UMNO-MCA or PMLP.

future of Penang and secession became, therefore, not only legitimate but also prudent.

The issue was to be publicly raised in the immediate context of discussions about the merger of Singapore with the Federation. In mid-August 1953, UMNO-MCA announced that they would study the issue of merger. Heah Joo Seang, President of the Penang SCBA joined in the of merger. Heah Joo Seang, President of the Penang SCBA joined in the chorus of largely elitist, predominantly non-Malay, pro-merger sentiments that followed.⁴⁷ T.W. Ong, now once again President of the Singapore SCBA, replied indignantly that instead of hoping for the fusion of Singapore with the Federation, Penang and Malacca should try to secede.⁴⁸ Sultan Ibrahim of Johore, in one of his quixotic moods, wrote to the *Straits Times*: 'I say Singapore, Penang and Malacca should be Straits Settlements for ever... why did they make a Federation of all Malaya? Why did they put in Penang and Malacca?'⁴⁹ In a reaction to this outburst, Heah argued that 'Although the Colonial Office has invariably said "no" to the two Settlements' representations for secession, I feel we should try again and break away from the Federation.'⁵⁰ In the weeks that followed, however, the Penang SCBA did not actively pursue the secessionist cause, espousing instead the concept of a United Malaya and concentrating on a campaign 'to protect and preserve the status, special rights and privileges of the Queen's Chinese'.⁵¹

The issue of secession was only brought into the open again in June 1954, this time by what was seen as 'a movement to foster hatred of the British'.⁵² It followed UMNO-MCA's threat to withdraw from all federal and state councils and to boycott elections if they were not held in 1954.⁵³ Once again, however, no serious move was made towards secession.

Throughout the rest of 1954 and most of 1955, secessionist sentiments remained, but they were not strong and not publicly expressed. By the third quarter of 1955, however, they had begun to grow, due to no insigni-

⁴⁷ *Straits Times*, 19 September 1953.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 September 1953.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 24 September 1953.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 September 1953.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3 October 1953. In dealing with the second Penang secession movement, we will distinguish between the 'Queen's Chinese' and the rest of the Straits-Chinese community which since 1945 had begun to move politically and socially closer and closer to the main Chinese community. The second secession movement, unlike the first, was not a Straits-Chinese movement as such but largely a Queen's-Chinese movement. The Queen's Chinese may be regarded as those who refused to move closer to the main Chinese community and who still clung tenaciously to their British connections and their very pro-British sentiments.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 18 July 1954.

⁵³ *Malay Mail*, 19 June 1954.

ficant extent, to Penang Malay demands that Penang be returned to 'its proper owner', Kedah.⁵⁴

The 'Merdeka' talks began in London on 8 January 1956; the Queen's-Chinese apprehensions in general grew as it became more and more apparent that the negotiations would be successful. This time the issue did not recede into the background. The setting up of an independent Constitutional Commission entrusted with the task of soliciting views and drafting a Constitution providing for independence by August 1957 'if possible' raised the entire question of the future status of Penang. That future status was to be actively discussed until it was finally settled.

In mid-February,⁵⁵ the Penang SCBA decided that:

The best solution would be for all the nine states and two settlements to enjoy political autonomy and form a United States of Malaya.

Failing this, we have no alternative but to agitate for a dominion status for Penang, Malacca and Singapore — in other words, we will revert to our former status [as Straits Settlements].⁵⁶

Heah Joo Seang stated that a five-man SCBA delegation was prepared to go to London. Tunku Abdul Rahman retorted that Penang need have no fear of anyone's will being imposed on the Settlement.⁵⁷ And despite the fact that Heah was vice-president of the Penang and national Party Negara, the party's Penang branch adopted the position that 'The Queen must waive her jurisdiction over Penang, and the Settlement should be merged into a unified independent Malaya....'⁵⁸ In early March 1956, when the terms of reference of the Reid Commission were announced, the SCBA set aside its plan to go to London on grounds that these terms had not prejudiced the position of the Queen in relation to Penang and Malacca and did not preclude the Commission from considering dual citizenship for British subjects.⁵⁹

In early April 1956, on the occasion of Tunku Abdul Rahman's first official visit to Penang as Chief Minister, he categorically declared that Penang's inclusion in the Federation was 'absolutely necessary'; 'Indepen-

⁵⁴ After a heated debate at the tenth annual general assembly of Penang UMNO, it was decided that the matter would be dealt with after the achievement of independence. (*Straits Echo*, 26 September and *Singapore Standard*, 26 September 1955.)

⁵⁵ *Utusan Melayu*, 13 February 1956.

⁵⁶ *Straits Echo*, 19 February 1956.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 February 1956.

⁵⁸ *Malay Mail*, 22 February 1956.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 March 1956.

dence', he said, 'would be meaningless if this settlement were left out.'⁶⁰ On 16 April, Koh Sin Hock, one of the most enthusiastic advocates of secession in the SCBA committee,⁶¹ put forward his 'Malta plan' which envisaged Penang as a separate state in political association with the United Kingdom. He argued that 'The best way out for us is to get out of the present Constitution.'⁶² Dato Sir Onn bin Jaafar suggested a referendum for Penang with limited and loaded options. The people should decide, he said, whether they wanted Penang to be merged with Kedah or as a 'separate State of the Union...'⁶³ The realization by the more practical among the secessionists that these were the real alternatives for Penang explains to a large extent their temperance. A commentator argued that 'agitation for Penang's secession can only result in the stiffening of Malay demands for union with Kedah'.⁶⁴

The Queen's Chinese were to indulge in one last gesture. On 22 January 1957 the three presidents of the three SCBA's met in Singapore. T.W. Ong suggested the re-creation of a group of three states distinct from the nine Malay States.⁶⁵ A few days later he denied having suggested secession, arguing that 'there should be a loose federation between Singapore, Penang and Malacca under their own autonomous government and the nine Malay States'.⁶⁶ Heah realized that it was now too late in the day to campaign for a confederation. And while he did come out in support of this, he and the Penang SCBA had now changed course. The SCBA, whose president had been vice-president of the IMP and then of Party Negara, had previously been antipathetic to the Alliance. In February 1957, it began a series of moves to join the Alliance as a member party. There was no more talk of secession.

As this account of the development of secessionist sentiments indicates, there are more grounds than one for differentiating the second secession movement from the first. Whereas the dissatisfactions which led to secessionist demands in the first movement arose from past grievances and the

⁶⁰ *Straits Times*, 6 April 1956.

⁶¹ Interview with Cheah Phee Aik, then Secretary of the Penang SCBA. According to Cheah, Koh put forward the view that Penang could be viable on its own. According to Koh, he was not very enthusiastic about secession (Interview with Koh Sin Hock).

⁶² *Malay Mail*, 17 April 1956. The next day, Koh clarified his stand by suggesting that Penang should break away only as a last resort (*Straits Times*, 18 April 1956).

⁶³ *Singapore Standard*, 24 April 1956.

⁶⁴ Mas Ibrahim, 'The Future of Penang' in *Singapore Standard*, 11 July 1956. 'Mas Ibrahim' was the *non de plume* of the first chairman of the PMLP (Mohamed Sopiee bin Sheik Ibrahim).

⁶⁵ *Singapore Standard*, 22 January 1957.

⁶⁶ Letter in *ibid.*, 31 January 1957. This was clearly a suggestion of confederation.

then existing *status quo*, the dissatisfactions which underpinned separatist sentiments in 1953-7 were in the main concerned with a future event, independence, and the position of Penang and the status and rights of Queen's Chinese in an independent Federation of Malaya.⁶⁷ Further, merchants, Eurasians and Indians and economic and financial considerations played practically no role. The second movement was largely a Queen's Chinese phenomenon. And while the secessionists of both movements were pro-British, the separatists of the second period were somewhat less Penang-centred. Another important difference also existed between the two movements. Commitment to secession in 1953-7 was at best only a weak one.

While it is possible to argue that the second Penang secession movement would have failed even if the secessionists had been very strongly committed to a secessionist policy – for they would not have been able to surmount the strong Alliance objections to it – the maintenance of the integrity of the Federation can be most immediately attributed to their weak commitment to the policy of withdrawing Penang from the Federation. The secessionists were prepared to express their sentiments but never prepared to go far beyond that. Three main factors explain reasonably well their weak commitment to secession: the absence of societal reinforcement in the form of public support for secession, its limited subjective value as a course of action, and most important, perceptions of the impossibility of secession.

By some twist of fate, politics in Malaya developed in such a way as to make the prospect of successful secession extremely dim throughout the period 1953 to 1957. From 1953 to 1955, the British were so preoccupied with the Emergency that they were not prepared to tolerate any talk of secession. Their opposition was of long standing, well-known and inflexible. By 1956, it is possible, though unlikely, that there may have been a shift in British policy.⁶⁸ The *Singapore Standard* believed that there was 'a probability that [Britain] will keep a toe-hold in South-East Asia by reviving the old Straits Settlements'.⁶⁹ By 1956, however, power and system trans-

⁶⁷ While the actual circumstances which sparked each demand for secession may have been different, one factor, the prospect of independence, conditioned it throughout. The Queen's Chinese believed that it was essential that their rights and privileges be guaranteed while the British, who would safeguard their interests, were still powerful – and before independence. They were against independence within the time demanded by the Alliance (Interview with Cheah Phee Aik).

⁶⁸ Interviews with Dr. Lim Chong Eu, D.S. Ramanathan, Koh Sin Hock, Mohamed Sopiee, and Cheah Phee Aik.

⁶⁹ *Singapore Standard*, 16 February 1956 (Italics mine). There is little doubt that an important section of the British officers in Malaya (many of whom regarded the 31 August 1957 deadline for independence as patently unrealistic) began to think along these lines. The Resident Commissioner of Penang, R.P. Bingham, seemed to have been personally sympathetic to the aspirations of the SCBA and the Queen's Chinese (Interview with Cheah Phee Aik). At a dinner party given by him in early

formation authority had been transferred to a large extent to the elected Alliance government. To that Alliance government, the inclusion of Penang was 'absolutely necessary'.

The belief that attaining secession was impossible was probably the most decisive factor ensuring that there would only be at best a weak commitment to it. This weak commitment and ambivalent attitude of the secessionists was also related, however, to its subjective value, which seemed limited.

To a large extent this was because secession had several important disutilities. The first secessionists of 1948-9 did not much feel that secession and reconstitution of the Straits Settlements was an improper or illegitimate aim. In 1953-7, it was a retrograde colonialistic and anti-independence move and was seen as such by a great many of the secessionists.⁷⁰ In 1948, Penang had had little experience as a member of a political entity broader than that of the Straits Settlements. Her membership of the Federation had by 1953 generated a greater sense of political community and lessened the force of Straits Settlements political sentiments. The affiliation motivation, the desire to be associated with the mainland and to belong together in one political entity, by no means universal, but by no means limited to a handful, ran directly counter to secessionist sentiments.

Possibly the most important factor which consistently worked in this direction, however, was the fear of doing anything to worsen communal relations. Elections, and the rapid move towards independence had exacerbated racial tensions. A dramatic symptom of the disease was the Penang riots of 2 January 1957 which took five days to bring 'under control'. The occasion was the presentation of the Queen's Letters Patent declaring George Town a city — the first in the Federation. Tunku Abdul Rahman connected the riots with the 'unfounded fear' among the UMNO rank and file that Penang might stay out of the Federation if its status was raised.⁷¹

February 1957, Sir Robert Scott, who had taken over MacDonal's post as Commissioner-General, asked D.S. Ramanathan (Chairman of the Malayan Labour Party) about 'the position of the Labour Party if it was decided to continue Malacca and Penang as Straits Settlements' (Interview with D.S. Ramanathan). One cannot be certain that this was a purely personal initiative — but it does seem so coming as it did so late in the imperial day. According to Ramanathan, Scott wanted to keep Singapore separated from the other two Settlements.

⁷⁰ The elite of the Straits Chinese and many of the Queen's-Chinese leaders had, of course, been voicing demands for greater self-government since 1946. For Heah Joo Seang especially, the counter-pulls must have been tremendous. Heah who had strongly stated his belief in the natural unity of Malaya as a whole (in 1953), who in 1951 had himself argued for the abolishment of dual nationality, who had been vice-president of the IMP (whose ultimate objective was proclaimed in its very name) was placed in the role of leader of an association and a community important sections of which wanted partition and dual nationality and rejected independence.

⁷¹ *Straits Times*, 12 January 1957.

Opposed to these factors which made secession unattractive were others that worked in the other direction. In 1948-9, the Straits Chinese secessionists had been riled by reference to them as 'aliens' and 'immigrants' and had been angered by the arrogance of UMNO. There seems little doubt that an important factor which again turned many towards secession in 1953-7, was the antagonism which they felt towards UMNO, the MCA and the Alliance. Exception was taken to being called 'puppets of the Queen', 'pariahs of the Queen', 'running dogs of the British'. By 1957, however, these epithets were either dispensed with or edited out of newspaper reports, especially the *Straits Echo's* reports. Tempers began to cool.

Second, the SCBA and those in the Straits Chinese community of like ilk had always been attracted to the idea of secession and reconstituting the old Straits Settlements because only in such a state could they regain their political eminence and power. This was one reason why they had wanted Penang's secession in 1948-9. They had then wanted power also because of their fear of Malay power. In the period 1953-7, this security aspect was even greater because on the one hand, Malay power remained as great as ever and on the other, their patrons and protectors, the British, were seen to be on their way out. One common thread which ran through the majority of cases in what were parts of the British empire was the fear, on the part of one group, of domination by another, once the prospect of the removal of British control and protection became real. Like the Muslims who feared permanent Hindu dominance in an undivided India (though not to the same extent), the Queen's Chinese feared permanent Malay domination in an undivided Federation of Malaya.⁷²

Indeed, the desire for security was by far the most important determinant of the attitudes and the activities of the Queen's Chinese in the three years or so preceding *merdeka*. As a small and politically impotent group, they feared that in an independent Federation of Malaya, with their protectors gone and the Malays in charge, their rights and privileges as regards *jus soli* and dual citizenship, for example would be whittled away.⁷³ More extremist Malay demands, which included the incorporation of Penang with-

⁷² Tan Cheng Lock, president of the MCA had noted that in a situation where 90 per cent. of the electorate were Malays, the Association would have to play second fiddle (*Straits Times*, 17 February 1955).

⁷³ The desire for British nationality and the British connection was probably as strong amongst the conservative Straits Chinese in Penang as it had been in 1945-9; but in 1953-7, it had a security aspect it did not have previously. At the annual general meeting of the Penang SCBA in 1954, Heah Joo Seang proclaimed his pride in being a British subject and suggested that Chinese expectant mothers come to Penang to give birth so that their children could automatically acquire British citizenship. 'If we are to surrender our British nationality', it was argued, 'then who can we approach for redress of any grievances we may have?' (*Straits Times*, 3 September 1954). It is worth noting that the Penang SCBA refused to drop 'British' from its name until 1964!

in Kedah, the extension of Malay privileges (including the setting up of Malay reservations in the Settlements) and the demand (made by the Perak Malay Chamber of Commerce) that no more business licences or permits be granted to non-Malays until the Malays had come on par with them in the economic field⁷⁴ made it even more frightening.⁷⁵ The Queen's Chinese feared for their economic position; and they were not unaware from examples in the Philippines and Indonesia that independence often resulted in the persecution of the Chinese. They feared not only Malay domination but even the prospect of an independent Federation in which the two huge and 'selfish' racial groups, the Malays and the non-Straits-born Chinese, and their political champions would be the sole rulers; they believed that neither the MCA nor the Alliance could be counted upon to foster or safeguard the interests of the Queen's Chinese.⁷⁶

The over-all value of secession to the separatist-minded was not great, however, because on the one hand secession had its costs and on the other their considerations of power and security did not constitute overpowering motivations for secession. Their motivational strength fluctuated over time and their peaks of strength never coincided at any one particular moment. Thus, the fear regarding Penang's incorporation within Kedah had lessened by late 1955 when the top moderate leadership of UMNO not only in the Federation as a whole but also in Penang were seen not to favour it. The apprehensions regarding the most extremist of Malay demands on Malay privileges and business licences were mitigated by the evident moderation of UMNO's national leaders. The Tunku and all of UMNO set their faces firmly against dual citizenship, it is true, but the British gave their assurances that they were determined to secure this for the Queen's Chinese.⁷⁷ Ultimately, the Alliance agreed both to dual nationality and *jus soli* for the Straits Chinese.⁷⁸ Secondly and thirdly, most of the secessionist-minded

⁷⁴ *Straits Echo*, 20 March 1956.

⁷⁵ At a more mundane level, stories of Malays refusing to pay their debts and of unrealistic Malay expectations after independence abounded and had measurable impact.

⁷⁶ The Queen's Chinese of Penang differentiated themselves from the China-born 'aliens' and 'immigrants' and generally looked down on the '*sinkeb*' (new arrivals). MCA's demands regarding Chinese education, and the establishment of Chinese as an official language they cared little about.

⁷⁷ The Colonial Secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd, told Heah Joo Seang in London (in early October 1956) that the British Government was determined to secure dual nationality for Penang's British subjects (Lee Yong Hock, 'A History of the Straits Chinese British Association: 1900-1959', unpublished B.A. academic exercise, University of Malaya, 1960, p.80).

⁷⁸ The Alliance rejected the Chinese demand for *jus soli* as such but agreed that all born after *merdeka* would be given the right to citizenship by birth. The British

were aware on the one hand that secession was a practical impossibility, and on the other, that talk of and agitation for secession was certain to prejudice their chances of securing their secure interests.

The Queen's-Chinese and the SCBA were divided between those who dreamed of a reconstituted Straits Settlements, and those hard-headed men (generally younger) who did not want to prejudice their Straits Chinese interests by pursuing an impracticable dream. Because the hard-headed men never wavered (and the more idealistic secessionists did) they were able most of the time to channel the Queen's Chinese and the SCBA into more constructive pursuits within the context of the Federation of Malaya framework. Thus, rather than actively agitate for Penang's secession, the SCBA campaigned for *jus soli* and dual nationality (not without success). Instead of alienating UMNO and MCA by demanding secession, most Straits-Chinese leaders called for multi-racialism, racial tolerance and non-communal politics. To negate their racial minority position and probably to gain that sense of racial security in numbers, many among the Straits Chinese including their leaders, had since 1945 moved closer towards the Chinese community.⁷⁹ The Queen's Chinese were doing the same; so ultimately would some of their leaders.⁸⁰ To regain their power more directly, the Queen's Chinese called for Singapore's merger with the Federation. Their leaders had previously backed the Dato Onn-led IMP and Party Negara. When Party Negara became a Malay chauvinist organization, the SCBA attempted to turn itself into a political party and tried to become the nucleus of a 'Malayan Peoples Party'. Heah steered the SCBA finally to the concept of joining the UMNO-MCA-MIC Alliance.⁸¹

One of the most important factors which had stopped the first Penang secession movement was to play an even more crucial role in putting an end to secessionist sentiments in 1957: the fear of its racial consequences. Tun-ku Abdul Rahman had connected the Penang riots of January 1957 with the 'unfounded fear' among UMNO rank and file that an independent Federation of Malaya would emerge shorn of Penang. To the charges later in the month that the fundamental cause of the riots was the desire for

subjects of Penang had *jus soli* for those already born before 31 August 1957. In effect, therefore, their demand for *jus soli* was granted.

⁷⁹ In fact, the Straits Chinese had assumed leadership positions within the MCA out of all proportion to their numbers within the Association. From 1949 to 1958, Tan Cheng Lock, who more than any man can claim to be the founder of the MCA, was the President. From 1959 to the present time, his son, Tan Siew Sin assumed the presidency. The President from early 1958 to mid-1959 was Dr. Lim Chong Eu who it is arguable was also a Straits Chinese although one who could speak Chinese well.

⁸⁰ Heah Joo Seang became President of the Penang MCA in the early 'sixties.

⁸¹ The MCA rejected SCBA's demand that it come in as a fourth partner. The SCBA also demanded (unsuccessfully) two nominated representatives in the two Houses of the federal legislature in its memorandum to the Reid Commission.

secession, Heah Joo Seang himself replied: 'there are no active secessionists left in Penang'.⁸²

THE JOHORE SECESSION MOVEMENT: 1955-6

The first and second Penang secession movements emanated from a state of the non-Malay heartland, and were exclusively non-Malay movements. The Federation was to see two more secession movements. They were Malay; and they came from two states of the Malay heartland: Johore and Kelantan.

The idea of secession emanating from the Federation's southernmost state was first publicly articulated in a debate in the State Council of Johore at the end of 1954. In an attack on the 1955 budget estimates, Yap Kim Hock argued that Johore would have to consider leaving the Federation unless she received a more equitable share of federal funds in the future.⁸³ This was mere talk. A more serious challenge to the integrity of the Federation of Malaya was to come in the fourth quarter of 1955 – and it was sparked off by the doyen of the Rulers, the Sultan of Johore.

Sultan Ibrahim had publicly expressed his dissatisfaction with the Federation set up in 1953 in his famous 'Straits Settlements for ever' letter to the *Straits Times*. 'I am sure', he had written, 'many people will agree that we were all very happy when Singapore, Penang and Malacca were the Straits Settlements; when Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang were the Federated Malay States, and Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu, and Perlis were Unfederated Malay States.'⁸⁴ The indignation which followed this was nothing compared with the reactions to his 17 September 1955 speech at the lavish Diamond Jubilee celebrations held in Johore to commemorate his sixty years on the throne. In an obvious criticism of the Alliance, the Sultan reminded those clamouring for 'immediate independence' that 'if the British go today [the communists] will come in tomorrow'.⁸⁵ Tunku Abdul Rahman, now Chief Minister (after the Federation's first national elections), and the rest of his colleagues in the new government sat in grim silence. They boycotted the rest of the celebrations.

The Tunku dismissed the Sultan's speech as 'nonsense' and left it at that.⁸⁶ The Johore Alliance went further and announced that at the next

⁸² *Straits Times*, 19 January 1957.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 29 December 1954. Federal allocations for Johore for 1955 were to be reduced by 21 per cent. Reductions for other states ranged only between 2 to 14 per cent.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 September 1953.

⁸⁵ *Sunday Times*, 18 September 1955. At the time, the comparatively militant and radical UMNO was demanding self-government in two, and full independence in four years.

⁸⁶ *Singapore Standard*, 20 September 1955. By this time, the date for the tripartite

meeting of the State Council they would demand that future policy speeches by the Sultan or his Regent be vetted by the Alliance-dominated State Executive Council.⁸⁷

One voice came out to Sultan Ibrahim's defence. Ungku Abdullah bin Omar, a nominated State Councillor and a relative of the monarch stated his intention 'to oppose any move to curtail the Sultan's right to speak his mind fully and freely'.⁸⁸ On 22 October 1955, at a meeting of some eighty people, the Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Johor (PKMJ) was formed with the dominant aim of campaigning for the secession of Johore from the Federation and for her return to her previous status as an 'independent' state under British protection.⁸⁹ Ungku Abdullah became the Persatuan's general secretary and its major spokesman. While Sultan Ibrahim did not openly reveal his support for the secessionist movement until mid-December 1955, he must be counted among the secessionists – though not a publicly active one.

THE SECESSIONIST POLICY

In all the analyses of policies thus far undertaken, calculations of profit have probably been more instrumental in determining policy choice than 'irrational' or non-deliberative expressions of passion, sentiments and emotions. The opposite may be said of the Johore secession movement. It is arguable that the most important motivation driving it was the anger felt against the Alliance.⁹⁰ The Labour Party of Malaya had termed the Alliance boycott of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations 'a feeble protest'.⁹¹ To the royalists around the Sultan, this was nothing less than an insult to their beloved sovereign. So too was the Johore UMNO move to curb his freedom of expression.⁹² It was time as far as Ungku Abdullah was concerned, that

Merdeka talks in London had been fixed. It was in the Alliance's interests to do nothing to make the task of forging a united Alliance-Sultans stand any more difficult.

⁸⁷ *Straits Times*, 19 September 1955.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 September 1955. Ungku Abdullah was the great-grandson of Temenggong Abdul Rahman who sold Singapore to Raffles. At the time he was a nominated member of the Johore State Council.

⁸⁹ *Straits Echo*, 24 October 1955. Other objectives included strengthening Johore's relationship with Indonesia, maintaining cordial relations with all Islamic countries, seeking admission to the UN (*Singapore Standard*, 21 October 1955).

⁹⁰ This anger was expressed in intemperate public statements. At the inaugural meeting of the PKMJ for example, Ungku Abdullah poured scorn on the activities of Tunku Abdul Rahman and asserted that Malaya would not achieve independence in forty years (*Utusan Melayu*, 24 October 1955).

⁹¹ *Straits Times*, 21 September 1955.

⁹² The Sultan did not take too kindly also to the snide remarks that he would be more sympathetic to his people's aspirations for independence if he spent less time in London.

UMNO be 'taught a lesson'.⁹³ Many of the leaders of the Persatuan had personal antagonisms too towards the Alliance after their defeats by Alliance candidates in local, state and federal elections. The new UMNO establishment had supplanted the elite surrounding the royalty in social standing also. Relations between Ungku Abdullah, the driving force of the PKMJ, and the UMNO establishment appeared particularly bitter.⁹⁴

When the anger had died down, one non-deliberative motivation tended to increase in motivational force — and operated to reduce the value of the secessionist policy. Johore, which had provided so much Malay leadership to the Federation, was seen as a natural and integral part of the peninsula. In October and November 1955, however, the affiliation motivation was submerged in the wave of anger and aggression.

Despite the great importance of anger as the driving force, the secessionists did perceive several significant advantages to secession. They wanted the retention of the State British Adviser and continued British administration of Johore. Tunku Abdul Rahman had in August 1955 demanded the abolition of British Advisers. In a letter to the Federation High Commissioner dated 1 December 1955, the Sultan candidly wrote: 'I do not care what the other Rulers say but as for Johore and myself I must have a British Adviser, otherwise, works cannot be carried out smoothly.'⁹⁵ The secessionists believed also that an independent Johore under British protection would restore the 'glory' of Johore and the prestige of Sultan Ibrahim. Up to December 1955, the maintenance of the Rulers as heads of state in an independent Malaya was not certain. Secession would guarantee the status of Sultan Ibrahim.

Considerations of personal power and social standing could not also have been absent from within the ranks of the secession movement. An independent Johore, with the Sultan restored to his former splendour and once more in a position to exercise his authority, could result in the supplanting of the UMNO establishment and the re-establishment of the political position and probably more important, the social eminence of the courtiers.⁹⁶

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 15 December 1955.

⁹⁴ Originally a committee member of the radical and multi-racial Malayan Democratic Union, he had joined and then resigned from UMNO in 1951 'in disgust'. His failure to be re-nominated as a State Councillor in November 1955 he attributed to his support for the Sultan (*Ibid.*, 15 December 1955). UMNO animosity towards him was carried even to the chamber of the State Council. On the day the 'gag' motion was introduced, members of UMNO inquired how a state-owned vessel, the *Regulus*, had been sold to Ungku Abdullah, an undischarged bankrupt who was at the time a nominated member of the State Council, and how an undischarged bankrupt had been nominated as a State Councillor in the first place (*Ibid.*, 13 December 1955).

⁹⁵ *Sunday Times*, 15 December 1955.

⁹⁶ Ungku Abdullah's checkered political career gives an indication of his political and social ambitions. When the secession movement collapsed, he decided to rejoin UMNO.

Despite all these perceived expected benefits, the value of the secessionist policy to the secessionists should not be exaggerated, for their policy had one onerous cost throughout: the loss of social approval and respect. Condemnation and ridicule of the movement was almost universal. Abuse from enemies and the press was expected. What was really hurtful was the castigation and disapproval of friends. Dato Onn, a 'bosom pal' of Ungku Abdullah came out in immediate criticism; and the silence of the other Rulers rang in the ears of the secessionist royalists.⁹⁷ The fear of being a laughing stock weighed heavily on the minds of the secessionists.

The commitment of the Johore secessionists, at best moderate, is to be explained partly in terms of the limited value of secession. It was also due partly to the discouraging public support it received. Most important, however, the Johore separatists, like the Penang secessionists of their period, never really believed that they could succeed. Tunku Abdul Rahman minced no words. 'The UMNO-MCA-MIC Alliance', he proclaimed, 'will not tolerate attempts from any quarter to partition Malaya on any account.'⁹⁸

OPPOSITION TO THE MOVEMENT

While the opponents of the Johore secession movement were many, the most crucial of these was the Alliance.⁹⁹ The Alliance opposed the movement for three basic reasons. First, and most immediate, it was seen as a factor complicating the move towards independence. The movement could have provided a pretext for delaying independence for Malaya if the British had wanted to do so. The Alliance before 1956 believed that they did.

Second, the Johore secession movement, like the secession movement of Penang, was a threat to the integrity of the Federation. While the Alliance did not believe that it had any possibility of succeeding, its very existence was a threat in that it might encourage similar movements elsewhere. This it did.¹⁰⁰

When this move fell through, he was off to Singapore to restore a Sultanate to Singapore.

⁹⁷ UMNO's *Malaya Merdeka* had linked the Persatuan with Somerville, the State Adviser and Dato H.B. MacKenzie, a Johore State Councillor (*Malaya Merdeka*, 24 October 1955). They wrote back expressing regret at having their names associated with the movement. MacKenzie added insult to injury by stating that the whole idea was 'ridiculous' (*ibid.*, 27 October 1955).

⁹⁸ *Singapore Standard*, 21 October 1955.

⁹⁹ The British kept out of the matter. Throughout the period, the British governments in the UK, the Federation, and Singapore maintained complete silence.

¹⁰⁰ As a direct consequence of the movement, for example, a group called 'Pasok Melayu Daerah Segamat' was formed in early November 1955 with the aim of detaching Segamat District from Johore if the State seceded from the Federation (*Utusan Melayu*, 5 November 1955). Less than three weeks later, the Kelantan Malay

The Alliance reactions to the Johore movement was also conditioned to a significant extent by the necessity of creating a united front between the Rulers and itself on the issue of Merdeka. Because sovereignty lay in the hands of the Rulers, their agreement to independence was necessary. The Johore movement, by pitching Sultan Ibrahim against the Alliance, constituted a threat to this united front strategy.

While the Alliance was determined to defeat the Johore secession movement, this determination found little expression in concrete and tough action. It believed that through want of support, the movement would die a natural death. This diagnosis proved correct, but before it collapsed its death throes were prolonged.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOVEMENT

There is some problem in finding an apt term to describe the evolution of the Johore secession movement. 'Struggle' cannot be used because there was no real struggle. What ensued for the most part was a series of verbal dog-fights between the secessionists and the Alliance, with other groups and parties putting a word in edgeways.

On 13 December 1955, the state Alliance introduced and carried a motion in the Johore State Council calling on the Sultan to consult the Menteri Besar before making any future political address. The Sultan came out in immediate defiance and once more publicly opposed independence. He also released his letter to the High Commissioner of the Federation of 1 December 1955, in which he had stated: 'I wish Johore could leave the Federation right now and be on her own as before, under British protection.'¹⁰¹ The *Straits Times* reported the Tunku hurrying back to Kuala Lumpur to consult his 'cabinet'.¹⁰² Ungku Abdullah despatched letters to the eight other Rulers warning them that events in Johore could be the spearhead of a similar threat to their sovereignty, unless they united to protect their status.¹⁰³ An 'Alliance leader' retorted that if the Rulers did not wish to be constitutional heads of state, then an independent Malaya would have no place for them.¹⁰⁴ The Conference of Rulers, which met on 21 December 1955, was purported to have requested a written guarantee from the Alliance that their status as constitutional heads would be upheld as a condition for their support of the Alliance's demand for self-govern-

United Front was formed to campaign for Kelantan's secession. In its memorandum to the Reid Commission, the 'State Council' of 'Negri Nanning', a part of Malacca annexed in 1845, demanded the return of its 'sovereignty'.

¹⁰¹ *Straits Times*, 15 December 1955.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 16 December 1955.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 17 December 1955.

¹⁰⁴ *Malay Mail*, 17 December 1955.

ment in two and independence in four years.¹⁰⁵ Ungku Abdullah commented that in asking for such an assurance, the Rulers had lowered their royal dignity.¹⁰⁶ The agreement of eight (out of nine) Rulers to the Alliance programme was reported on 27 December 1955.¹⁰⁷

By the end of 1955, Ungku Abdullah had decided to personally lobby the eight Rulers. On 1 January 1956, he had a 20-minute audience with the Sultan of Perak. What transpired may well have caused him to change his mind, for he abandoned this line of action. It was evident that the secession movement was getting absolutely nowhere.¹⁰⁸ With cool nonchalance, however, Ungku Abdullah proclaimed in May that the Persatuan was gaining support among the masses.¹⁰⁹ Then in mid-June 1956, he announced that he had decided to rejoin UMNO, that the PKMJ had over four hundred members, and that he would advise them to join UMNO also.¹¹⁰ Sheikh Annuar of Johore UMNO replied hurtfully that his application could not be considered because 'Ungku Abdullah is an active member of another party, even though it has only about ten members.'¹¹¹

Ungku Abdullah did not after all attempt to rejoin UMNO. And the PKMJ was to make one last defiant move. On 26 July 1957, the Ungku sent a cable to London urging Sultan Ibrahim not to sign the Federal Constitution by which Malaya would gain independence on 31 August.¹¹² On being informed that his Regent and not Sultan Ibrahim would be doing the signing, the Persatuan sent a telegram on 30 July 1957 to Sultan Ibrahim exhorting him to instruct the Regent, Tengku Makhota, not to sign. It was a futile move. Tengku Makhota signed.

In the face of hostile and unyielding opposition from the Alliance, the Johore secession movement was probably doomed from the start. But it was not to be without its consequences. One of these was the encouragement it gave to dissatisfied elements in Kelantan to attempt a break with the Federation.

¹⁰⁵ *Straits Times*, 22 December 1955.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 December 1955.

¹⁰⁷ *Malay Mail*, 27 December 1955.

¹⁰⁸ By May 1956, in fact, Ungku Abdullah had fallen out with Sultan Ibrahim. The split had started when the Sultan refused to sack the State Mentri Besar, Dato Wan Idris. It had simmered when Sultan Ibrahim rejected further advice proffered by him. It was complete when the Sultan refused to bring back the body of 'beloved Boo', Tengku Abu Bakar, the second son of the Sultan, from London for burial in Johore.

¹⁰⁹ *Singapore Free Press*, 5 May 1956.

¹¹⁰ *Straits Times*, 11 June 1956.

¹¹¹ *Singapore Free Press*, 19 June 1956.

¹¹² *Singapore Standard*, 27 July 1957.

THE KELANTAN SECESSION MOVEMENT: 1955-6

Kelantan was a relatively poor, very parochial-minded state tucked away in the northeast corner of Malaya, cut off from the western side of the Malay peninsula by a mountain range, and suffering from poor communications with the more modernized west coast states. In 1959, it became the first state in the Federation to be ruled by a political party in opposition to the Alliance, the Pan Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP) and it has remained in PMIP hands to this date. It is quite surprising, therefore, that Kelantan's 'exclusivism' has only once given rise to secessionist sentiments and even then to very weak and very limited secessionist sentiments. This occurred in 1955-6.

Roughly a month after the formation of the Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Johor, on 28 November 1955, the Kelantan Malay United Front was formed in Kota Bharu. The Front followed in the footsteps of the PKMJ in pledging itself to the objective of a separate independent Kelantan under British protection. Unlike the Johore case, however, the Kelantan secession movement was less interested in the position, status and affairs of the State Sultan¹¹³ and much more markedly concerned with Malay interests. According to Nik Mahmood bin Abdul Majid, its leader, the Front was necessary to safeguard the rights of the Malays as 'they were losing them to the Chinese under the Federation set-up'. He argued that under this set-up, 'Malays have been degraded into accepting, as Ministers, Chinese and Indians....' Among the objects of the Front, was the 'restoration' of the supremacy of the Islamic religion, the Malay language and Malay customs.¹¹⁴

It should be noted that the Federation of Malaya was in the paradoxical situation of appearing too Malay to the Penang secessionists and too non-Malay and Chinese to their Kelantan counterparts. It is also interesting to note that the Kelantan secession movement (like the other three we have examined) was led by men who had been pushed out or were isolated from the mainstream of Malayan political life and who were antagonistic towards UMNO, the dominant political force in Malaya. Nik Mahmood, the leader of the Kelantan movement, was a former strongman, first of the inconsequential Peninsular Malay Union, and later, of the relatively impotent Party Negara, both opponents of UMNO. It does appear that in all the four secession movements, a sense of political frustration led to a disenchantment with the Federation itself. In all four cases too, the desire to give expression to the anger felt against UMNO and the desire for greater power worked in the direction of secession.

¹¹³ The Sultan of Kelantan refused to back it.

¹¹⁴ *Straits Times*, 24 November 1955. It was on these sentiments that the PMIP was later to build its popularity in Kelantan.

The Kelantan secessionists were not as pro-British as those of the other three movements, but they were as fervent parochialists. The three secession movements of the immediate pre-independence period may in fact be seen as the last stand of state parochialism of the pre-war type. On more particular motivations, the Kelantan separatists took exception to that part of the Malayanization plan for the civil service by which non-Kelantanese could be posted to the state civil service.¹¹⁵

On the face of it, one might thus have expected significant public support for secession and more than the feeble activity of the Kelantan Malay United Front. In actuality, the support the Front received was minimal even by the standard of the Johore movement.¹¹⁶ To a large extent this was due to the fact that secession was never a real possibility, and the secessionists must have known this. It was also frowned upon by the Malay intelligentsia in Kelantan and Malaya generally, and was never legitimized by the acquiescence of the State Ruler. There were probably also other reasons, reasons which help to explain why Kelantan has never in its post-war history been attracted to secession.

First, the state has never been a financially viable one and has always gained financially from membership of the Federation. In 1956, for example, federal grants amounted to over 12 million dollars, nearly four times the estimated revenue of Kelantan. Significantly, history holds relatively few examples of secession attempts by poor and financially dependent regions. A second factor may possibly be related to the plight of their kith and kin in the four southern Thai provinces whose conditions the Kelantanese knew only too well. These provinces had, of course, been agitating off and on for unification with the Federation of Malaya since 1948.¹¹⁷ Probably the most important factor working against secessionist sentiments, however, was the sense of social and political community the Kelantan Malays felt with their brethren in the rest of the Federation and their belief that Kelantan rightly belonged in the Federation of Malaya.

THE MAINTENANCE OF THE FEDERATION OF MALAYA: 1948-63

The preservation of the territorial integrity of the Federation of Malaya in the face of the first Penang secession movement, the second Penang secession movement, the Johore secession movement and the Kelantan seces-

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24 November 1955.

¹¹⁶ *Singapore Standard*, 24 November 1955. In talking of the Kelantan secession 'movement', it is necessary to stress that its claim to being a movement rests only on the fact that it constituted a 'series of actions and endeavours of a body of persons for [some] special object' (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Oxford, 1964, p. 790).

¹¹⁷ See M.N. Sophe (ed.), 'The South Siam Secession Movement and the Battle for Unification with Malaya' (Kuala Lumpur, 1970, mimeographed).

sion movement may be explained in terms of the weakness of the secessionists and of the obstacles they had to surmount. While each of these enterprises posed a threat to the unified system, *none of them really seriously threatened its survival*. In no case was there strong commitment to a secessionist policy, and in no case was the essential policy commitment for success met: the maintenance of at least moderate commitment until achievement. The prerequisite of instrumental power, the capacity to unilaterally secede (and therefore, dismantle the Federation) was also never fulfilled. In all four cases, even the idea of doing so probably never entered the secessionists' minds. One of the principal reasons for this was the belief that they had no legal authority whatever for unilateral secession.

The monopoly of 'system-transformation' authority by the central government in Kuala Lumpur doomed the four secessionist movements to failure, for in no instance was the central government anything but strongly opposed to any threat to the territorial integrity of the Federation. The active opposition of a central government always in a position to veto secession meant that the four secession movements had, without exception, to overcome a hostile and non-compliant political environment. If the secessionists had had sufficient political power, they would have been able to engineer a receptive or a compliant political environment. The maintenance of the Federation of Malaya can, therefore, be partly attributed to the fact that no major political movement or party (eg. UMNO, MCA, PMIP, the Socialist Front) ever took up the cause of secession. This was to a large extent due to the belief that their power did not lie in a politically-divided Federation of Malaya and to the growth of a sense of social and political community — the sense of social and political community which infected even the second Penang, Johore and Kelantan secessionists.

The separatists' patent helplessness may be attributed to three factors: insufficient commitment to engineering Kuala Lumpur support; great deficiencies in resources and assets; and probably most important, the Herculean task of gaining the support of the central government. The failure of the secession movements indicate the limitations of exclusively elitist politics on great issues in post-war Malaya. When the secessionists refused or were unable to generate significant mass support, their fate was sealed.

The preservation of a politically-unified system over time may be examined by focusing on the failure of those who seek to destroy it. On the other hand, its continuance may also be analyzed from the viewpoint of the success of those who attempt to maintain it. The Federation of Malaya was maintained in the period 1948 to 1963 because throughout that period there was strong commitment to its maintenance. The crucial factor, however, was not this consistent strong commitment as such but the fact that unlike the secessionist movements, such commitment came from two extremely powerful political actors in the system: the central government and UMNO.

In the 1946-55 period, when the central government was, to all intents

and purposes, under British control, Kuala Lumpur was strongly committed to the maintenance of the Federation (and opposed to any challenge to its territorial integrity) – for at least six important reasons. First, the British in Malaya (and especially Malcolm MacDonald) were committed to the Federation of Malaya as an end in itself. In addition, and because of the pre-occupation with the Emergency, they were averse to attention and energy-diverting discussions about system transformation. Talk of basic alterations was at best a nuisance, at worse, disloyal. The Emergency precluded British sympathy for any move for political fragmentation. The desire to coordinate the anti-guerilla campaign led in fact to the greater over-all centralization of government in Kuala Lumpur. It was difficult enough to conduct a war with Singapore as a separate political and administrative entity, and in a federated state; it would have been impossible to conduct it in a politically-fragmented country. Fourth, the British policy of keeping Singapore separate (to a large extent for military-strategic reasons) precluded sympathy for any move to break Penang or Malacca from the Federation. The possible long-term British aim of creating a united Malaya too, predisposed them against any attempt to re-create the Straits Settlements. Devotion to the policy of fostering racial harmony and of dealing with any threat to that precious commodity also caused the British to oppose the two non-Malay Penang secession movements.

A sixth interest conditioned British behaviour in the period 1946-55. This was the desire to preserve the Anglo-Malay political alliance. Whether the British liked it or not, this meant gaining the general support and collaboration of UMNO. The great British devotion to this aim and to ensuring that the Malays would not turn against Britain ensured the importance and power of UMNO as regards the secession movements. It was a very important cause of British opposition to all the secession movements – for UMNO was invariably strongly opposed to any attempt to partition the Federation.

UMNO's strong opposition to partition in the period 1946-55 was, like British opposition, partly based on an ideological commitment to it as an end in itself. The Federation was seen as the fruits of UMNO's heroic struggle for the birthright of the Malays. The force of this foundation saga was bolstered to a large extent by the belief that the unified system was a natural political unit. That belief was not of long standing. It was based on a sense of social and political community, the sense of social and political community which had grown immeasurably out of the common Malaya-wide Malay struggle against the Malayan Union, which had been nurtured as a consequence of UMNO's operation as a Malayan political movement and which was fostered by the common struggle against the communists. UMNO was consistently opposed to partition also because it believed its power lay in Malay solidarity throughout the Federation.

By the end of 1955, the British had largely transferred system authority to the Alliance government, an Alliance government dominated by UMNO.

UMNO's antipathy towards partition remained — and was probably strengthened. Its partners, the MCA and the MIC too had a commitment to the Federation as a value in itself, but one based largely on a sense of social and political community. They too saw their power in Chinese and Indian solidarity throughout the Federation. By 1955, there was another important cause of Alliance opposition to the second Penang, Johore and Kelantan secession movements. These were seen as events which could only complicate the task of gaining Malayan independence.

The maintenance of the Federation of Malaya in the period 1948-63 must be explained not only in terms of commitment to its preservation but also in terms of the instrumental capacity of the proponents to make the necessary inputs to maintain the machinery of central government and to secure sufficient public obedience to, cooperation with and support for the central government to allow it to function. These were no mean achievements especially in the first six years of the Emergency when the central government was seriously threatened by the communist insurrection.

The maintenance of the Federation of Malaya in the period 1948-63 can be attributed also to the fact that at no point was the political environment facing the maintenance proponents unyielding or vetoist. There was never an opponent which could veto or prohibit maintenance. The communists posed the greatest threat and challenge to the central government, but they were not interested in dismantling the Federation. The Penang, Johore and Kelantan secessionist movements were. They could not do so because the central government wanted and possessed the political power to defeat them.

Thus far we have examined two cases of the successful formation of politically-unified systems in the Malaysia region: the formation of the Malayan Union and its substitution by the Federation of Malaya. We have also analyzed the successful maintenance of the Federation of Malaya in the face of four secession movements. We will now turn to the unsuccessful attempts at constructing a pan-Malayan unified system inclusive of Singapore in the period 1945 to 1961.

THE QUESTION OF MERGER AND A UNITED MALAYA

The island of Singapore is historically, militarily, politically, socially and economically very much a part of the Malayan mainland. It was from 'Tumasik' that Parameswara set off to found the Malacca Empire of the fifteenth century; and the peninsular Malays have always regarded the island as part of their Malay realm. Since the Second World War, Malaya¹ and Singapore have been militarily a single defence community. Even before it, military strategists had come to the realization that Singapore in the hands of an enemy would mortally threaten the mainland. General Yamashita showed in 1942, on the other hand, that he who conquered the peninsula would overwhelm the island. Politically, UMNO, the MNP, the MCP and the MIC were from the beginning pan-Malayan parties; and almost every ambitious Malayan and Singaporean political party after them has followed or aspired to this pan-Malayan pattern. Socially, the bulk of Singaporeans up to today regard themselves as the kith and kin of those of their racial stock across the causeway. This ethnic sense of social community was probably reciprocated by the majority of those on the mainland. In the period 1945-65, there were no travel or labour restrictions. Malaysians played dominant roles in much of Singapore life.² Singapore as a centre of university and Chinese education attracted and educated many from across the causeway. Economically, Malaya and Singapore shared the same currency; they were strongly interdependent. And up to the time of Malayan independence, there were a great many government departments whose jurisdictions were pan-Malayan. Despite all these unifying factors, however, the 'natural' merger between Singapore and Malaya as such has never been achieved. It is the aim of this chapter to examine why a United Malaya was not formed in the period 1954-61.

PERIOD 1: 1945-8

The development of the merger question in the fifteen years after the Second World War may be divided into three periods, from 1945 to early 1948; from then till 1954; and from 1954 to 1961. Its development in the first period may itself be analyzed in terms of three phases.

¹ In this chapter 'Malaya' will be used to refer to the territories of the Federation of Malaya, 'pan-Malaya' to these territories plus Singapore.

² At one point, practically the whole PAP cabinet save Lee Kuan Yew was made up of men born and/or bred in Malaya.

Subdued Criticism of Singapore's Separation: 1945 - December 1946

The initial division of pan-Malaya into two governmental units following the imposition of the British Military Administration (on 15 August 1945) caused no stir. The BMA was an interim regime pending the introduction of constitutional reforms and was regarded as such. The announcement of the Malayan Union scheme which envisaged Singapore's continued separation evoked more response. Up to March 1946, however, public opposition on this score was largely confined to newspapers such as the *Utusan Melayu*, the *Straits Times*, the *Singapore Free Press* and the *Malaya Tribune*, whose readership spanned the narrow Straits of Johore. It was only in the first week of March 1946 that the newly-formed Malaya Nationalist Party came out in public criticism.³ It was followed a week later by the even newer Malayan Democratic Union.⁴ The MNP argued for the inclusion of Singapore in the Malayan Union in a meeting it had with Edward Gent on 29 April 1946 (nearly a month after the Malayan Union had been inaugurated).⁵ A few days later, the MDU submitted memoranda to the Governors of Singapore and the Malayan Union in which the exclusion of the island was criticized.⁶

These feeble moves do not indicate disinterestedness on the part of the MDU and the MNP on the issue of merger. They are to be explained partly in terms of the other preoccupations of Malaysians in general and of political organizations of the left in particular in the period immediately following the British return. With few exceptions, everyone was engrossed in searching out a livelihood, a condition which limited the time and energies that could be devoted to political activity.⁷ A large segment of the radical left believed also that 'what the British did or did not do was only important tactically, not strategically. In our minds, the British were finished, and were only carrying out a holding measure in Malaya'.⁸ They and particu-

³The MNP, a weak, Indonesian-oriented and radical left-wing Malay party, was formed in Ipoh in October 1945. Its first president was Mokhtar U'din, an Indonesian member of the MCP and head of the Malay section of its 'Anti-Japanese-Union'. See G.P. Means, *Malaysian Politics* (London, 1970), p. 96.

⁴The MDU, a radical (Singapore) party of English-educated leftists was formed on 12 December 1945. For more on the MDU, see M.N. Sophe (ed.), *The Malayan Democratic Union* (Kuala Lumpur, 1970, mimeograph).

⁵*Malayan Daily News*, 2 May 1946. The main purpose of the meeting, however, was to discuss the MNP's memorandum on citizenship.

⁶*Malaya Tribune*, 4 May 1946.

⁷John Eber, who was to become the most dynamic leader of the MDU, had just emerged, for example, from internment during the Japanese occupation.

⁸Letter from Gerald de Cruz to the editor, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 1 No. 1, p. 123.

larly the MCP, therefore, concentrated on the task of organizing labour and speeding up the passing of colonialism and of organizing themselves so that they would be in a position to step into the shoes of the British when the imperial power left.⁹ It should also be noted that the MDU and MNP were still struggling to get off the ground.

The agitation for merger began in earnest only in December 1946 when the Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action was formed. It announced three major objectives: (i) a United Malaya inclusive of Singapore, (ii) responsible self-government through a fully-elected central legislature for the whole of Malaya, (iii) equal citizenship rights for those who made Malaya their permanent home and the object of their undivided loyalty.¹⁰ By this time, the British had abandoned the Malayan Union scheme and had worked out with UMNO and the Rulers a set of proposals for a federation from which Singapore was also excluded. From mid-December till the end of October 1947, a vociferous campaign was launched in support of a United Malaya and in opposition to the Federation of Malaya proposals.¹¹ On the left, the campaign was spearheaded by the MDU-led PMCJA and the MNP-led PUTERA.¹² On the right it was led more sedately by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the Malayan Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce. While opposition to 'partition' was pan-Malayan, it should be noted that the most enthusiastic advocates of merger tended to be Singaporean.

Commitment to Merger

The forces of the left (PMCJA-PUTERA and their constituent organizations) the Chinese Chambers of Commerce on the right and what might be called the 'third camp' (the diverse and non-cohesive group of newspapers, socio-political organizations like the three SCBA's, the Singapore

⁹ Stenson suggests that MCP leaders tended to believe that 'the labour struggle alone would be of sufficient intensity to drive the British, willingly or otherwise, from Malaya' - the first priority. M. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya* (London, 1970), p. 129.

¹⁰ While the demand for a United Malaya was almost invariably stated first in the Joint Council statements of its aims, it was for the most part not the over-riding priority. Stenson is probably correct when he states that 'Above all, the council emphasized the necessity for the holding of democratic elections.' *Ibid.* p. 129.

¹¹ Osborne is incorrect in stating that the issue of merger came into real prominence only after 1954 (Milton Osborne, *Singapore and Malaysia*, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper No. 53, 1964, p. 2). It should be noted, however, that no substantial analysis of the issue in the period 1945 to 1948 exists in secondary literature.

¹² While the MDU provided the leadership for the PMCJA (later AMCJA), its mass backing was provided by the Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions. On PMFTU's strong influence over labour on labour issues especially in Singapore, see Stenson, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-6.

Association, and certain big British business interests) advocated the idea of a United Malaya first because merger was seen to have financial-administrative benefits. In a United Malaya, the financial costs of having two separate administrations would not be incurred, and by avoiding duplication and bureaucratic encumbrances, it was also believed that merger would ensure greater administrative efficiency. On these two benefits, and probably only on these two, all three segments of the proponent set were agreed. These considerations were probably only peripheral to the socialist advocates of merger, however.

The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and elements in the Colony's third camp were further influenced by the belief that the island would not be financially viable on its own. They feared that for Singapore to be financially viable, the burden of taxation would have to be very onerous indeed. There was in addition the fear that a Malayan state not incorporating the island might develop its own ports — Penang, Port Swettenham and Lumut — thus depriving Singapore of its hinterland.

The PMCJA-PUTERA and the Chinese Chambers of Commerce saw certain political benefits in merger. PMCJA (to all intents and purposes a non-Malay alliance) and the Chinese Chambers believed that in a United Malaya, the political strength of the Chinese would be enhanced; the MNP and PUTERA probably believed that the inclusion of Singapore would strengthen the party and the Malay left in Malaya.¹³

The PMCJA-PUTERA probably also saw political-ideological benefits in a United Malaya. The merger of Singapore (which had the most developed labour unions and where the forces of the left were comparatively very strong) with the more conservative and politically less sophisticated mainland would strengthen the forces of socialism throughout pan-Malaya.

The MNP and PUTERA probably had one interest it did not share with its non-Malay collaborators on the left. That was the desire to safeguard the welfare and security of the Malays of Singapore. They believed that Singapore Malays would become a helpless minority on the island if merger was not effected.¹⁴

¹³ It was to strengthen the MNP that the party was purported to have shifted its headquarters from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore by the beginning of 1948 (*Utusan Melayu*, 3 January 1948). The MNP received most of its support from 'non-Malay Malaysians' i.e. those of Indonesian origin. The percentage of such 'Malaysians' out of the total 'Malaysian' population for Malaya as a whole was 12.8. The corresponding figure for Singapore was 37.66 per cent. (M.V. del Tufo, *Malaya — A Report on the 1947 Census of Population*, London, 1948, p. 73).

¹⁴ UMNO too was aware of this, but unlike the Malay left, it was more concerned with the prospect of Malays becoming a submerged minority in all of Malaya if Singapore was not kept out. According to the 1947 census, Chinese constituted 44.70 per cent., Malays 38.20 per cent., 'other Malaysians' 5.29 per cent. of the population of pan-Malaya as a whole (del Tufo, *op. cit.*, p. 40).

Merger, however, would not be without its costs. The leadership of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Singapore elements of the third camp were initially fearful that like Penang, Singapore would be deprived of its full free-port status if she were included in the Malayan Union. They, and some elements of the Singapore left, believed also that the development of democratic institutions on the island would be retarded if it was hitched to the 'backward' Malay States.

One further expected cost, but one which appeared to have influenced all the proponents of a United Malaya, was the fear that agitation for merger would anger the Malays and exacerbate racial antagonisms. This consideration probably gained great motivational force, however, only after the October 1947 hartal.

By the end of 1946, and despite perception of these costs, there was little doubt among the advocates of a United Malaya that commitment to merger was a profitable line of action. Nevertheless, commitment to it must be explained also in terms of several important 'irrational' or non-deliberative motivations. All the advocates were influenced, for example by the belief that the peoples of Singapore and Malaya were one people and should be associated in a single political entity. All the advocates of merger, and especially those on the left probably believed also that merger was a value in itself. While the force of this ideological commitment was to be stronger after 1954, merger was already becoming an integral tenet of pan-Malayan socialism by 1946. The strongly anti-colonial AMCJA-PUTERA also believed that the partition of pan-Malaya was part of the age-old imperial strategy of divide and rule (a supposition which was not without some foundation). To agitate for merger was to frustrate the British and to harm British interest. To a large extent, they were for merger because the British were against it. To the MNP, however, commitment to a United Malaya was probably also the outcome of the desire to frustrate UMNO (which was strongly committed to separation) as well as the British imperialists.

Since merger must have been of great overall value to the proponents of a United Malaya, it is surprising that they were not even more strongly committed to agitation for merger than they in fact were. This can be explained by at least three factors. First, all the advocates of a United Malaya had other equally important preoccupations. The concentration of political leadership among a few individuals coupled with the existence of many other important interests precluded single-minded agitation for merger. For most of 1945-8, the constitutional issue was less basic, as far as the leftist forces were concerned, than the struggle for independence. Once the British were thrown out, merger would be no problem. The Chambers appeared to have been more concerned about citizenship and Chinese representation in the Legislative Council than in the creation of a United Malaya. They, of course, had their personal business interests to attend to.

Second, for the time being, the advocates of merger had no great confidence in the practical possibility of achieving the political unification of

Singapore and the mainland. By mid-1947, the chances of success seemed bleak. By the end of the year, it appeared impossible.

Third, and paradoxically, what served to finally temper agitation to a very large extent was the belief on the one hand that *immediate* merger was impossible of attainment and the conviction on the other that in the longer run it was *inevitable*. It was incredible to the vast bulk of the advocates of a United Malaya, especially the Singapore proponents, that an island so closely linked in all respects with the rest of Malaya — the 'head' of the Malayan animal — could be severed for long from the body.¹⁵ British statements of policy and intention bolstered this belief. MacDonald very skilfully argued that 'So far as the British Government is concerned, they declared their readiness to see the two territories come together.' For the time being, he went on, merger was unacceptable to the Malays:

When the two new constitutions have got well started the question of Singapore being included in the Federation can be considered *next*.¹⁶

The *Singapore Free Press* began to talk in 1947 of merger in 1949. The argument for securing one major reform at a time was a persuasive one to many of the proponents of merger. Since a United Malaya seemed impractical for the present but inevitable in the longer run, it was that much easier after November 1947 to be complacent and languid. In the period January to the end of October 1947, however, the advocates of merger were far from being docile or inert.

Agitation for a United Malaya in 1947

The agitation for a United Malaya in 1947 was part and parcel of the campaign against the Federation proposals which sought among other things to continue the separation of Singapore. That campaign will only be briefly summarized here as it has been dealt with in some detail in Chapter III.

PMCJA-PUTERA agitated for a United Malaya and against the Federation proposals by organizing a whole series of mass rallies throughout pan-Malaya, by despatching telegrams to London, by issuing continuous public statements, writing and publishing articles and letters in the press, by boycotting the (Cheeseman) Consultative Committee, by posing a set of alternative proposals to the Federation scheme (the People's Constitutional Proposals), by setting up a News and Information Bureau on Malaya in London, by calling for a British parliamentary fact-finding mission and finally, by boycotting the 1 February 1948 inaugural celebrations and calling for a one-day strike on that date as a mark of sorrow.

¹⁵ They seemed to have been unaware that to the great majority of the conservative Malayan Malays, Singapore was a 'tail' which the Malayan animal could well do without.

¹⁶ *Malaya Tribune*, 22 October 1947. Italics mine.

The right-wing Chinese Chambers' campaign was more elitist in character.¹⁷ They were openly critical of the People's Constitution, refused to hold mass rallies and demonstrations, and were averse to being drawn into the left-wing PMCJA-PUTERA alliance. They submitted memoranda to the Consultative Committee, despatched telegrams, issued statements, organized hartals in Malacca and Ipoh and called for a Royal Commission for Malaya. The peak of the agitation was reached when the Chambers and PMCJA-PUTERA cooperated on the holding of a pan-Malayan hartal on 20 October 1947.

The impressive October hartal was the swan song of the campaign for a United Malaya and against the Federation of Malaya proposals. The demonstration of Chinese economic power increased the necessity, as far as the British were concerned, of ensuring a wide Malay base of political power which only UMNO could provide. It angered the British and UMNO and increased their determination to push the proposals through. When this became evident, the left changed their tactics and very markedly de-escalated the agitation. The Chinese Chambers began to move, slowly at first, but surely, towards the acceptance of a *fait accompli* and maximizing their interests within a new constitutional framework.

Even though the advocates of a United Malaya could have been more committed to campaigning specially for merger, their failure to achieve it cannot in the main be attributed to a lack of commitment and effort on their part. Possibly of greater importance was their deficiency in power.¹⁸ Extremely crucial was their inability to back their demands for a United Malaya with a mass movement. The Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions which could play havoc with the labour situation especially in Singapore, could not mobilize its labour support behind the merger issue to anywhere near the same extent.

Probably the most important factor explaining the failure to form a single pan-Malayan unified system, however, was the existence of unyielding opponents who had veto power. In the face of the intransigent British and UMNO rejection of merger, the advocates of a United Malaya could make no headway whatsoever.

PERIOD II: MARCH 1948 - FEBRUARY 1954

While the non-formation of a United Malaya in the period up to March 1948 cannot be attributed in the main to insufficient commitment to

¹⁷ Enthusiasm for merger was not uniform among the Chinese Chambers. The Singapore, Penang, Perak and Malacca Chambers were the most keen. The Selangor Chamber in its memorandum to the Cheeseman Committee did not even mention the issue of merger.

¹⁸ For a comprehensive analysis of their power, see Chapter III above.

merger, the non-formation of a single Malayan unified system inclusive of Singapore in the ensuing six and a half years was most directly a consequence of grossly inadequate policy commitment.

March 1948 is a landmark in the development of the merger question for in that month, the seven-month old Progressive Party of Singapore, a rightist party of Straits-born and parochial-minded personalities, won three of the six elected seats in the Singapore Legislative Council elections.¹⁹ It remained the dominant political party in Singapore until 1955.²⁰ By June 1948, the *Singapore Free Press* had to note with dismay that the 'most astonishing fact about the separation of Singapore... has been the growth of opinion in the colony in favour of it'.²¹ The Progressive Party became the most fervent champion of such opinion and gave the most articulate expression to this growing anti-merger sentiment. It was never to waver from its anti-merger attitude up to 1955.

The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, had for some time been reconciled to separation. The MDU, the most determined advocate of a United Malaya had forfeited its position as the most powerful party political force in Singapore when it boycotted the 1948 Singapore elections. It dissolved itself on 24 June 1948, less than a month after the communist guerilla insurrection began. There was no further advocacy of merger either in the Federation or Singapore.

In fact, in the two and a half year period up to the later part of 1950, the issue which had been a burning question in Singapore in 1947 was seldom, if at all, publicly mentioned. The matter was brought once more into the public gaze only at the end of September 1950 when the Political and Economic Committee of the Singapore Labour Party (SLP) publicly argued for immediate unification.²² With an eye towards the Singapore City and

¹⁹ It should be noted that up to 1955, the Singapore electorate was very small. In 1948, for example, only 22,387, roughly one-fifth of Singaporeans eligible to vote, bothered to register; of these, only 63 per cent. actually voted (Stenson, *op. cit.*, p. 179).

²⁰ In the 1951 elections, it won six of the nine elected Legislative Council seats. Because it was essentially pro-British, its influence was greater than its minority position in a legislature of twenty-two members would suggest.

²¹ Editorial, *Singapore Free Press*, 5 June 1948

²² The Singapore Labour Party, formed on 1 September 1948, was the chief opponent of the PP in the island-centred politics of Singapore for most of 1948-1954. Patterned on the British Labour Party, the SLP won three of the six seats in the 1951 Singapore City Council elections. In 1950, Lim Yew Hock, a powerful trade unionist, a nominated Legislative Councillor, and an ex-member of the PP, was elected president and P.M. Williams, secretary-general. The party suffered from the beginning from chronic factionalism. In mid-1952, the clash between the Lim and Williams cliques reached serious proportions. Later that year, Lim Yew Hock was expelled from the party. The SLP was never to recover from the turmoil of 1952 and went steadily downhill.

Legislative Council elections of 1951, the SLP's programme for 1950-1 called, among other things, for self-government for Singapore by 1954 and independence through merger with the Federation. Merger, however, became only a peripheral election issue, with the SLP on one side advocating merger and the Progressive Party on the other condemning the SLP for 'crying for a blind fusion with the Federation'.²³ Once the election was over, public talk of merger in Singapore once more receded into the background.

In mid-1951, the dim torch of merger was passed across the causeway to Dato Onn, who was, up to then, a strong opponent of a United Malaya. The period 1949 to 1951 saw his attempt to move from his position as the father of the Malays to the status of non-communal Malaysian statesman and father of Malaysian independence.²⁴ Over-confident of his power and influence, he pressed in the last quarter of 1951 for the complete opening of UMNO's membership to non-Malays and the conversion of UMNO into a 'United Malayan National Organization'. The UMNO Central Executive Committee backed him on 5 January 1951 but Onn came under heavy Malay criticism. On 5 June 1951, he threatened to form an Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) if UMNO refused to open its gates. The IMP would work for 'the merging of Singapore in this Independent State of Malaya'.²⁵ Onn had clearly moved too far too fast. A week later, he stated his decision 'to all intents and purposes' to break away from UMNO. On merger, he said, 'I am sure we can all agree that in the process of the evolution of these territories, Singapore — or is it the Federation? — will reunite.'²⁶

The IMP was formed on 16 September 1951. At its imposing inaugural meeting which was presided over by Tan Cheng Lock (President of the MCA), Dato Thuraisingam (Federal Member for Education and a close friend of Onn) stated amid cheers that 'an independent Malaya must include Singapore, and the Settlements of Penang and Malacca'.²⁷ For the time being, however, the IMP turned its attention to the impending Kuala Lumpur municipal elections of February 1952. As a result of the party's traumatic defeat in these elections, the subsequent post-mortem, and the attempt to build up IMP strength in the Federation, its initial idea of expansion into Singapore and the issue of merger were pushed into the background.²⁸

²³ *Straits Times*, 20 March 1951.

²⁴ In March 1951, Onn succeeded in getting UMNO to adopt a new slogan, 'Merdeka' (Independence), in place of 'Hidup Melayu' (Long Live the Malays).

²⁵ *Singapore Free Press*, 6 June 1951.

²⁶ *Straits Times*, 13 June 1951.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17 September 1951.

²⁸ For a lengthy analysis on Dato Onn's departure from UMNO, and the IMP, see

The flame of merger was to be re-lighted – but only just – by the Pan-Malayan Labour Party (PMLP). The PMLP, a confederation of the Singapore, Penang, Perak and Selangor Labour Parties was formed on 26 June 1952. It adopted a ten-point 'basic national programme' the first of which was 'to strive for the establishment of a United Independent State of Malaya' inclusive of Singapore. Again, in July 1953, at the PMLP's first annual conference in Kuala Lumpur, the party adopted a radical independence programme which called for development towards a sovereign, independent and democratic pan-Malayan state. Apart from such statements of sentiments, however, the PMLP did little else to really agitate for or propagate the idea of a United Malaya. Like all other parties of the period, it was preoccupied with local municipal elections which demanded emphasis on local issues, not on great national questions.

The non-formation of a United Malaya in the period March 1948–February 1954 may be directly attributed to the fact that there was never anything more than merely weak commitment to the establishment of a single pan-Malayan unified system. The SLP, the IMP, the PMLP all proclaimed their attitudes but never actively agitated for merger. Two questions logically follow. First, why did they favour the coming together of Singapore and the Federation at all? Second, why was their commitment so limited?

It may not be far from the truth to assert that SLP, IMP and PMLP commitment to merger was primarily due to non-deliberative or 'irrational' motivations, several of which had influenced most of the previous advocates of merger and were to influence most of subsequent proponents. There was the belief that Singapore was a part of Malaya, and that Singaporeans and other Malaysians should be associated together in one political unit. There was commitment to merger as an end in itself. The advocates of a United Malaya in this period were probably also affected by another factor: political fashion. Just as it was fashionable for all progressive forward-looking leaders in Malaya to talk and demand self-government or independence (especially after 1951), it was fashionable for many self-respecting anti-colonial Malayan nationalists to demand merger.

Notwithstanding these non-deliberative motivations, it seems clear that at no time did the policy of merger possess great subjective value. The idea of a United Malaya was not a popular one with the majority of Singapore's (limited) electorate. IMP and PMLP must have known that merger was anathema to the vast majority of the politically-mobilized Malays in the Federation.

Three other factors probably contributed to causing only weak SLP, IMP and PMLP commitment. Possibly the most important of these was the

R.K. Vasil, *Politics in a Plural Society* (Singapore, 1971) chapter II, especially pp. 37–82.

widespread belief that there was no immediate prospect of merger. In addition, commitment to a United Malaya evoked no significant societal reinforcement: it received a very lukewarm response from the public. Third, as in 1945-8, the proponents of merger in the period of parochial politics had other preoccupations. The confinement of party politics to local or parochial elections called for concentration on local issues. In addition, the IMP and the PMLP were in their infancy, while the SLP suffered from chronic internal squabbles and factionalism.

In the period March 1948-November 1954, there was never a time when merger appeared even likely. This was because there never arose from any quarter a strong enough commitment to the formation of a United Malaya. In view of the vociferous agitation for unity emanating predominantly from Singapore in the immediate post-war period and after 1954, it is fascinating to examine why there was no comparable agitation in the years between, indeed why there was *opposition* to merger from the Progressive Party and probably the majority of the (limited) Singapore electorate.

The fact was that the PP and probably the great majority of politically-interested Singaporeans saw major benefits in continued separation. The unificationist of 1945-8 had believed that a separated Singapore would be unable to financially sustain its administration. The advent and peculiar development of the communist insurrection (which ravaged the mainland but left Singapore relatively untouched) altered the whole picture. Singapore emerged with budget surpluses, the Federation with thumping deficits. It was believed that in a United Malaya, Singapore's already substantial financial assistance to the mainland would cease to be voluntary and would become mandatory — and greater in volume. Second, the Penang secession movement of 1948-9 had raised apprehensions regarding the trading position and interests of Singapore if she were to join the Federation. Third, the Progressives and probably the majority of politically-aware Singaporeans feared that, as had happened in Penang, merger would retard the Colony's housing, social welfare, and educational development. Possibly more important, and with Penang again as the major reference point, they believed that becoming chained to the Federation would retard their political development towards greater public participation in government.²⁹

Many politically-interested Singaporeans, especially the non-Malay Straits-born and their champion, the PP, also took pride in the non-communal politics of the Colony. They feared that merger would result in the development of Singaporean politics along the communal lines of the Federation. In addition, the Singaporean opponents of merger also looked askance at the communal and racial nature of the constitution, government

²⁹ T.W. Ong, President of the Singapore SCBA, summarized these views and the sentiments behind them well when he said, 'we are at least one generation ahead of the Federation socially, culturally and politically' (*Straits Times*, 12 April 1954).

and administration of the Federation. They feared that in a United Malaya they would suffer from 'discriminatory practices'.³⁰

Merger was also unattractive to them because it was believed that in a United Malaya, Singapore would lose its unique identity, an important consideration in view of the great pride in being Singaporean (and therefore of being superior to the northern country cousins). This desire to maintain the Colony's Singaporean identity was strengthened by the belief that the Federation had become a Malay State. Continued separation would, as far as the PP and the anglophile Straits-born were concerned, also ensure the Colony's British status.

Separation would additionally protect Singapore from the dictates of Malay nationalism and the spectre of Malay rule of which the Penang separatists had expressed great apprehensions. John Laycock, a leader of the PP strongly argued that 'We do not want to be ruled by Malays any more than they want to be ruled by the Chinese.'³¹

Singapore throughout the Emergency remained relatively free from guerilla violence. Many of the opponents of merger apparently associated the Colony's peace with its separation and believed that by joining the Federation they could be inviting the spread of political violence to the island.

Further, it was believed that as part of a wider political system, Singapore's power position and standing would be decreased. The island's 'top dog' mentality had been fostered for a century. It lay behind the Colony's strong disinclination towards joining the Federation as a mere unit like Penang or Malacca even long after the period of parochial politics. It was possibly the strongest motivation for the PP's advocacy of a 'Confederation of Malaysia' (made up of the island, the British territories of Borneo and the Federation) with Singapore at the centre as capital.³²

One very important consideration affected the PP and its Straits-born supporters exclusively. The Progressives knew full well that only in a separated Singapore could they have political power.

As opposed to these major benefits of continued separation, there were few factors which worked in the other direction. A sizeable segment of the local non-European element of the PP and the Singapore electorate did have a sense of *social* community with the people across the causeway, especially with those in Penang and Malacca. But their sense of social community did not lead to any significant feeling that it was natural and proper that they should all be members of a single political entity. There was no prospect of independence in the near future to turn their minds to the consideration of a viable self-governing Singapore. Unpropelled by any

³⁰What this meant in effect was that they preferred the societal discrimination of Singapore to the governmental discrimination of the Federation.

³¹*Singapore Free Press*, 25 August 1953.

³²Interview with T.W. Ong.

dogmatic anti-colonialism, and unlike the socialists of the SLP, they saw no dastardly imperialist plot of 'divide and rule' in the separation of Singapore. The PP and Straits-born community it led were very pro-British. They were after all the political beneficiaries of the colonial regime.

PERIOD III: 1954 - DECEMBER 1960

This analysis of the grounds for opposition to merger on the part of the PP and a sizeable proportion of politically-aware Singaporeans is interesting in view of the fact that by the beginning of 1955, every political party in Singapore (including the PP) had espoused the merger cause. Singaporeans had imagined in the period of largely parochial preoccupations that fair and wealthy Singapore was being wooed by Federation politicians (Tan Cheng Lock, Dato Onn, Dato Thuraisingam, Heah Joo Seang). In the period 1955 to 1960, there was little doubt that it was Singapore's politicians who were banging rather loudly on the Federation door.

This change in Singapore's political attitude and behaviour from being the wooed to becoming the most persistent of suitors was initially the consequence of constitutional, political and economic factors within Singapore itself. It may be traced to February 1954 when the Report of the Rendel Commission was published.³³

The Commission's recommendation of automatic electoral registration meant that for the first time Singapore would have a mass electorate.³⁴ The search for new appeals potentially possessing mass appeal led Singapore's existing and emergent political elite to the related questions of colonialism, self-government, independence *and* merger. The leap towards self-rule envisaged in the Rendel Report also turned their minds towards the next logical step, independence and, therefore, merger;³⁵ for the commonsense and almost universal view was that the tiny island of Singapore could never attain a viable independence if it stood on its own.

The prospect of general elections by April 1955 at the latest encouraged the resurgence of the Singapore left, that segment of the political spectrum which had favoured merger since 1946. The formation of the Singapore Labour Front (SLF) (in August 1954) and of the more leftist PAP (three months later) transformed merger into an important political issue because

³³ The Rendel Commission was set up on 21 July 1953 to submit recommendations for the revision of Singapore's Constitution. It is to be noted that it was not so much a response to public clamour as an attempt to keep one step ahead of political demands. The Rendel Constitution was promulgated on 8 February 1955.

³⁴ Automatic registration would increase the electorate five-fold, from the 1951 figure of 48,144 to an estimated 280,000.

³⁵ The Report called for an elected majority in the legislature and a Council of Ministers with an elected Chief Minister.

both parties were very committed to the concept of an independent United Malaya and to making it a political issue. Not willing to take an 'unprogressive' stand against merger, their main opponents tried to steal their thunder by also coming out in favour of a United Malaya.

The year 1954 was also one in which very serious study was made, as part of Singapore's Master Plan, of the problem of employment, or rather, unemployment. The Report of the Industrial Resources Study Group dated September 1954 sombrely concluded: 'by 1972 it is possible that the number of unemployed and their dependents may be between 200,000 and 450,000 depending on the action taken by the Government.'³⁶ 'The best possible solution', the Report continued, was 'the encouragement of the manufacturing industry.'³⁷ That manufacturing industry required the Federation market.

The Advocates of Merger and Their Motivations

By the time of the Singapore Legislative Council elections of 2 April 1955, all of Singapore's political parties (the Labour Front, the PAP, the PP, the SLP, the Democratic Party,³⁸ Singapore UMNO, Singapore MCA, the Singapore Malay Union, Singapore Party Rakyat and Singapore PMIP) had become proponents of a United Malaya.³⁹ With fluctuating intensities, all of them were to remain pro-merger throughout the period 1954-61.

Their commitment to the concept of a United Malaya is to be explained first in terms of their desire to free Singapore from British rule.⁴⁰ The motivating strength of the 'independence through merger' argument depended to a large extent, however, on how much the objective of independence was valued. To the Progressive Party, the Democratic Party and the Liberal Socialist Party,⁴¹ other considerations probably had greater motivational force.

³⁶ Singapore, *Master Plan* (Singapore, 1955), p. 55.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁸ The Democratic Party was a right-of-centre party which championed Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Chinese interests. It was formed in February 1955 and drew a great deal of support away from the PP.

³⁹ Several mainland parties also called for merger although their commitment to it was generally nowhere as strong as their Singapore counterparts: the Malayan MCA (with Tan Cheng Lock as its president until 1958), the Labour Party of Malaya, the national Party Rakyat, the MIC, and PMIP. At the beginning, it is probable that active support for merger in Singapore was very largely an elitist phenomenon. By 1958, however, it is likely that a significant proportion of the masses had come to strongly favour merger — due to no insignificant extent to the efforts of the PAP.

⁴⁰ Comments on motivations refer to the whole 1955-60 period unless otherwise indicated.

⁴¹ The PP and the Democratic Party merged in 1956 to form the Liberal Socialist Party.

A factor which was probably more uniform in its motivational impact on all of Singapore's political parties was the apparent belief that merger was potentially or actually an extremely popular issue with the island's electorate. This is indicated by the fact that devotion to pan-Malayan political unity was paraded and became most vociferous whenever elections approached. It was very dramatically demonstrated in the Kallang by-election of mid-1958.⁴² The Singaporean advocates of a United Malaya (unlike their Federation counterparts) probably saw their advocacy of merger as a means of increasing their public support and, therefore, their political strength in the island's politics.⁴³

A third major benefit of merger perceived by all Singapore parties revolved around the desire to make Kuala Lumpur more responsive to Singapore's interests, especially her economic interests. It is to be noted that by July 1955, the Federation, Singapore's main market, had already begun to erect tariff barriers to protect its own secondary industries. The *Straits Times* wrote in consternation that 'the Federation is hitting Singapore as hardly as though a trade war had been declared' at a time when unemployment had become 'the greatest shadow hanging over Singapore'.⁴⁴

The Singapore unificationists believed also that political merger would enhance the chances of creating a common market between Singapore and the Federation.⁴⁵ These considerations were not unconnected with the desire to alleviate Singapore's unemployment problem, a problem which was seen to threaten the whole socio-political fabric of her society.

There were other more exclusive or sectarian benefits associated with

⁴²The main line put forward by the SLF was this: in Lim Yew Hock's words, 'Singapore's only chance for merger depends on a Labour Front victory.... If you want merger vote for the Labour Front' (*Straits Times*, 12 July 1958). Lee Kuan Yew retorted: 'Tunku Abdul Rahman did not say that. If he did, we [the PAP] would be the first to vote the Labour Front in' (*Sunday Times*, 13 July 1958). The way to achieve merger, Lee argued, was to show the Federation that Singapore's Chinese were not communal. The way to show that was to vote for the PAP's Malay candidate. Marshall, then leader of the Workers Party, pledged that if the Tunku was prepared 'to enter into a binding agreement to incorporate Singapore as a State in the Federation on 31 August 1959, the people of Singapore will return to the Assembly at the next election every man nominated by him' (*Straits Times*, 14 July 1958).

⁴³In the Federation, merger never became a significant election issue.

⁴⁴Editorial, *Straits Times*, 2 July 1955.

⁴⁵This consideration gained strength, however, only after 1955 when the Federation's tariffs began to hit Singapore with some force. Its influence increased with the fear of a tariff war between her and the Federation, with the increasing importance of the secondary-industrial sector of the island's economy, and the decreasing importance to Singapore's economy of her entrepôt trade pursuant to the increased economic nationalism of her South-East Asian neighbours. Singapore's entrepôt trade stagnated at roughly the 1955 level. In 1959, she lost two-thirds of her exports to Indonesia as a result of Djakarta policy (Editorial, *Straits Times*, 7 January 1960).

merger. The SLP and the PAP, for example, believed that a mercantile and tiny island could not, on its own, be a truly socialist state. For the PAP, merger would also enhance its prospects for political expansion throughout Malaya.⁴⁶ The Singapore right, centre and a great deal of moderate leftist opinion hoped that merger would result in increased political stability in Singapore.

The spectacular growth of political upheaval in Singapore may be dated from 12 May 1955 when a strike by employees of a bus company, backed by students from Chinese middle schools, erupted into a riot in which four lost their lives. In the October riot of the succeeding year, at least fifteen people were killed. Whereas previously the Federation had been regarded as a country torn by strife and plagued by political instability, the reverse was now the situation. By 1958, the guerilla insurrection in the Federation was virtually over. In contrast, communist subversion in Singapore was seen to be increasing in strength and effectiveness. The Singapore centre and right wanted the political stability which could be provided by the tough and strongly anti-communist government in Kuala Lumpur. They also wanted the fruits of political stability, renewed confidence in Singapore's economic future and prosperity and an optimistic business atmosphere. They were joined in this by the SLF government and then by the moderate wing of the PAP after 1959. At the same time the Malays in Singapore saw in merger the opportunity for them to improve their economic, social, cultural and political position.

These major benefits connected with merger were not outweighed by its potential costs. The Singapore advocates of a United Malaya were aware that merger could possibly entail the loss of Singapore's free-port status. Singapore could lose her distinct identity and local autonomy by becoming part of a larger state.⁴⁷ The non-Malays of Singapore strongly disliked the governmental system of discrimination operative in the Federation. Many non-Malay Singaporeans and an element of the island's Malays disliked also the idea of rule from Kuala Lumpur which in their eyes meant more or less feudal rule. Another important potential cost of merger was financial. The Federation government to be formed after the federal elections in July 1955 was expected to be 'virtually bankrupt'.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ This probably became a major PAP motivation, however, only after 1958.

⁴⁷ By 1955, Singapore had, for example, introduced free primary school education in the English stream.

⁴⁸ *Malay Mail*, 21 April 1955. The Singaporean fear of being milked financially by the Federation that had been a major motivation for opposition to merger in the period of parochial politics remained. But its motivating force lessened over time with the growing prosperity of the Federation and the ever-increasing strength of its governmental finance. Indeed, after the Federation's independence, Singapore found that it had to increase its taxation while the Federation tried to decrease it.

Had the Singaporean advocates of merger believed that all these costs would in fact follow union, many of them would probably have opposed it and almost all would have altered their degree of commitment to merger. The costliness of 'coming together' depended, however, not on merger as such but on the form which the union of the two territories would take. While most of the Federation advocates of merger assumed that Singapore should *come into* the Federation and become just another ordinary unit in a twelve-state federation, most of the Singapore proponents initially and automatically supposed that the Federation and Singapore would '*come together*' in a *partnership*.⁴⁹ In a partnership, Singapore could retain a large measure of self-government, develop its own social and welfare programmes, retain its free-port, refrain from accepting the system of Malay privileges and so on. In a partnership, not all the potential costs of merger need be borne.

The commitment of Singapore's political parties to merger was to a very large extent, though not exclusively, a result of the weighing of costs and benefits. Non-deliberative and largely unconscious motivations for merger did exist, and they were at least three. Most of the advocates of union had come to believe that Singaporeans and the people of the Federation being one people, they should be politically affiliated within one politically-unified system. To a large section of the unificationists also, especially to those on the left, merger had become, like independence, a value in itself. Third, and especially with reference to the sizeable proportion of socialists and other fervent nationalists in Singapore, advocacy of merger was regarded as an essential part of anti-colonialism. They were to persist in believing that to propose merger was to be anti-colonial even after it became clear that the main opponent of merger was not the colonial government in Westminster but the nationalist government in Kuala Lumpur.

The Opposition to Merger

In the period 1954 to 1961, the crucial opponent of a United Malaya was UMNO led by Tunku Abdul Rahman.⁵⁰ Its opposition constituted a veto in the three years before independence because the British authorities in Malaya refused to countenance merger in the face of its rejection of a United Malaya,⁵¹ and after August 1957, because UMNO became the dominant partner in the Federation Government.

⁴⁹ Whereas the Federation thought of merger in terms of adoption, most of Singapore saw it as a marriage, a marriage, furthermore, of equals.

⁵⁰ When referring to the UMNO position we refer to the majority opinion. There was a small minority which favoured merger, the Singapore branch of UMNO for example. The Tunku and UMNO were to remain strongly opposed to the merger of Singapore with the Federation as such even after 1960.

⁵¹ The British Government appears to have been moderately opposed to immediate

The causes of the Tunku's and UMNO's commitment to opposition are to be sought mainly in their perceptions regarding the costs and benefits of merger. It was believed, in the first instance, that a United Malaya would gravely threaten the Malay sense of security. In such a state, the Malays would be numerically outnumbered by the Chinese and significantly outnumbered by the non-Malays.⁵² Such was the Malay sense of ethnic insecurity that in their minds being outnumbered was largely synonymous with being overwhelmed.

Second, the incorporation of a territory so predominantly Chinese in population and attitude would threaten the privileged position of the Malays in Malaya. The spectacle of Singapore politicians pandering to the island's largely Chinese electorate did nothing to assuage this fear. And it became more intense because in the period leading to independence especially, but also even after *merdeka*, powerful elements within the Federation itself were demanding *jus soli* and very liberal citizenship provisions for the non-Malays, equality in the fields of education and land ownership, restrictions on and even the abolition of Malay privileges altogether.

The inclusion of a Chinese Singapore and over a million Chinese was seen to also threaten the Malay or Malay-based identity of *Persekutuan Tanah Melayu*. The Malay fears on this score were heightened by what were seen as attempts from within the Federation to sinocize the State. Powerful elements in the Chinese community, often including sections of the MCA itself, were clamouring for multi-lingualism in the legislature, for Chinese as an official language and for a better deal for Chinese schools.

As important, possibly more important, than any other factor in as far as UMNO and the Tunku were concerned, was the fear that the incorporation of a million Chinese would immediately threaten and ultimately abolish Malay political dominance and power. For ultimately, the majority of the electorate would be non-Malays.

In as far as UMNO interests were concerned, any marked increase in the number of Chinese electors would of course be prejudicial to its dominant position in Malayan politics, in the Alliance and in its relations with the MCA. Tunku Abdul Rahman's and UMNO's attitude and behaviour on the merger question must also be viewed in the context of Malay politics and their Malay power base. The majority of politically-aware Malays were opposed or unsympathetic to merger. UMNO, constantly under attack

merger between 1954-9 — although it was not unsympathetic to the idea of merger in the future. It apparently began to change its mind during 1959. In any case, Whitehall remained largely aloof on the merger question for most of 1954-61.

⁵²In 1957, 75 per cent. of Singapore's 1,446,000 were Chinese and only 13.5 per cent. were 'Malaysians'. In a United Malaya, 'Malaysians' (Malays, Indonesian immigrants and the aborigines) would amount to 43 per cent. of the population, Chinese 44.3 per cent., non-Malays as a whole, 57 per cent. In the Federation, 'Malaysians' constituted 49.8 per cent. and Chinese 37.2 per cent.

from Party Negara for selling out to the MCA and the Chinese, was not likely to weaken its Malay support by being anything but strongly opposed to the entry of Chinese Singapore. The Tunku in fact attacked the PMIP in the 1955 Federal elections for criticizing UMNO's collaboration with the MCA while at the same time urging for merger with a Chinese state.

At least three other benefits were probably associated with opposition to merger. First, Singapore after 1955 quickly became a hotbed of socialism, communist subversion and political instability. Whereas in the period of parochial politics the Straits of Johore had been regarded by Singapore as a *cordon sanitaire* insulating the island from the spread of the Federation's turmoil and racial politics, now a great many in the Federation saw it as a barrier preventing the northward spread of the chronic Singapore *malaise*. Second, the Tunku, UMNO and the elected Federal Government felt that they had enough problems on their hands without taking on Singapore's. Merger would not only increase the problems that a young (and still unconfident) government would have to tackle. Before August 1957, it would have retarded and complicated the Federation's move towards independence. The Tunku believed that he travelled fastest who travelled alone. Merger would have meant re-negotiating the terms of reference of the Reid Commission, convincing Singapore to accept the sultanate system, Malay as the national language, the Federation's citizenship laws and so on, and persuading the British at that juncture to give up Singapore, its military bastion in the Far East.

Compared with all these benefits of opposition, it was difficult to see what benefits lay in supporting merger.⁵³ Very interesting from the viewpoint of the motivations for Malaysia later on, Singapore posed no great security threat to the Federation for the British controlled her internal security, foreign policy, and defence. The establishment in 1959 of the Internal Security Council in which the Federation had a casting vote made certain that she would have the necessary control over Singapore's internal security. It served more than any other factor to make merger appear unnecessary from the Federation viewpoint.⁵⁴ And at each point in the deve-

⁵³ It is worth noting that the almost unconscious assumptions and sentiments which made merger attractive to the majority of the Singapore proponents did not significantly exist with regard to the mainland UMNO and the Tunku. While there was some feeling that the people on both sides of the causeway were very similar in some ways, they believed that taken as a whole, the populations of Singapore and the Federation were qualitatively different in many crucial respects. Certainly there was no implicit or dogmatic belief in the idea that they should all be brought together under the same political roof. Merger was not valued as an end in itself. Nor was commitment to merger regarded as an essential element of anti-colonialism or nationalism.

⁵⁴ This view was openly articulated by the Tunku in Canberra in November 1959 (*Malay Mail*, 10 November 1959). Dr. Toh Chin Chye, Chairman of the PAP, had noted in the Legislative Assembly that the ISC was 'competent to make executive

lopment of the merger question, the Tunku knew that he had a whole array of reasonable justifications which could be used to defend his and UMNO's stand.

Development of the Campaign for Merger: 1954-60

The development of the campaign for merger in the period February 1954 to December 1960 may be divided into three stages. Focusing on the Singapore advocates of merger, the period 1954 to December 1955 was a time of great optimism and little realism, with Singapore believing that only the British guardian was standing in the way of marriage to the Federation ward. The succeeding five or so months was a period of greater realism and acceptance of the fact that merger was impracticable for the time being. The four and a half years after June 1956 was characterized by dogged wooing by word and deed to overcome the Federation's suspicions and fears.

SUB-PERIODS

1. The Period of Great Optimism and Little Realism: 1954 – December 1955

The great optimism and little realism of the period 1954 to December 1955 was to a large extent based upon implicit assumptions regarding the future development of politics in Malaya. It was widely assumed by Singapore's anti-British elite that the anti-colonial parties in Singapore and the Federation were organizations which were and would act as part of an integrated national movement of liberation.⁵⁵ Although Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tan Cheng Lock had been conspicuous at the inauguration of the PAP,⁵⁶ and UMNO and MCA were both pan-Malayan political parties, this was not an accurate supposition. It was a mistake to assume that the anti-colonial struggle in Singapore and the Federation would be carried out within a pan-Malayan context and that the ending of colonial rule would automatically bring about the emergence of a United Malaya. Since independence was initially regarded as imminent (as it indeed was for the Federation) merger was optimistically thought to be around the corner. Tunku Abdul Rahman

decisions for the maintenance of internal security in Singapore and any such decision which has been communicated to the Singapore Government must be given immediate effect' (*Straits Echo*, 15 October 1959).

⁵⁵ See 'A New Political Party is Born' by a founder member of the PAP in *Sunday Mail*, 12 February 1961.

⁵⁶ On that occasion, it should be noted, the Tunku suggested that if the PAP's stand on merger had wider currency, attaining that aim might not be as difficult as observers imagined (Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 4). He also pledged UMNO support for the new party (*Straits Times*, 22 November 1954).

and UMNO's opposition to merger was to ensure, however, that the two units would progress toward self-government separately while British policy was to make certain that the Federation would attain independence first. There was lack of realism in another direction also in that it was assumed that the Tunku and UMNO would not reject merger.

The Merger Issue During Singapore's Election Campaign, January – April 1955

By the end of 1954, the SLF and the PAP, which were strongly committed to merger, had arrived on the Singapore political scene; but the issue of merger came into real public debate only during the Singapore Legislative Assembly election campaign of 1955. The first broadsides came from the then leading party, the PP, and its president, C.C. Tan. On 23 January 1955, in a statement of new PP policy and attitudes towards merger, Tan argued that before Singapore could expect complete independence, the question of her relationship with the Federation must be settled; he called for 'an eventual tie-up'.⁵⁷ However, Tan opposed immediate merger, declared that when the time came the 'two countries... should meet as equals....' and argued that in the meantime politicians should refrain from interfering in each other's affairs.⁵⁸ Tan Cheng Lock,⁵⁹ President of the MCA, and K.L. Devaser,⁶⁰ President of the MIC, came out in immediate support of merger. By comparison, Tunku Abdul Rahman was, to say the least, unenthusiastic. 'The question of merger', he noted, 'is still a very long way off and nothing much can be done about it until Singapore and the Federation achieve independence.'⁶¹

The Tunku's 'NO' did not stop Singaporean advocacy of unification. On 6 February 1955, a more forceful advocacy of merger than C.C. Tan's was made by Lim Yew Hock of the SLF. 'To my mind', he stated, 'what is more important [than the issue of self-government or independence] is the necessity of bringing the two territories into a coherent whole.' Independence, he argued, would automatically follow merger. While Lim talked of a 'United States of Malaya' and a 'Federal Legislature', he also talked of a marriage of 'equal partners', and called for a system in which 'each partner can be assured of its own fiscal policy and the control of its own internal affairs'.⁶² The President of the SLF, David Marshall, was more flam-

⁵⁷ *Straits Times*, 24 January 1955. The PP's 'eventual' may be taken to mean some time near 1963, its target date for Singaporean independence.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24 January 1955.

⁵⁹ *Straits Times*, 15 January 1955.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 16 January 1955.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 26 January 1955. Italics mine.

⁶² *Straits Echo*, 7 February 1955. Italics mine.

boyant in approach. He predicted that 'there will be a union of the two territories within three years.... From the information I gathered in London recently', he declared, 'I am satisfied that it is in the British Government's policy that Malaya and Singapore should be united.'⁶³

*The Merger Issue in the Period of Post-Election Euphoria,
April - July 1955*

The Singapore election campaign of early 1955 was the first time in the history of the Malaysia region that merger became a prominent electoral issue. Every major political party in the Colony declared its commitment to merger. The SLF, the political party most strongly committed to the concept of a United Malaya (with the exception of the PAP) emerged to its own surprise⁶⁴ on 2 April with the largest number of seats. Marshall was summoned to form the government. The Labour Front decided to form a coalition government with the UMNO-MCA-Malay Union Alliance in order, it said, to broaden the basis of government 'and facilitate ultimate union with the Federation'.⁶⁵ For the first time in the region, merger had a government as an advocate. The prediction of the head of that government appeared to be on the way to fulfilment.

The SLF's euphoria was markedly undermined by student riots which broke out in Singapore six weeks after its electoral victory and by its inability to handle them. Its optimism was deflated further by Tunku Abdul Rahman's statement in mid-July 1955 to the effect that the Alliance was not at present thinking in terms of a union between the Federation and Singapore.

*The Merger Issue After the Malayan Elections
August - December 1955*

After the first Federation Legislative Council elections of 21 July 1955 (in which the Alliance won fifty-one out of fifty-two seats) the SLF initiated discussions on merger and Singapore-Federation relations in general. After two meetings with Marshall in early August, the Tunku stated that he saw no prospect of merger in the near future.⁶⁶ The PP ridiculed the Front for begging for merger and being snubbed,⁶⁷ and turned once again to its alternative and nebulous concept of a 'Confederation of Malaysia'.

⁶³ *Straits Times*, 5 March 1955.

⁶⁴ Interview with David Marshall.

⁶⁵ *Straits Times*, 6 April 1955.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6 August 1955. Indeed, during the Tunku's two-day talks with the Colonial Secretary, Lennox-Boyd, in Kuala Lumpur some two weeks later, the subject of merger was not even broached.

⁶⁷ Progressive Party, *Newsletter*, No. 32 (7 September 1955).

The SLF continued to refuse to face up to the Tunku's adamant rejection of merger. In attempting to achieve merger, however, the party was in a dilemma. It believed that the way to bring it about was to win the Tunku over to its cause and that the way to do this was to create interpersonal goodwill and trust and to cooperate as fully with the Federation as possible. An uncooperative Singapore would not be an acceptable *partner*. Yet the existence of interpersonal goodwill and trust and inter-territorial cooperation provided no inducement to even contemplating change. Indeed from Kuala Lumpur's viewpoint it was an argument for not altering the *status quo*. There was no reason to do so.

The wooing went on regardless however. On Christmas day 1955, the Tunku changed his method of saying 'no' by saying 'yes'. Whereas previously he had stated that merger had to come after Singaporean independence, he now argued for merger on the basis of the island's incorporation as an ordinary unit on the same terms as the other federal units, a condition which Singapore found unacceptable. The PP, still a major force in Singapore politics⁶⁸ angrily argued that 'We will join the Federation only as an *equal partner* and we will resist vigorously any attempt by anyone to sell Singapore to the Federation.'⁶⁹ Marshall flew to Kuala Lumpur to propose and apparently argue for a confederation.⁷⁰ He did not succeed.

2. The Period of Greater Realism, January – June 1956

January to June 1956 was a period of greater realism. Singapore was to slowly realize what had been plain by mid-1955, that the path to a United Malaya lay not in fighting the British but in convincing Kuala Lumpur. The Colony recognized that the Federation would not allow the merger question to impede or complicate its own move towards *merdeka*, it also could no longer assume that merger would be on the basis of equal partnership.

One fact has not emerged sufficiently from the literature on the subject of merger in the post-1954 period. This was the Tunku's repeated offer of

⁶⁸ It is to be noted that in Singapore's Legislative Assembly elections of 1955, the PP won 24.8 per cent. of votes cast i.e., only 2.2 per cent. less than the Labour Front. The PP would probably have become the first elected government of Singapore if not for the fact that the Democratic Party robbed it of support it would otherwise have had. The DP won 20.6 per cent. It was in order to prevent the splitting of their votes that the PP and DP merged into the Liberal Socialist Party in 1956. It is important to note that the PAP contested only four seats and polled 8.7 per cent. of the votes in 1955. The parties of the right, the PP, the DP, and the Alliance polled 53.8 per cent. (Pang Cheng Lian, *Singapore's People's Action Party*, Singapore, 1971, p. 79).

⁶⁹ *Singapore Standard*, 28 December 1955. Italics mine. Two days later it announced its opposition to 'annexation' (*ibid.*, 30 December 1955).

⁷⁰ Editorial, *Straits Times*, 22 January 1956.

merger on the basis of Singapore's entry as a federal unit like the other states of the Federation. On 22 January, while in London for the Merdeka talks, he once again affirmed that merger on the basis of equality was impossible but reiterated that he would 'welcome them [Singapore] however as a unit... so that we could have control in the affairs of Singapore, especially subversive activities now being carried on there'.⁷¹ If the SLF had accepted unit status, it is not impossible that the Tunku might have been obliged to accept merger. This was never put to the test. 'We seek maximum local autonomy with maximum representation', Marshall proclaimed.⁷² On 3 March 1956, however, he and his deputy, Lim Yew Hock, flew to Kuala Lumpur for another round of discussions on merger.⁷³ The chances of agreement were very slim. Marshall's unwillingness apparently to accept Singapore's incorporation as an ordinary unit doomed it to failure from the start.⁷⁴ The Tunku sweetened the pill by stating that merger would be desirable. At the same time, he argued that in order not to impede the Federation's progress towards independence, moves towards the goal of a United Malaya should wait until the Reid Constitutional Commission's work on the Constitution of an independent Malaya had been completed. He received a promise from Marshall not to bring up the issue of merger at the Singapore constitutional conference scheduled for May 1956.⁷⁵

In statements in March and April, Tunku Abdul Rahman showed no signs of weakening in his stand on merger. Then, on 15 May 1956, Singapore's constitutional talks in London broke down dramatically (on the question of internal security). In what was probably a spontaneous outburst of compassion for the disappointment of fellow nationalists, the Tunku announced that he would welcome Singapore into the Federation as a unit like Penang or Malacca. He declared that he had repeatedly made this offer to Mr. Marshall and other Singapore leaders. 'I personally think that Singapore should come in It is now up to Mr. Marshall to act.'⁷⁶ Haji Mustapha Albakri, the Keeper of the Rulers Seal, indicated that the Malay Rulers would give 'every consideration' to any Singapore proposal

⁷¹ *Singapore Free Press*, 23 January 1956. The Democratic and Progressive Parties immediately issued a joint statement declaring that membership as a unit was 'too high a price to pay' (*Straits Echo*, 24 January 1956). Even Lee Kuan Yew only went so far as to say that Singapore could not expect to become an *equal partner*.

⁷² *Straits Times*, 1 March 1956.

⁷³ Lee Kuan Yew also arrived on the same day for talks with the Tunku.

⁷⁴ *Malay Mail*, 3 March 1956.

⁷⁵ *Sunday Standard*, 4 March 1956.

⁷⁶ *Singapore Standard*, 17 May 1956.

for merger.⁷⁷ On 20 May the Singapore branch of the MCA carried a resolution calling for merger at the annual meeting of the general committee of the pan-Malayan MCA.⁷⁸ If ever there was a possibility of merger, this was it. But Singapore was not ready. Marshall had so committed himself over the London talks that his resignation was inevitable. The disoriented Singapore government was in no position to mount a new initiative on merger. By the time Marshall resigned (in early June 1956) and Lim Yew Hock became Chief Minister, compassion had given way to cool-headed reason once again. The small opportunity had been squandered.

One of the first acts of the Lim Yew Hock Government was to make a by then almost ritual flight to Kuala Lumpur. Once again the main subject was merger. Once again, after a meeting in the Federation capital, a Singaporean Chief Minister spoke optimistically of 'brighter' chances of 'marriage with the Federation'.⁷⁹ Once again the Federation Chief Minister had to deflate Singapore's raised hopes. But this time, the Tunku very forcefully nailed the merger bogey. In an interview with Associated Press, he complained that he had his 'hands full keeping the Federation peaceful', and stated, 'If I have a say in this matter, we will not have Singapore at all.'⁸⁰ The next day, he confirmed that merger 'is not in my mind', and that this was his 'final word'.⁸¹

3. The Merger Question in the Period of Dogged Determination June 1956 – December 1960

While Tunku Abdul Rahman was to state that he would not have Singapore *even as a unit* only in January 1957, it had probably become clear to many of Singapore's politicians by July 1956 that merger was not just a question of finding the right terms. The Singapore suitors did not give up, however, but kept up the knocking on the door – with patience in the face of repeated rejections and with dogged persistence and determination in the face of repeated failures.

The Penang riots which started on the first day of 1957⁸² were not a happy augury for a future independent Federation. The Tunku's hard stand on merger hardened further. In a blunt statement in Singapore in mid-January, he firmly declared that he would not accept Singapore 'even as a

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 17 May 1956.

⁷⁸ *Straits Times*, 21 May 1956.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 16 June 1956.

⁸⁰ *Singapore Standard*, 20 June 1956.

⁸¹ *Straits Times*, 21 June 1956.

⁸² See Chapter IV above.

unit'. He admitted that 'once I said that we will accept Singapore. But now I know a little bit more.'⁸³ This 'little bit more' may well have been directly connected with the island's reaction to Singapore UMNO's six demands at the Colony's All-Party Conference which was convened to prepare for a common stand at the second Singapore constitutional talks scheduled for 6 March 1957 in London. Regrouped into five, these were (i) that the Governor-General be Malay, (ii) that Malay be the sole national language in ten years, (iii) that Islam be the religion of Singapore, (iv) that five-eighths of government posts be reserved for Malays, and (v) that there be a rigorous basis for citizenship (including fluency in Malay).⁸⁴ Most non-Malay Singaporeans regarded many if not all of these demands as unacceptable and ridiculous. Yet, if Singaporeans could not accept them, how could they accept the projected Federation Constitution and be loyal to a country which would (if UMNO had its way), have a Malay monarch, Malay as the national language, Islam as its official religion, Malay privileges and tight citizenship rules?⁸⁵ The logic was powerful. For his part, the Tunku was naturally very reluctant to strengthen the already strong opposition that existed in the Federation on these issues by even seriously considering merger.⁸⁶

Lim Yew Hock appeared publicly unperturbed, described the Tunku's attitude as a 'passing phase' and stated that he would carry on the campaign for merger regardless. In April 1957, he led Singapore's all-party mission to London to negotiate successfully for Singapore's separate movement towards greater self-government. By mid-1957, he had revived the process of seeking to convert Tunku Abdul Rahman on the issue of merger. In the fourth week of June, Tunku Abdul Rahman had intimated that if subversive activities came under control in Singapore 'we might then begin to consider a merger'.⁸⁷ On 22 August 1957, on the very eve of his talks with the Tunku (to discuss travel restrictions across the causeway) Lim arrested thirty-five persons, among whom were five members of the PAP Central Executive Committee.⁸⁸ On his arrival in Singapore, Tunku Abdul Rah-

⁸³ *Straits Times*, 18 January 1957.

⁸⁴ *Malaya*, March 1957, pp. 34, 35.

⁸⁵ Even Singapore MCA refused to accept the first three demands.

⁸⁶ The Report of the Reid Commission published in February 1957 in fact rejected Islam as the official religion, proposed that special Malay rights be continued for only fifteen years and reviewed at the end of that period, and that Malay (land) reservations be restricted; it also envisaged dual nationality and multilingualism in the legislature.

⁸⁷ *Straits Times*, 24 June 1957.

⁸⁸ This allowed Toh Chin Chye and Lee Kuan Yew to return to office as Chairman and Secretary-General respectively after their refusal to serve following the pro-

man said he was glad that 'this is a courageous and good government' but added smilingly, 'I do not know whether this will lead to a merger....'⁸⁹ The Tunku appeared to become more flexible, however, in the euphoria following the achievement of Merdeka for the Federation. In the Yang di-Pertuan Agong's speech from the throne on 3 September 1957, the wish was expressed that 'we will come together *one day*, God willing'.⁹⁰ Later in the month, the Tunku declared that merger was possible only if Singapore was prepared to take its place as an ordinary unit of the Federation.⁹¹ He might have added 'in the future' for this was what he must have told Lim Yew Hock in private. In June 1958, Lim stated his hope that merger would come about in five years!

Singapore's separate constitutional development and the unlikelihood of merger in the near future was to have a logical result — the rise of a political party sympathetic to the idea of an independent Singapore. At the inaugural meeting of the Workers Party on 3 November 1957, Marshall, who had resigned from the SLF and emerged as the party's leader, castigated the Singapore government for making the island a 'helpless slave' of the Federation. He commented: 'one doesn't get married by being first a prostitute'.⁹² By April 1958, he was talking of an independent Singapore under UN trusteeship. And by May, the Worker's Party appeared to have adopted a stand that Singapore must strive for independence before and regardless of merger.⁹³ Marshall personally had not come to oppose merger. He appears to have simply realized that it was impracticable (and thus should not be allowed to stand in the way of Singapore's development towards independence).

By August 1958, Singapore's political parties had more immediate matters on their mind, the city council elections later in the year, and more important, the coming Singapore Legislative Assembly elections in May 1959. Lim Yew Hock launched the Singapore People's Alliance, a party based on the SLF but attracting Liberal Socialist support. SPA represented a somewhat feeble attempt to form an anti-PAP front. That such an attempt

communist coup in the PAP executive. Before the arrests, Tan Chok Kim was Chairman and T.T. Rajah Secretary-General.

⁸⁹ *Straits Times*, 24 August 1957.

⁹⁰ *Malaya*, October 1957, p. 41. Italics mine. It seems probable that by this time and possibly earlier, the Tunku had recognized that one day Singapore had to be incorporated. Indeed, his vague concept of 'Greater Malaya' first articulated in December 1955 was probably an early manifestation of this belief.

⁹¹ *Singapore Standard*, 25 September 1957.

⁹² *Straits Times*, 4 November 1957. The weakness of the Worker's Party is attested by the fact that in the Legislative Assembly election of 1959, it polled less than 2.5 per cent. of the votes, in 1963, less than 1.5 per cent.

⁹³ *Malaya*, June 1958, p. 38.

was made was indicative of the belief that unless the PAP was politically countered, it would in all probability win the 1959 elections. The PAP began, where it could, to act like a future ruling party, a ruling party which would have to make initiatives on merger. In the Legislative Assembly on 8 October 1958, for example, Lee Kuan Yew voted against the extension (for another year) of the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance (in order to maintain internal party support) *but* at the same time promised not to repeal it when the PAP got into power.⁹⁴

In the elections of 30 May 1959, the party, as expected, emerged victorious, winning forty-three of the fifty-one seats.⁹⁵ K.M. Byrne was immediately despatched to Kuala Lumpur to provide assurances about PAP intentions and policies.

*PAP in the Forefront, June 1959 - December 1960*⁹⁶

Too much reliance on Lee Kuan Yew's *Battle for Merger*⁹⁷ (in much past literature) has obscured the fact that from 1955 to 1959, it was the SLF, not the PAP, which had assumed the main responsibility for achieving a United Malaya and which mounted the serious campaign to achieve merger. The PAP government snatched the baton in June 1959.

Unlike the SLF coalition government, the Government under Lee Kuan Yew was from the outset more sophisticated and knowledgeable about merger and the difficulties that lay in the path of creating a United Malaya. The game had, of course, already been played for some time. That the Tunku was an obstacle to merger was by now perfectly clear. But the PAP went beyond the problems of personality and examined the communal forces in Federation politics which would bear heavily on any leader of UMNO, and on the head of any Federation government, turning him away from merger. 'Once the communal problem is solved in the Federation', argued a *Petir* editorial, 'the addition of a predominantly Chinese state will not give rise to communal fears.'⁹⁸ S. Rajaratnam, the island's Minister of Culture, went one step further: 'the present fears about accepting Singapore as a partner will vanish, *provided* we too, develop a Malayan society in Singapore'.⁹⁹ The PAP was under no illusions about the speed with

⁹⁴ *Straits Times*, 9 October 1958.

⁹⁵ SPA won four seats, UMNO three, independents one. The Liberal Socialists were almost wiped out. Of their thirty candidates, seventeen lost their deposits, Marshall's Workers Party also failed to win a seat.

⁹⁶ December 1960 is taken as the terminal point for the sake of convenience in order to avoid duplication and also because by the beginning of 1961, the merger issue was clearly being transformed into the Malaysia question.

⁹⁷ Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for Merger* (Singapore, 1963).

⁹⁸ *Sunday Times*, 7 August 1960. *Petir* is the official organ of the PAP.

⁹⁹ *Straits Times*, 6 January 1960. Italics mine.

which communal politics would sufficiently ebb north of the causeway and Singapore's population could be Malayanized south of it. Toh Chin Chye, in an article in *Petir* in early January 1960, pessimistically argued that it would be foolish to believe that merger would occur within five years.¹⁰⁰

PAP tactics in pursuit of merger, based as they were on more sophisticated analysis and a secure majority in the legislature, also differed to a significant extent from those of the SLF. Whereas Marshall and Lim Yew Hock had concentrated on the task of winning the Tunku personally over to merger, the PAP supplemented direct influence efforts with attempts at removing some of the basis of his and UMNO's antipathy towards merger, at creating 'the conditions for merger'. The PAP had in 1958 codified what it believed were the reasons for Federation opposition, fear of Singapore's one million Chinese, and apprehension arising out of the belief that Singapore had too many 'leftists'.¹⁰¹

To resolve the first fear, PAP leaders consistently and constantly declared their commitment to the creation of a Malayan culture and took steps to 'steam-cook' a 'national consciousness, a national language and a national culture' in order to create the Malayanized Singapore man who would talk, think and act like the exemplary Malayan of the Federation.¹⁰²

As regards what the PAP saw as the fears concerning Singapore's leftists arising out of the attributed inability of the Federation leaders to distinguish between democratic socialists and communists, the PAP leadership did at least four things. At the beginning, it tried to de-emphasize the dangers of communism. The immediate danger to Malaya was not communism but communalism, Lee Kuan Yew constantly reiterated.¹⁰³ Second, the PAP government more or less stopped saying that it was not anti-communist.¹⁰⁴ Third, and particularly in the latter part of 1960, the leadership began more and more to attack 'leftist adventurers' and communists.¹⁰⁵ On 3 August

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ 'The New Phase After Merdeka - Our Tasks and Policy', available in Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-62. Tunku Abdul Rahman in a comment on this statement noted: 'The reasons given by the PAP are in fact the real fears of the Federation Government' (*Straits Times*, 24 November 1958).

¹⁰² Malay was accepted as the national language. On 3 December, a Malay Head of State was installed. A 'Malayanized' school syllabus was introduced. And before the end of 1959, the PAP had decided that all Malay children who were Singaporean citizens or children of Singapore citizens would be provided with free primary school education, something which a racially plural Alliance Government could not have done.

¹⁰³ *Straits Times*, 17 September 1959.

¹⁰⁴ It is to be noted that the PAP Cabinet consisted exclusively of party moderates.

¹⁰⁵ As early as October 1959, however, and in the Legislative Assembly, Toh Chin

1960, Lee Kuan Yew declared in the Legislative Assembly that 'Extremism either from the right or from the left will have to be smacked down good and hard.'¹⁰⁶ Fourth, despite strong pressures from its radical left, the PAP leadership refused, to the satisfaction of Kuala Lumpur (though not only for Kuala Lumpur's sake) to give in to the demands of the PAP radicals that all the detainees arrested by Lim Yew Hock be released, that the British base in Singapore be removed, that the ISC be abolished, and that Singapore proceed with all speed towards the goal of a separate independence.

The insecure Marshall and Lim Yew Hock governments had badly needed a dramatic breakthrough to enhance their popularity and power in Singapore. Quick results could only come through the conversion of the Tunku. They had not only to make progress but to be seen to make progress. Thus optimistic statements were issued in Singapore after almost every Kuala Lumpur-Singapore meeting. The PAP, until late 1960 at least, was not in this position and could concentrate more on the much slower process of creating the conditions for merger. Unlike the SLF, therefore, it did not rush headlong into active and widely publicized lobbying of the Tunku. While leaving the Federation in no doubt about the PAP's desire for merger, its leadership argued more circumspectly in their contacts with Federation leaders in the party's first year of office. Many meetings were held away from the glare of publicity. And no over-optimistic statements were made which put pressure on the Tunku and left him with the never enviable, always unpleasant, at times tiresome, and invariably politically unattractive task of shattering Singapore's illusion and hopes.¹⁰⁷

The PAP differed from the SLF as a government campaigning for merger in another important way. The Marshall and Lim Yew Hock governments, in which the SLF was in coalition with UMNO-MCA, had been accepted as friendly and unthreatening and comparatively respectable. The PAP government certainly was not – at least not at the beginning. The 'People's Action Party', noted a perceptive observer in 1959, 'is commonly – but pessimistically – considered to be the next worst thing to a communist party under communist leaders.'¹⁰⁸ The moderate leadership of the PAP realized that

Chye had warned communists and pro-communists to desist from the folly of trying to use Singapore as a base or to prepare for the consequences of their actions (*Straits Echo*, 15 October 1959).

¹⁰⁶ *Straits Times*, 4 August 1960.

¹⁰⁷ Marshall and Lim seemed to have acted repeatedly in such a way as to ensure that failure to achieve merger would not be attributed to them. The Tunku was naturally not pleased to have the onus consistently put on his shoulders, not least because Singapore UMNO and MCA and the national MCA and MIC were throughout committed to merger, albeit never militantly so.

¹⁰⁸ W.A. Hanna, *Reports on Singapore and Malaya: Singapore Prepares for Self Government* (New York, American Universities Field Service Staff, 1959), p. 2.

so long as the Federation's substantial suspicions and fears of their intentions and trustworthiness remained, the chances of achieving merger would be practically nil. To present themselves as respectable,¹⁰⁹ reasonable and trustworthy friends and acceptable partners in the merger enterprise (and partly also for reasons internal to Singapore) the PAP in government almost immediately changed its political style. It toned down its militancy (though not its puritanism) and its vituperative outbursts and concentrated on the sedate tasks of government. Second, the Lee Kuan Yew administration also modified some of its public stands and preoccupations. It became less bitterly anti-British, did not agitate for the removal of British armed forces, dutifully passed the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance, and made no demands – despite strong internal pressure – for the release of political detainees. Third, in formal and informal contacts with Federation leaders and in the Internal Security Council, Singapore Ministers were reasonable and obliging. The success of the PAP was such that by the beginning of 1961, the Tunku could sincerely say, 'It is not the [PAP] Government I am worried about. The PAP is as good a Malayan Government as mine is.'¹¹⁰

All these tactics were evident throughout the period June 1959 to December 1960. By mid-1960, however, the PAP was to indulge in a particular set of activities which were to bear fruit in 1961. The SLF had stressed the interrelatedness of the Federation and Singapore as a reason for merger. The PAP went much further. It had tried, from the beginning, to allay the fears of Federation leaders about the dangers of merger. By mid-1960, Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP had begun to very ably point out the dangers of Singapore staying *outside* the Federation. They did this in three ways. Singapore and the Federation were not only interrelated, it was argued; they were permeable units which could not be insulated from contamination by each other. What made the impossibility of effective quarantine the basis of a potent argument for serious consideration of merger was the convincing and threatening scenario of future developments in Singapore which was ably presented by the PAP leadership.

First, the moderate leadership of the PAP warned that if independence for Singapore could not come through merger, the island would in all probability become independent as a separate unit. Its public campaign against the concept of a separate independence for Singapore was not merely an attempt to raise a bogey to scare the Federation into merger.¹¹¹ And it was no mere shadow boxing. Militant anti-colonialism was a force

¹⁰⁹ For some time after 1954, membership of the PAP was not something which 'respectable' people were at all keen to reveal.

¹¹⁰ *Malay Mail*, 31 January 1961.

¹¹¹ Singapore's Constitution was, of course, due for revision by 1963 at the latest.

which had to be reckoned with in Singapore. The impact of the spectre of Singaporean independence was probably strengthened by skilful presentation of its consequences. Obviously the British and the Federation would no longer be able to directly control Singapore's internal security. Less evidently, the PAP leadership argued that in an independent Singapore, Chinese chauvinism would come to the fore. Power would go to those who pandered to these chauvinist sentiments. What would be created would be a Singapore Chinese consciousness, language and culture, and a Chinese state on the Federation doorstep; the island would be a magnet drawing the region's Chinese and Singapore would become the Israel of South-East Asia. Like the Arabs in Palestine, the Malays would flee or be driven from Singapore. Malay chauvinism would probably arise in the Federation with disastrous consequences for the Federation's Chinese and for racial harmony.¹¹²

Equally frightening was the argument that the Federation could not assume a cooperative and friendly government in Singapore. The salience of the challenge from the Ong Eng Guan 'radical left' after June 1960 must be viewed within the context of Federation awareness by 1960 that the PAP was a divided house with the moderates in government consistently performing a balancing act under constant pressure from the militants.¹¹³ Kuala Lumpur knew that no elected government in Singapore had been able to secure more than one term in office, and that at every election, there was a movement further towards the left. Very important also was the fact that the PAP's first fifteen months of office was far from being a period of great achievement. Singapore exports to Indonesia dropped by nearly two-thirds (as a result of Indonesia's import restrictions). Capital continued to pour out of Singapore. The housing programme was a dismal failure. Singapore's 'headache number one', unemployment, appeared to be getting worse with little prospect of dramatic improvement. How long Lee Kuan Yew could remain in power and how long he could pursue moderate policies were beginning to become open questions by the last quarter of 1960. In November 1956, Tunku Abdul Rahman had believed that the SLF 'coalition government and Mr. Lim Yew Hock must be saved if the people

¹¹² These were important arguments used against those in Singapore who were pro-merger and who were beginning to be sympathetic to the idea of merger after independence. It was also pointed out that in modern history, post-independence merger by consent had occurred only in the case of the United Arab Republic. In the Singapore-Federation case, merger could only come by conquest. To those who believed in Singaporean independence as an end in itself, the point was made that the island could and would be strangled by 100 million hostile Malays. See Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for Merger* (Singapore, 1963), Appendix 6, 'The Fixed Political Objectives of Our Party - a Policy Statement by the Central Committee of the People's Action Party - 1960'.

¹¹³ Ong resigned from the PAP and took two PAP Assemblymen with him.

of the colony are to be saved from disaster'.¹¹⁴ By 1961, the Federation Government felt the same about Lee Kuan Yew and the government he headed.

The initiatives of the PAP government were to bear fruit only in that year. Even then, Singapore was not to merge with the Federation but to eventually become a part of a larger whole. The policy of creating a United Malaya was clearly never brought to fruition.¹¹⁵ The failure to form a pan-Malayan unified system in the period 1954 to 1960 cannot be explained in terms of any lack of resolution and effort on the part of its protagonists. In contrast to the period of parochial politics, in these seven years or so important political forces within Singapore (including two Administrations) worked consistently, despite obstacles and constant disappointments, to achieve it. As in the years 1946 to 1948, failure can in the main be attributed to the existence of opponents who had veto power. But whereas in the earlier period the British and UMNO under the leadership of Dato Onn held the veto, in the period 1954 to 1960 the insurmountable obstacle to merger was UMNO under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman. An element of change lay in the withdrawal of the British as a crucial political opponent of a United Malaya. The element of continuity rested in the determined opposition of the dominant Malay political movement in the Federation.

Yet the opposition of the Tunku and of UMNO, and *ipso facto*, the government of the Federation of Malaya, was an insurmountable obstacle to merger not because they acted vigorously to frustrate or to prevent the formation of a United Malaya, but because their active participation in the merger enterprise was a fundamental prerequisite for political union. Their cooperation and instrumental support was necessary because the advocates of merger did not themselves possess the will or the resources and assets (especially legal authority) to actually and unilaterally establish a United Malaya. The lack of such a will was to a large extent also the result of their acceptance of the Tunku, UMNO and the Federation government as psychological vetoists, actors whose consent was regarded as psychologically necessary before implementation of any proposal for merger could be proceeded with.

The incapacity of the advocates of merger to convert the Tunku, and UMNO (and the Federation government) doomed them to failure. This incapacity was mainly a result of the immense difficulty of their task. First, neither the Tunku nor UMNO was really open to persuasion on the merger issue. UMNO had closed its mind on the subject in 1946. To a very signi-

¹¹⁴ *Straits Times*, 17 November 1956.

¹¹⁵ A United Malaya made up of Singapore and the mainland has, of course, never been established.

which had to be reckoned with in Singapore. The impact of the spectre of Singaporean independence was probably strengthened by skilful presentation of its consequences. Obviously the British and the Federation would no longer be able to directly control Singapore's internal security. Less evidently, the PAP leadership argued that in an independent Singapore, Chinese chauvinism would come to the fore. Power would go to those who pandered to these chauvinist sentiments. What would be created would be a Singapore Chinese consciousness, language and culture, and a Chinese state on the Federation doorstep; the island would be a magnet drawing the region's Chinese and Singapore would become the Israel of South-East Asia. Like the Arabs in Palestine, the Malays would flee or be driven from Singapore. Malay chauvinism would probably arise in the Federation with disastrous consequences for the Federation's Chinese and for racial harmony.¹¹²

Equally frightening was the argument that the Federation could not assume a cooperative and friendly government in Singapore. The salience of the challenge from the Ong Eng Guan 'radical left' after June 1960 must be viewed within the context of Federation awareness by 1960 that the PAP was a divided house with the moderates in government consistently performing a balancing act under constant pressure from the militants.¹¹³ Kuala Lumpur knew that no elected government in Singapore had been able to secure more than one term in office, and that at every election, there was a movement further towards the left. Very important also was the fact that the PAP's first fifteen months of office was far from being a period of great achievement. Singapore exports to Indonesia dropped by nearly two-thirds (as a result of Indonesia's import restrictions). Capital continued to pour out of Singapore. The housing programme was a dismal failure. Singapore's 'headache number one', unemployment, appeared to be getting worse with little prospect of dramatic improvement. How long Lee Kuan Yew could remain in power and how long he could pursue moderate policies were beginning to become open questions by the last quarter of 1960. In November 1956, Tunku Abdul Rahman had believed that the SLF 'coalition government and Mr. Lim Yew Hock must be saved if the people

¹¹² These were important arguments used against those in Singapore who were pro-merger and who were beginning to be sympathetic to the idea of merger after independence. It was also pointed out that in modern history, post-independence merger by consent had occurred only in the case of the United Arab Republic. In the Singapore-Federation case, merger could only come by conquest. To those who believed in Singaporean independence as an end in itself, the point was made that the island could and would be strangled by 100 million hostile Malays. See Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for Merger* (Singapore, 1963), Appendix 6, 'The Fixed Political Objectives of Our Party - a Policy Statement by the Central Committee of the People's Action Party - 1960'.

¹¹³ Ong resigned from the PAP and took two PAP Assemblymen with him.

of the colony are to be saved from disaster'.¹¹⁴ By 1961, the Federation Government felt the same about Lee Kuan Yew and the government he headed.

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¹¹⁴ *Straits Times*, 17 November 1956.

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ficant extent so too had Tunku Abdul Rahman.¹¹⁶ Their antagonism towards merger was strongly anchored not only in a political habit of many years' standing, but more important, in the belief that merger would be a very costly enterprise. Second, and this refers specifically to Tunku Abdul Rahman and other UMNO leaders, the social and political control of UMNO and the politically-mobilized Malays was sufficiently powerful as to make it somewhat perilous for their leaders to deviate from their anti-merger stand. Third, the Tunku and UMNO in the period 1954-61 were not susceptible to value manipulation. There was nothing that the proponents of a United Malaya could bestow or promise to bestow which could alter their perception of costs and benefits to the extent of causing policy change.

Even though a United Malaya was not successfully formed in the period 1954 to 1960, the agitation for merger in these years cannot be adjudged a complete failure. It highlighted the question of Singapore-Federation relations, kept the United Malaya issue alive and helped to lead to the eventual conclusion in Kuala Lumpur that sooner or later the incorporation of Singapore was inevitable. While we shall argue in the next chapter that the formation of Malaysia cannot be seen as merely the culmination and logical conclusion of the campaign for a United Malaya, it was one crucial factor which was to result in the creation of a new state in South-East Asia.

¹¹⁶ Dato Sir Clough Thuraisingam remembers the Tunku telling him in 1954 that there would be merger 'over his dead body'. Interview with Thuraisingam.

VI

THE FORMATION OF MALAYSIA

There is a strong consensus of academic opinion on the question of the formation of Malaysia. Generally, this consensus centres around the date, 27 May 1961; and sees Malaysia as the outcome of attempts to solve the 'Singapore Problem'. The movement towards Malaysia is dated from the Tunku's 27 May 1961 speech to the Foreign Correspondents' Association of South-East Asia in which he made a reference to the need for 'a political and economic association' between Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei, the Federation and Singapore.¹ The Tunku's initiative arose, it is argued, from the fear of future events in Singapore. Since the island would most probably gain independence by 1963, the British would no longer be in a position to control its internal security, defence and foreign relations. The Internal Security Council through which the Federation (in conjunction with the British) had had direct control over Singapore's internal security would be abolished. This would not be a dangerous event if an amenable Singapore government could be guaranteed.

By May 1961, however, the opposite appeared imminent. There were indications that the PAP was rapidly losing ground. In the Hong Lim by-election held at the end of April, its candidate was severely trounced. This, combined with the knowledge that no government had, in the island's history, managed to win more than one term of office, and the full awareness of the perpetual movement of Singapore politics towards the left, created the impression in Kuala Lumpur that unless something was done, the island would become a second Cuba, a threat to the security of the Federation. The Tunku was convinced that the Federation had to have control over Singapore's internal security. A reversal in his stand on merger was, therefore, necessary.

This may be called the security theory on the formation of Malaysia. It has a corollary. Having decided that the incorporation of Singapore was necessary, the Tunku had to find a *racial counterbalance* to the island's Chinese population; the Borneo territories had to be included because it was essential that Singapore be brought into the Federation of Malaya. Malaysia was thus the logical solution to the Singapore Problem. Among those who propounded the security theory are Hanna, Brackman, Means, Kahin, Gould, Osborne, Tan Koh Chiang, Gullick, Sadka, Allen and Justus van der Kroef.²

¹ *Sunday Times*, 28 May 1961.

² Willard Hanna, *The Formation of Malaysia: New Factor in Politics* (New York, American Universities Field Staff Inc., 1964), Ch. 3; Arnold Brackman, *South-East*

In the course of interviews I had with five ministers of the Federation cabinet of 1961 and two senior Malayan civil servants, however, a somewhat different interpretation was put forward. They all traced the genesis of Malaysia from dates earlier than 27 May 1961. The dating is very important for it was only in 1961 or from late 1960 that apprehensions about the future evolution of Singapore politics became a major motivating force.

According to Tan Sri Sardon Jubir and Encik Senu bin Rahman, the idea of Malaysia had already taken root by 1960.³ Tun Ismail dates the movement towards Malaysia from before 1959; Encik Khir Johari, from 1959 but before the PAP came into power (June 1959).⁴ According to Tunku Abdul Rahman the idea of Malaysia came to him 'somewhere around 1958 or 1959'.⁵ In a published speech made on 15 September 1963, on the eve of Malaysia Day, the Tunku had said that the idea of Malaysia 'came about when I heard of the many discussions the British officials of the Borneo territories had with the British Government and agreed to by some of the leaders of Sabah and Sarawak, on the formation of a Federation of Borneo States'.⁶ According to Syed Jaafar Albar, UMNO circles were already discussing the Malaysia idea 'immediately after independence'.⁷ Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie goes further back and dates the movement towards Malaysia from the pre-Independence period.⁸

All the above disagree as to the starting point of the movement towards Malaysia; they also did not present a uniform picture of the attitudes and

Asia's Second Front: the Power Struggle in the Malay Archipelago (Singapore, Donald Moore, 1966); Gordon Means, *Malaysian Politics* (London, The University Press, 1970), p. 292, ff; George M. Kahin, in 'Preface' to Osborne's *Singapore and Malaysia* (Ithaca, Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program Data Paper No. 53, 1964); James Gould, *The United States and Malaysia* (Harvard, The University Press, 1969), p. 87 ff; Milton Osborne, *op. cit.*; Tan Koh Chiang, 'The Formation of Malaysia: Some Aspects of Political Geography', Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1966, p. 534 ff; J.M. Gullick, *Malaya*, 2nd ed. (London, Ernest Benn, 1964), p. 155; and his *Malaysia and its Neighbours* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 20-21; Emily Sadka, 'Malaysia: the Political Background', in T.H. Silcock & E.K. Fisk (eds.), *The Political Economy of Independent Malaya: a Case Study of Development* (Singapore, Eastern Universities Presses, 1963), p. 33 ff; Justus van der Kroef, *Communism in Malaya and Singapore: a Contemporary Survey* (the Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), p. 48 ff. The list can be lengthened with ease.

³ Interviews with Tan Sri Haji Sardon bin Haji Jubir, and Senu bin Abdul Rahman.

⁴ Interviews with Tun Dr. Ismail bin Dato Abdul Rahman and Mohamed Khir bin Johari.

⁵ Interview with Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj in 1970.

⁶ *Straits Echo*, 16 September 1963. These discussions were held in 1957 and early 1958.

⁷ Interview with Tan Sri Syed Jaafar bin Hassan Albar.

⁸ Interview with Tan Sri Muhammad Ghazali bin Shafie.

motivations regarding the idea of Malaysia. In its most radical, elaborate and cogent presentation, far from bringing in the Borneo territories because Singapore had to be merged with the Federation, the inclusion of Singapore was stated as the means by which the incorporation of Brunei, Sabah and Sarawak could be accomplished. According to this 'expansion theory', from around 1956, Tunku Abdul Rahman, some other UMNO leaders, and an element in the Federation civil service wanted to, or were well disposed towards bringing the Borneo territories (*but not Singapore*) into an enlarged Federation of Malaya. The Tunku had, before 1961, approached the British Government about the incorporation of British Borneo but was informed that the Federation could not have these territories *unless* she agreed to also take Singapore off Whitehall's hands.⁹ This the Tunku was not prepared to do until 1961.

The security theory and the expansion theory are not completely irreconcilable or mutually exclusive. The movement towards Malaysia can and should be analytically divided into two periods: (i) from the end of 1955 to late 1960 and (ii) from then till 1963. The security theory is really relevant to the second phase, whilst elements of the expansion theory are relevant to the first period.

The expansion theory has significant heuristic value. It clearly calls for a more than cursory glance at the pre-1961 development of the Malaysia concept.¹⁰

THE MALAYSIA CONCEPT BEFORE 1956

The first suggestion of bringing together all the territories of the Malaysia region has been traced to Lord Brassey who advocated in 1887 that the whole area be merged 'into one large colony'.¹¹ According to Professor K.G. Tregonning, the matter was deliberated upon in the British Cabinet in 1888 and once again in 1932.¹²

The political rationalization which was undertaken immediately after the Second World War¹³ caused many to suspect a British intention to link up

⁹ James Gould has written, without citing his authority, that by '1958 Tunku Abdul Rahman had endorsed a British suggestion of merger, but favoured joining only Borneo with Malaya, leaving out Singapore since it raised Malays' [*sic*] fears of Chinese predominance. The British refused to release Borneo without the inclusion of Singapore' (*op. cit.*, p. 87).

¹⁰ For a more detailed account of the development of the Malaysia concept in the period before 1961 than is given here, see Mohd. Noordin Sopiee, 'The Advocacy of Malaysia - Before 1961'. *Modern Asian Studies* (in press).

¹¹ S. Runciman, *The White Rajahs* (Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 195. Brassey was a director of the British North Borneo Company which owned north Borneo.

¹² *Singapore Free Press*, 26 August 1961.

¹³ Britain gained sovereignty over the nine Malay States in Malaya, Sarawak and British North Borneo.

all the territories of the region into one governmental unit.¹⁴ *The Times* (London) intimated in 1947 that 'The loose structure of government of Malaya is in process of replacement by a federation which may eventually include not only Singapore but Borneo and Sarawak.'¹⁵

In fact, of course, an extremely decentralized politically-unified system encompassing the whole Malaysia region was established by the British after the war. It had a Governor-General (later Commissioner-General) who was entrusted with the function of broadly coordinating the major policies of the five territories of the region. In 1949, in a despatch from Creech-Jones to the Commissioner-General, Malcolm MacDonald was told: 'In the course of time some closer political cooperation [between the five territories] may be desirable, and you will advise the Secretary of State for the Colonies on this question from time to time.'¹⁶ This MacDonald did. He put the idea of closer political association in the Malaysia region not only to an unsympathetic Colonial Office,¹⁷ and to Malaysians, but also (among others) to Dr. Hatta (in mid-November 1949),¹⁸ President Sukarno and Vice-President Hatta (in Indonesia in 1952)¹⁹ and Lord Cobbold (in 1951).²⁰

MacDonald was not the only propagator of the Malaysia concept before 1956. The Singapore Progressive Party became in fact the first political party of the Malaysia region to advocate a region-wide unified system.²¹ Rule 3 of the party Constitution adopted in 1947 read: 'For the purpose of these Rules, "Malaya" means the Colony of Singapore...the Malayan Union and Sarawak, Brunei and British North Borneo.'²² In 1948 and 1951, Thio Chan Bee, the Progressive Party Vice-President, raised the Malaysia idea in the Singapore Legislative Council as a substitute for a

¹⁴ See for example, Editorial, *Malay Mail*, 14 February 1946; and *Sunday Tribune*, 21 October 1946.

¹⁵ Editorial, *The Times* (London), 29 July 1947.

¹⁶ *Straits Times*, 28 November 1949.

¹⁷ In an answer to a British parliamentary question in 1954, the Colonial Secretary (Lyttleton) stated categorically that a region-wide 'federation in any form in the future' was not 'a practical proposition' (*Malaya*, July 1954, p. 389).

¹⁸ Mohammed Hatta, 'One Indonesian View of the Malaysia Issue' in *Asian Survey*, Vol. 5 No. 3, p. 140.

¹⁹ Brackman, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

²⁰ *Straits Times*, 19 October 1962. Cobbold was a personal friend who was to be Chairman of the 1962 Commission of Enquiry into Sabah and Sarawak opinion on the Malaysia proposal.

²¹ According to Lim Choon Mong, the PP arrived at the idea of Malaysia independently of MacDonald. There is evidence to support this. (Interview with Lim.)

²² Progressive Party, *Newsletter*, No. 6, July 1952.

straight merger between Singapore and the Federation.²³ And in 1952, the object of a 'Confederation of Malaysia' was formally incorporated into the programme of the party.²⁴ The PP's commitment to the concept of Malaysia was, however, weak. It (and after February 1956, its offshoot, the Liberal Socialist Party) nevertheless advocated the concept intermittently throughout the 'fifties.

The PP's advocacy of Malaysia only gained some vague support from Malaya's political elite. In March 1954, Ghazali Shafie joined them in advocating the Malaysia concept.²⁵ By early 1955, Tan Cheng Lock too had espoused the concept. In February 1955, he predicted that Malaya (including Singapore) and British Borneo would become a dominion within ten years.²⁶

To this still weak chorus advocating the Malaysia concept, Tunku Abdul Rahman was to add his voice.

THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS MALAYSIA

Phase 1: December 1955-60

The Tunku's move must be viewed largely in the context of Singapore's clamour for merger. In his most important speech since he became Chief Minister, made at the UMNO General Assembly on 26 December 1955 (on the eve of his departure for the Merdeka constitutional conference in London) he suggested that if Singapore felt too small a territory to achieve independence on its own, it might consider joining the Federation as a member state; he also extended this invitation to Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo.²⁷ The *Singapore Standard* pronounced the idea of a 'Greater Malaya [a] laudable step to think [*sic*] years ahead...'²⁸

Among those who had attended the UMNO General Assembly was one A.M. Azahari, a politician from Brunei who was to organize the revolt of

²³ Colony of Singapore, *Singapore Legislative Council Proceedings*, 1948, p. B. 20.

²⁴ It is interesting to note that whereas in 1961 Tunku Abdul Rahman was to see the Borneo territories as a means of ensuring against Chinese domination, the PP in the 'fifties saw the bringing in of Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei as a method of safeguarding against the Malay dominance which would follow a Singapore-Federation merger. There was a second major motivation, the desire to preserve the identity, prestige and standing of Singapore. The Malaysia envisaged would have Singapore as its centre. (Interview with C.C. Tan, President of the PP from 1947 to 1955.)

²⁵ *Straits Times*, 2 March 1954. Ghazali, who was later to become the head of the Federation's Ministry of External Affairs and one of the central figures behind Malaysia's formation, was then an upcoming officer in the civil service.

²⁶ *Straits Times*, 8 February 1955.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 December 1955.

²⁸ Editorial, *Sunday Standard*, 27 December 1957.

December 1962. In an interview with *Utusan Melayu*, he declared that his aim was a union of the Malay Archipelago, and that the people of North Borneo hailed the Tunku's statement on the 'Malaysia' concept. Responsible political leaders in Malaya, he said, should not hesitate or be afraid to declare that *north Borneo should be merged with the Federation immediately*. Azahari also called upon the Federation to sponsor a united front to demand independence and the incorporation of northern Borneo in the Federation of Malaya.²⁹ He had come to Malaya not only to attend the UMNO General Assembly but also the inaugural congress of the Party Rakyat (Malaya). In February 1956, on his return to Brunei, Azahari initiated moves to form a fraternal Brunei Party Rakyat, one of whose objects was to establish a 'Malay Homeland' comprising the Federation, Singapore, Sarawak, Brunei and British North Borneo.³⁰ Significant too in view of later events, Ahmad Boestamam, Chairman of the Malayan Party Rakyat, confirmed on 21 February 1956 that his party was also working for the creation of such a 'Malay Homeland'.³¹ The Brunei Government looked upon the Brunei Party Rakyat with disfavour and alarm. A statement issued on 10 March 1956 emphatically declared that the Sultan of Brunei and his Government 'have never contemplated or wished' to unite or federate the State of Brunei with any other state.³² In July 1957, Sir Anthony Abell, High Commissioner of Brunei and Governor of Sarawak, declared that 'It is better for Brunei, and Sarawak, and... North Borneo to work out their own [separate] salvation...'³³

After the Tunku's December 1955 speech, he did not bring up the concept of Malaysia again until six months later. Then on 2 June 1956, he announced that he would welcome Singapore, Sarawak, Brunei and British North Borneo into a 'greater Malaya if they themselves come in voluntarily — when they attained independence'.³⁴ This rider clearly indicated that the Tunku was still thinking of the distant future. 'At this stage', he declared, 'it is wise to be prudent like Kamal Ataturk who resolutely opposed territorial expansion in favour of improving Turkey itself first'.³⁵

In 1956 and early 1957, the job of working out the Constitution for an independent Federation took precedence over other constitutional matters. One facet of this enterprise merits attention: the elaborate search for a new

²⁹ *Utusan Melayu*, 31 December 1955.

³⁰ *Singapore Standard*, 20 February 1956.

³¹ *Malay Mail*, 21 February 1956.

³² *Sunday Times*, 11 March 1956.

³³ *Straits Times*, 24 July 1957.

³⁴ *Singapore Standard*, 23 June 1956.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

name for an independent Federation of Malaya. In August 1956, the Alliance's eighteen-man Political Committee (entrusted with the task of working out a joint Alliance memorandum to the Reid Commission) adopted, under UMNO insistence, its choice of 'Malaysia'.³⁶ In September 1956, Khir Johari, publicity chairman of UMNO, explained that the Alliance chose 'Malaysia' in order 'to give room' to other territories — he specifically mentioned British Borneo — to join the Federation later.³⁷

Meanwhile, the Malaysia concept seemed to be gaining ground in Whitehall. United Press, citing 'Colonial Office officials', reported from London in September 1956 that if 'Britain's long-term ideas are carried through, it appears that the ultimate plan is for Malaya to become a Federation, including Singapore, Sarawak, British North Borneo and Brunei...'.³⁸

In Brunei itself, Party Rakyat had by April 1957 firmly established itself. At its congress in early April, the party instructed its executive to find ways of bringing together the three territories of north Borneo into a federation based on the historic sovereignty of the Brunei Sultanate.³⁹ Less than three weeks after the Congress, however, Azahari, president of the Brunei Party Rakyat, announced, while in Malaya, that his party envisaged a federation of the territories of the *Malaysia* region to be called 'Malaysia'.⁴⁰

The Federation became independent on 31 August 1957. But the rest of the Malaysia region was not forgotten by its Malay leaders. In a broadcast over the BBC in the last week of September 1957, the Tunku pointed out that the new Federation Constitution had provisions for a 'Greater Federation' to enable the inclusion of the Borneo territories — Brunei and Sarawak — and eventually Singapore. 'We will be happy indeed', he said, 'if some of them will come in'.⁴¹ The actual formulation of this statement suggests that what the Tunku had in mind was a (future) federation by stages, involving first the incorporation of Brunei and Sarawak, and later, the inclusion of Singapore and British North Borneo.

³⁶ *Straits Times*, 24 August 1956. The Chairman of the Committee was Tun (then Dato) Abdul Razak.

³⁷ *Straits Times*, 13 September 1956. 'Malaysia' was withdrawn from the Alliance memorandum after it was pointed out that changing the name of the Federation was outside the scope of the Reid Commission's terms of reference; but in October 1956 an UMNO spokesman stressed that UMNO would continue to press for the new name (*Straits Times*, 20 October 1956).

³⁸ *Straits Echo*, 6 September 1956. Italics mine.

³⁹ *Straits Times*, 6 April 1958. The Congress also protested against the refusal of the British authorities to allow the entry into Brunei of Dr. Burhanuddin Alhemy of the PMIP and Ahmad Boestamam of the Malayan Party Rakyat.

⁴⁰ *Straits Times*, 22 April 1957.

⁴¹ *Singapore Standard*, 25 September 1957. Italics mine.

Khair Johari, now Minister of Education, responded with the statement: 'Originally, a large section of UMNO wanted this country to be called Malaysia with the intention of making Malaya a Greater Federation.'⁴² Nazid Nong, general secretary of the Malayan Party Rakyat, expressed support for the Tunku's idea and proudly recounted that the party had called for 'Malaysia' at its first congress in 1955. The PMIP central executive reversed the decision of its recently-held delegates' conference (which had debated but rejected the Malaysia concept) and expressed support for what was called the Prime Minister's 'Malaysia' scheme.⁴³

Tunku Abdul Rahman's attitudes, statements and actions connected with the concept in 1958 must be viewed to a large extent within the context of the British proposals for a confederation of north Borneo which were announced in early February 1958.⁴⁴ Within two weeks of their announcement, the Tunku was once again advocating the Malaysia concept. He stated:

Their people are within our group. They have the same characteristics as we, the same way of living and the same currency.

It would be a matter well worth considering *if they approached us*. It would be good financially. They have oil.⁴⁵

In Britain, *The Times* (London) of 11 February 1958 argued that provided a way could be found to resolve the region's 'internal contradictions', the Malaysia concept as already talked about 'looked a tidy solution of British responsibility in the area'.⁴⁶ Later in the month, Sir Hilary Blood, a former Colonial Governor of Gambia suggested the idea of Malaysia in a pamphlet published by the Conservative Commonwealth Council.⁴⁷ In the Malaysia region itself, the concept lit no fire.

The Tunku's apparent belief (which was shared by many others) that the Borneo states were basically Malay territories was not seriously undermined by his first visit to north Borneo in September 1958, for he visited only Brunei, the most Malay state in Borneo.⁴⁸ On his return, and in a broadcast in November 1958, he emphasized that

... one thing struck me very much in Brunei. Over there, they talk of

⁴² *Malay Mail*, 30 September 1957.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7 October 1957.

⁴⁴ *The Times* (London) 11 February 1958. Brunei's opposition constituted an effective veto on these proposals.

⁴⁵ *Sunday Times*, 16 February 1958. Italics mine.

⁴⁶ *Straits Echo*, 12 February 1958.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 February 1958.

⁴⁸ Even the guard of honour greeting the Malayan Prime Minister on his arrival in Brunei town consisted of a detachment of the Royal Federation of Malaya Police which had been lent to Brunei (*Malaya*, November 1958, p. 38).

Malaya [the Federation] as a country to which they look for guidance. They speak of Malaya with affection and pride as if it were almost their homeland.⁴⁹

It was the Sultan of Selangor, a close relative of the Brunei monarch, who was to publicly propose (on 6 November 1958) a Brunei-Federation merger. The Tunku made no public response. Boestamam came out in support. Other political parties proffered no comment since 'it was much too early to do anything about it'.⁵⁰

It was probably some time after this that the Tunku sounded the British Government on the possibility of bringing the Federation and British Borneo under one political roof.⁵¹ According to Brackman, who cited 'unimpeachable Chinese and Malay sources', the British 'in effect told Kuala Lumpur: you can't have Borneo without Singapore'.⁵² Up to early 1961, the Tunku was not prepared to have Singapore.

It is clear that the non-formation of Malaysia in the period 1956 to 1960 can be attributed primarily to insufficient commitment on the part of the Federation. No detailed plans were ever worked out. At no time did the advocates of the Malaysia concept go beyond 'invitations', soundings, and mere expressions of desired ends; and when these acts elicited no enthusiastic response or received a cold reception from some quarter or other, the matter rested — to be brought out again at a later date. At every point at which some variant of the Malaysia theme was put forward, it was done in such a way that it could be withdrawn with no loss of face. This weak commitment to the formation of a region-wide unified system can be explained partly in terms of the policy's limited overall value.

There were, of course, some facets of the Malaysia idea which made it attractive to the Tunku. The concept was seen first as a means of bringing independence to the other states in the region.⁵³ Second, all the Malay advocates of Malaysia probably wanted to ensure the security of the Malays of north Borneo, a factor not unconnected with a sense of Malay brotherhood. Constant use of the terms 'Greater Malaya' and 'a Greater Federation' suggests also that the idea of expansion was an attractive one to many Malay nationalists on the mainland, including Tunku Abdul Rahman. It

⁴⁹ *Straits Times*, 10 November 1958. Brunei's previous Sultan, Sultan Ahmad Tajudin Akhazal, had married the Sultan of Selangor's daughter in 1934. The children of Brunei royalty were sent to the Malay College in Kuala Kangsar. Sultan Omar himself went to secondary school in Malaya — as did his children.

⁵⁰ *Malay Mail*, 11 November 1958.

⁵¹ Brackman, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 37. Italics as in original. This is corroborated by two of my interviewees. Cf. Gould, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁵³ The desire to accelerate decolonization, however, appeared to have lessened somewhat after the novelty of independence had begun to wear off for the Federation.

would not have been surprising if, like the Indonesian nationalists with regard to the Dutch realm, though not to the same extent, they believed that it would be natural for the Federation to inherit the Malaysia realm once the imperial power decided to leave. The economic 'advantages' of Malaysia were, of course, noted by the Tunku.

The idea of Malaysia was attractive for another group of reasons. It is possible that as early as December 1955, the Tunku had recognized that sooner or later the political union of Singapore and the Federation of Malaya was inevitable because Singapore could not be a viable independent state on its own. It is possible that by that time, the Malaysia concept had come to be seen as a means of offsetting the future costs of bringing Singapore into the Federation body politic. In his speech in the Federation Parliament on 16 October 1961, the Tunku was to say, 'Originally it [the idea of Malaysia] arose as a result of discussions I had with a number of responsible citizens of the Federation and Singapore who asked me from time to time whether ... there was a possibility of integrating the two territories of the Federation and Singapore.'⁵⁴

It might seem from the mere enumeration of all these factors that the Malaysia concept was an extremely attractive idea. The fact of the matter was that all the benefits connected with it were not greatly valued at the time. The desire to bring Borneo to independence and to protect the Bornean Malays were vicarious motivations. The idea of expansion was not that attractive to a young and still unconfident state. Economic considerations in general were not matters which greatly interested or captured the imagination of the Tunku, and the UMNO, PMIP and Party Rakyat advocates of Malaysia. The advantages of Malaysia in terms of minimizing the cost of incorporating Singapore were not powerful incentives because up to 1960 at least, merger was still seen as a future event.

The perceived value of the Malaysia concept was markedly lessened by perceptions of the negative side of the equation. There were the great disadvantages of taking in Singapore — always considered a liability by the UMNO leadership. The idea of Malaysia appeared to have been rejected whenever these costs were seriously considered.

Commitment to the Malaysia concept stopped far short of serious concrete action to implement it not only because at no time did the idea have great value to the Tunku and his fellow advocates. As important, Malaysia was consistently regarded as an item on the agenda of the future, not of the immediate present. Further, the Tunku's statements on Malaysia before 1960 aroused but little support from Sabah, Sarawak, Britain, Brunei (Azahari notwithstanding) and even Singapore. Of great importance too was the fact that up to 1960, the Tunku and the Federation Government were preoccupied with domestic problems.

⁵⁴ Federation of Malaya, *Dewan Rakyat Proceedings*, III, No. 16, column 1590.

This analysis of the development of the Malaysia idea before 1961 places the events after 1960 within a somewhat different perspective. The movement towards Malaysia from 1961 to 1963 cannot be seen as merely the logical development of Singapore's campaign for merger, and the hurried response to the Singapore Problem. It must also be placed within the context of already existing predispositions and of past suggestions and initiatives, indecisive and uncertain as they were. Tunku Abdul Rahman was to bring to fruition in 1963 an idea he first publicly suggested in 1955.

Phase 2: 1961-3

Most accounts of the developments which led to the formation of Malaysia on 16 September 1963 begin from May 1961 or from the beginning of 1961. A case can, however, be made for starting the analysis from 1960.⁵⁵ For by the beginning of that year the British had probably begun to seriously examine the concept of Malaysia; and before the end of 1960, it is possible that the Tunku and other UMNO leaders had begun to seriously consider the setting up of a region-wide state.

On 30 January 1960, the Governor of North Borneo, Sir Roland Turnbull predicted the formation of a 'great Commonwealth member' made up of the Federation, Singapore and the Borneo territories as full partners.⁵⁶ The Sarawak Government may also have begun to think along these lines.⁵⁷ It seems likely that their attitude infected the other top officials in the Malaysia region.⁵⁸ However, as future events were to prove, if the British

⁵⁵The period 1955-60 must of course be considered as important background to the major initiatives of 1961.

⁵⁶Brackman, *op. cit.*, p. 68. According to one source, on his tour of north Borneo in September 1960, Lee Kuan Yew met William Goode (Turnbull's successor, erstwhile Governor of Singapore and Lee's personal friend) who suggested the idea of forming a political unit of the whole Malaysia region. The unit would be something in-between a confederation and a federation, possessing a Council of Representatives of the five territories to be made up of nominees of the various governments or of representatives of the various legislatures (Interview with James Puthucheary).

⁵⁷Means, citing no authority, states that Sarawak officials 'began to consider ways to give Sarawak her promised independence without turning the country over to the highly organized Sarawak United People's Party and its political parasites, the Communist Party' (*op. cit.*, p. 299). Later, he writes: 'With good reasons, it is commonly supposed that the Sarawak Government acting through the Colonial Office played a significant role in initiating the preliminary secret discussions about Malaysia prior to the Tunku's first public announcement in May 1961' (p. 310). As far as I am aware Means' is the only account which has suggested that the Sarawak Government played such a role.

⁵⁸In January 1962, Low Por Tuck, formerly of the PAP but by then one of the stalwarts of the Barisan Sosialis, revealed in the Singapore Legislative Assembly that 'Some time ago' at an important PAP gathering, Lee Kuan Yew reported on a meeting he had had with Lord Selkirk (the Commissioner-General in South-East Asia). Lord

government or her representatives in the area had formulated proposals for Malaysia, they were in the nature of a long-term plan.

The British were not the only ones to have given serious consideration to the Malaysia concept in 1960. At the end of 1960, the Central Executive Committee of the PAP declared in a major policy statement:

Merger between Singapore and the Federation is our immediate task to be accomplished. But this should not rule out a broader association between the Federation, Singapore, Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo provided all the territories concerned decide that is what they want....

It is in everyone's interest in these territories that the Federation, Singapore and Borneo should seek strength politically and economically by closer association with each other.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, the Alliance partner in Singapore, the Singapore People's Alliance, had in November 1960 joined the Liberal Socialists in advocating the Malaysia concept. In *The People*, SPA declared that Singapore could 'best achieve our objective of independence... by advocating a political union of Malaysian states'.⁶⁰

Before the end of 1960, Malay UMNO leaders in Kuala Lumpur had probably begun to be somewhat apprehensive of the idea of a close political association of Singapore, Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei which was favourably responded to by Lee on his September 1960 Borneo tour.⁶¹ Confident by then of the domestic situation, they appeared to have renewed their interest in the Malaysia concept. In 1960, Senu Abdul Rahman, the Federation's Ambassador to Indonesia, undertook a study tour of north Borneo — because 'we were afraid that the people [in Borneo] would be against us'.⁶² The result of the six-day visit was a report submitted to UMNO entitled 'Laporan Lawatan ka-Sabah, Sarawak dan Brunei'. That report classified

Selkirk had intimated to Lee that the British were worried that if the Indonesians could not solve their economic problems, they would turn their attention to north Borneo and West Irian. Lee had also disclosed that he had been shown a report that Lord Selkirk intended to send to the Colonial Office (*Straits Echo*, 27 January 1962). In the Legislative Assembly, Lee denied these disclosures. According to a prominent ex-PAP leader who was once a close friend of the Singapore Prime Minister, however, Lee Kuan Yew showed him a British document outlining the Malaysia concept in 1960.

⁵⁹'The Fixed Political Objectives of our Party' reprinted in Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for Merger* (Singapore, 1961), p. 173.

⁶⁰*Straits Times*, 11 November 1960. SPA saw the creation of such a union in terms of two stages with Singapore joining the Federation first and the Borneo territories entering later. This was the British stand in 1961 and 1962.

⁶¹*Straits Times*, 22 September 1960.

⁶²Interview with Senu. The Tunku dates Senu's tour 'around 1959 or 1960' (Interview with Tunku Abdul Rahman). In a speech in 1964, Senu states that he went to Borneo in 1960 (*The Point of No Return*, Solai Press, 1964, p. 1).

the indigenous people of Borneo as Malays. It concluded that in Malaysia, the Malays would remain in the majority. The Tunku was also told that Malay leaders in Sarawak were keen on the Malaysia idea. Tunku Abdul Rahman confided that 'when he [Senu] came back from Sarawak to tell me what he had heard there, I was convinced that the idea was right'.⁶³

The Tunku's Decision to Form Malaysia

There is insufficient evidence to allow us to conclude that by the end of 1960 or the beginning of 1961, the Tunku had made an important commitment to the formation of Malaysia. Even if he had decided to form Malaysia, he was still content to wait and see and probe and listen. In the period up to mid-1961, there was as yet no necessity for immediate action.

In a sense, the question of exactly when the decision to form Malaysia was made is not a very important one. When it comes to major and not easily reversible political enterprises such as the building of a new state, decision-makers seldom make one once-and-for-all decision at the outset. Insofar as the Tunku was concerned, it is possible that by the beginning of 1961, a mild commitment had been made to the idea of forming Malaysia and that this commitment was reappraised in early 1961. It seems most probable that shortly before 27 May 1961, it was readopted, that the several weeks after that date was a trial period, and that it was only *after* the Anson by-election of mid-June 1961 that the Tunku's commitment had become such that it would have been difficult to reverse it. This stage was reached because, in *contrast to numerous occasions previously* when the Tunku had openly advocated the Malaysia concept, a whole series of events occurred in the first half of 1961 to reinforce and strengthen his initial disposition. These events may be briefly summarized.

In January 1961, Dr. Toh Chin Chye spoke of the need for Singapore to strengthen its ties with the Federation *and* the Borneo territories at a PAP new year rally.⁶⁴ On 13 January, Duncan Sandys, the British Minister for Commonwealth Relations, started a three-day visit of Malaya. There seems every reason to believe, Milton Osborne suggests, that the problem of Singapore-Federation relations (i.e. 'merger') was on the agenda of Sandys' visit.⁶⁵ On 29 January 1961, Lee Kuan Yew had a meeting with the

⁶³ Interview with Tunku Abdul Rahman. According to Senu, the Tunku was fond of pulling his leg at private gatherings whenever the Borneo territories proved troublesome by saying: 'Senu is the man. Because of him I'm having trouble' (Interview with Senu).

⁶⁴ *Straits Times*, 2 January 1961.

⁶⁵ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 13. The main item on Sandys' agenda was the Laotian situation. Developments in Laos and Indochina in general constituted without doubt an important factor in the policy-making context in which the decision to form Malaysia was made.

Tunku. The subject may also have been merger. These events did not appear to have greatly increased Tunku Abdul Rahman's commitment to the Malaysia concept or created the belief that there was any urgent need to act; for a day after his meeting with Lee, he stated that merger would have 'to wait'.⁶⁶ It is to be noted, however, that by this time the Tunku had arrived at the conclusion that 'The PAP government is as good a Malayan government as the Alliance is.'⁶⁷ This was a compliment indeed; and it indicated the extent to which the PAP moderates had succeeded in presenting themselves as a respectable group of men.

The Tunku left for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in February 1961 and spent nigh two months in London. In London, Mac-Millan informed him of Whitehall's concern over Singapore, broached the question of Malaysia, and argued for a Singapore-Federation merger. Two arguments were effectively used. It was put to the Tunku that if the mighty United States could not deal with a communist Cuba in the Caribbean, it was difficult to see how the small Federation could cope with independent communist Singapore on its very doorstep. A *batik* curtain would be too flimsy, too permeable, too inflammable. Second, it was argued that the Indian Government could not have stepped into Kerala without arousing world condemnation had she been outside the Indian State. The British could not hold on much longer. To control Singapore's internal security and thus protect the Federation, it was necessary that the island be brought under Kuala Lumpur. By the time the Tunku's plane touched down at Bangkok airport, on 3 April 1961, he had confided (to a friend) his decision to form Malaysia.⁶⁸ If Tunku Abdul Rahman had made a recommitment to Malaysia's formation, however, it was probably still not an irreversible and therefore, not a decisive one.

The Tunku returned to Kuala Lumpur in the midst of a mammoth electoral battle in Singapore — the Hong Lim by-election. The whole apparatus of the PAP and a great deal of the Singapore Government's was ranged against the incumbent, Ong Eng Guan, leader of the United People's Party, an ex-PAP Minister of National Development, but by then an advocate of Singapore's separate independence. For the Lee Kuan Yew Administration, the by-election was regarded as a test of whether a non-communist government could survive more than a term in office. 'If the PAP should lose Hong Lim', Lee stated on 27 April, 'it's on its way out.'⁶⁹ Two days later, it did lose the by-election — and by a huge majority. Apprehensive of the PAP's prospects, the *Straits Times* hoped that Lee's immediate post-

⁶⁶ *Straits Times*, 31 January 1947.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1 February 1961.

⁶⁸ Talk with Mohamed Sopiee.

⁶⁹ *Straits Echo*, 18 April 1961.

election statement that 'we must clearly re-establish our position of confidence' did not mean a general election in the near future.⁷⁰

The *Malay Mail* described the defeat as 'a crucial blow to those who are still working towards a merger....'⁷¹ It was nothing of that sort. And it is probable that the PAP leadership took the opposite view for it did not scotch the rumours of possible fresh elections. At an UMNO rally in Malacca on 6 May 1961, Tunku Abdul Rahman came to the conclusion that 'There is a section of the Chinese in Singapore who do not want a good government which works for the good of the people. What they want is communist government or a communist-oriented government.'⁷² Lee came up to Kuala Lumpur to apparently drive the point home.

Tunku Abdul Rahman's increased commitment to Malaysia and his decision to act appears to have taken place in the twenty days between 6 and 26 May.⁷³ On 26 May, the Tunku, originally scheduled to leave the next day for a holiday in South Vietnam, flew instead to Singapore where he said he had 'an important speech to make'.⁷⁴ On his arrival in Singapore and in answer to familiar questions on the prospects of a Federation-Singapore merger, however, he repeated the equally familiar answer: merger could only be considered when the predominantly Chinese population of Singapore was sufficiently Malayan-conscious as to make Malaya the sole object of their loyalty.⁷⁵ In his lunch-time speech to the Foreign Correspondents' Association of South-East Asia the next day, Tunku Abdul Rahman concentrated on elaborating the Chinese loyalty theme. He also spoke about communism, ideological fence-sitters, and ASA. Among these topics, the Tunku inserted a brief passage:

Malaya today as a nation realizes that she cannot stand alone and in isolation.... Sooner or later she should have an understanding with Britain and the peoples of the territories of Singapore, North Borneo, Sarawak and Brunei. It is premature for me to say how this closer understanding can be brought about, but it is inevitable that we should look ahead to this objective and think of a plan whereby these territories can be brought together in political and economic cooperation.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Editorial, *Straits Times*, 1 May 1961.

⁷¹ Editorial, *Malay Mail*, 2 May 1961.

⁷² Quoted in Brackman, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁷³ This can be narrowed further but it does not seem important to do so. (If the decision had been made before 6 May, the Tunku would probably have publicly sounded UMNO opinion at the Organization's fourteenth annual general meeting held in Malacca on 5 and 6 May 1961.)

⁷⁴ *Straits Times*, 27 May 1961.

⁷⁵ Editorial, *Malay Mail*, 29 May 1961.

⁷⁶ Peter Boyce, *Malaysia and Singapore in International Diplomacy* (Sydney University Press, 1968), p. 8. Italics mine.

There is an overwhelming unanimity of opinion that this speech marked a turning point. Few would disagree with Hanna's assertion that Tunku Abdul Rahman had made 'a sudden 180° shift in policy' on merger.⁷⁷ To Milton Osborne, the speech marked a 'sudden change of position' on the concept of Malaysia.⁷⁸

Assertions to the effect that the Tunku's acceptance of or conversion to the Malaysia idea came at the end of May 1961 seem to be based on an unstated assumption that he was converted to the concept as a result of British and/or Singapore persuasion and pressure. This probably overstates the roles of Britain and Singapore, important as these were; it also ignores the Tunku's own generally favourable attitude towards the Malaysia concept in the preceding five years.

It is in fact arguable that Tunku Abdul Rahman's speech signified not only no sudden change of position but no directional change of position at all. It was a landmark, for it was an important indication that the Tunku had markedly *increased* his commitment to Malaysia. It was not, however, so much a *volte face* on the issue of Malaysia as a logical development of his long-standing attitudes on Malaysia. Nor, in the context of strict political usage in the region, can it be said that the Tunku had made a 180-degree shift in his policy on 'merger'. This term, in the period from 1946 and particularly after 1954 and up to 1961, was used to refer to the coming-together of Singapore and the Malayan mainland in a United Malaya. The Tunku was never to agree to a Federation-Singapore merger, to a United Malaya. Tunku Abdul Rahman proposed Malaysia in fact because he could not accept 'merger'.

These points do not deny the importance of the events of 27 May.⁷⁹ But it must be pointed out that the Tunku's speech was not so much a statement of policy as a trial balloon to test Malayan and Borneo opinion.⁸⁰ The Federation Prime Minister had made similar vague statements on merger and Malaysia very many times before. In view of this and the very vague and seemingly casual nature of his reference to 'closer understanding' and 'political and economic cooperation... sooner or later', it was not surprising that the speech did not generate much more than the usual public reaction to the Tunku's past statements on the topic of Malaysia. It is clear that few outside the very top leadership of the Federation and Singapore Governments and the top British authorities in Malaya were aware of

⁷⁷ Hanna, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁷⁸ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁷⁹ The Tunku had discussions with Lee Kuan Yew on the same day and at the correspondents' luncheon, the whole PAP Cabinet turned up (Interview with Alex Josey).

⁸⁰ Interview with Tunku Abdul Rahman, Ghazali Shafie, Senu Abdul Rahman and a Foreign Ministry official.

the significance of the speech.⁸¹ According to the *Straits Times*, all observers were 'unanimous that the big plan would take five to ten years to materialize even if pursued without pause'.⁸² It was a measure of how secretive the Tunku was that the Singapore Alliance could state as late as July 1961 that 'Merger in the foreseeable future is not possible'.⁸³ As before, the Tunku made certain that he could drop his commitment to Malaysia with no loss of face. His commitment was still reversible.

The immediate reaction to Tunku Abdul Rahman's sounding was in many ways discouraging. He confided that Lee Kuan Yew was very excited over the proposal.⁸⁴ On the other hand, he had evidently received a cool reception from Sir Geoffrey Tory, the British High Commissioner to the Federation.⁸⁵ Segments of the Indonesian press were critical.⁸⁶ All the political parties of northern Borneo, Brunei's Party Rakyat, Sarawak's Party Negara and the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) wanted a federation of Borneo to precede any movement towards Malaysia.⁸⁷ Probably more discouraging in effect was the British round-table conference of 26-27 June 1961, summoned to discuss Malaysia, and attended by Lord Selkirk, Sir William Goode (Governor of North Borneo), Sir Alexander Waddell (Governor of Sarawak), D.C. White (High Commissioner for Brunei) and M. Moynihan (Deputy High Commissioner to the Federation). While White thought that Brunei favoured the Malaysia idea, Goode and Waddell stressed that the three Borneo states would prefer to come closer together first. Commenting on Goode's statement, the *Sunday Gazette* concluded 'To all intents and purposes, and as far as the Borneo States are concerned, the plan for a wider union has been put in cold storage'.⁸⁸

The Tunku's visit to Brunei and Sarawak in early July 1961 also could not but have acted in the direction of undermining his commitment. He arrived in Brunei in the midst of strong anti-Federation feeling and resentment against the Federation's seconded civil servants. On 5 July 1961, Stephen Kalong Ningkan, Secretary-General of the new Sarawak National Party (SNAP) declared that 'Any attempt to put Sarawak under the in-

⁸¹ It had not been discussed in the Federation Cabinet. By no means all of his Cabinet colleagues had been consulted before the Tunku flew to Singapore.

⁸² *Sunday Times*, 18 May 1961.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 4 July 1961.

⁸⁴ *Straits Echo*, 31 May 1961.

⁸⁵ When asked of Tory's reaction, the Tunku replied 'I don't care about reaction. The country's interests comes [sic] first' (*Ibid.*, 31 May 1961).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Straits Times*, 2 June 1961.

⁸⁸ Editorial, *Sunday Gazette*, 2 July 1961. Italics mine.

fluence and subjugation of any foreign power would be strongly opposed.⁸⁹ Two days later, Donald Stephens stated his opposition to the north Borneo territories becoming 'Malayan colonies'.⁹⁰ More important was the united stand taken by A.M. Azahari, president of Brunei Party Rakyat, Ong Kee Hui, chairman of SUPP, and Donald Stephens.⁹¹ On 9 July 1961, they pointed out that 'any plan in accordance with the pronouncements made by Tengku Abdul Rahman in Brunei and Sarawak would be totally unacceptable to the people of the three territories'.⁹² Nor was the situation nearer home any more encouraging. It was clear by mid-July 1961 that active support for the Malaysia plan as envisaged by the Tunku would come only from the Alliance and its allies and the PAP.

It does seem possible, therefore, that had not the Singapore situation developed in such a way as to strongly counteract these discouraging factors and to forcefully act to reinforce his attitude, the Tunku might have significantly altered his commitment to the formation of Malaysia — as he had done so many times in the past. As it was, after Hong Lim and 27 May 1961, there were evident signs that the moderate PAP leadership was rapidly losing strength and that the communists and pro-communists in the PAP were making a serious and dangerous challenge for power. Having suffered a terrible defeat at Hong Lim, it was crucial for the top PAP leadership to win the Anson by-election (necessitated by the sudden demise of a PAP Assemblyman). In the crucial stages of this election, the left-wing of the PAP withdrew their support and endorsed the Workers Party candidate. David Marshall of the Workers Party emerged victorious. Though his majority was a mere 546 votes, the defeat was a shock to the Tunku as well as to Lee Kuan Yew; for the PAP portion of the vote had been slashed from a thumping 60.7 per cent. in 1959 to a mere 36.7 per cent. in 1961.

Five days after the election, on 20 July, the *Malay Mail* concluded that 'the result of the Anson by-election must be accepted as a considerable setback to merger hopes and opportunities'.⁹³ Once again it was abysmally wrong. The Anson calamity was probably as important as the Hong Lim rout. It sealed Tunku Abdul Rahman's commitment to the formation of Malaysia. There was now no turning back. Just as it was in the Federation's interest in the mid-'fifties to sustain the Lim Yew Hock Government, it was now in her interest to see that the PAP remained in power. Malaysia had to be formed.

⁸⁹ *Straits Times*, 6 July 1961.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 July 1961.

⁹¹ Stephens was the instigator of the first political party in north Borneo, the United National Kadazan Organization. UNKO was formed in August 1961.

⁹² *Straits Times*, 10 July 1961.

⁹³ Editorial, *Malay Mail*, 15 July 1961.

MOTIVATIONS FOR THE FORMATION OF MALAYSIA

As this account of the development of Tunku Abdul Rahman's commitment to the formation of Malaysia indicates, security considerations were probably uppermost in the Tunku's mind.⁹⁴ It is not often realized, however, that the potential security threat posed by Singapore to the Federation body politic consisted of not one but three elements. First, there was the fear that if Singapore was not brought under Federation control, it would fall to militants of the extreme left and become an ideological base and centre from which Malayan communists would subvert the mainland. Second, the Tunku, believing that communism was on the march throughout South-East Asia, feared that if Singapore was not incorporated, she would, as an independent state, develop 'towards another camp... hostile to the Federation...'.⁹⁵ 'We would then have communists right at our very doorstep', said the Tunku, 'and you can be sure that they would not rest until they have used all the means at their disposal to destroy our country and set up a communist government.'⁹⁶ Third, the expected movement of an independent Singapore towards a hostile camp was expected to lead to serious embroilment in the Cold War, external interference, and ultimately, civil war. The Tunku feared that Malaysians would then 'be fighting among themselves, goaded on and helped by forces from without...'. 'The same situation would develop here [in a divided Malaya] as we have seen in the past in divided Korea, in divided Vietnam'⁹⁷ he predicted. In addition, the formation of Malaysia was seen as a means of dealing with and preventing the spread of communism in Singapore⁹⁸ and the Borneo territories at a time when communism was seen to be on the advance in South-East Asia.

Malaysia was also seen as a method of bringing independence to the remnants of British colonialism in South-East Asia. One would be quite mistaken, however, to see this (as Simandjuntak does)⁹⁹ as a 'vital' factor or

⁹⁴ This analysis will concentrate on the Tunku's motivations because he was the crucial actor.

⁹⁵ Tunku Abdul Rahman's speech in the Federal Parliament, 16 October 1961; *Dewan Rakyat Proceedings*, III, No. 16.

⁹⁶ *Straits Times*, 29 October 1961.

⁹⁷ *Dewan Rakyat Proceedings*, 16 October 1961.

⁹⁸ A transformation in confidence had occurred in Kuala Lumpur between the late 'fifties and the early 'sixties. Whereas previously the Tunku often stated that the Federation could only consider bringing in Singapore when the communists in the island had been subdued, Kuala Lumpur now wanted to bring Singapore in so as to be able to deal with the problem herself.

⁹⁹ B. Simandjuntak, *Malayan Federalism, 1945-1963* (Kuala Lumpur, OUP, 1969), p. 125. In secondary literature, he presents the most lengthy analysis of motivations.

motivation behind the formation of Malaysia. Nor can we agree with Simandjuntak's view that considerations of the 'economics of scale' played a 'vital' role.¹⁰⁰ This assertion can be extended to cover economic considerations as a whole. During the time of policy-making, it does appear that insofar as economic issues were concerned, the Tunku was more occupied with the economic disadvantages of having to close the causeway if Singapore posed a security threat than with the advantages of a wider market, economic coordination, and a more diversified economy.

The Federation's patronizing attitude towards the Borneo territories certainly conjures up a brown version of the 'White-man's burden'.¹⁰¹ Considerations of personal and Federation prestige and glory may have also played some role although possibly an equally marginal one. There might in addition have been some concern for the fate of the Malays in Borneo if a federation of Borneo states or of the remaining British territories in South-East Asia was formed. Such a federation was seen to imply a third China.

Thus far we have dealt with the clearly positive side of the equation. The decision to form Malaysia was not taken without conscious consideration of several of the potential drawbacks of Malaysia. These revolved largely around the expected costs of taking in Singapore. First, it was evident that in a straight merger between the Federation and Singapore, the Chinese would outnumber the Malays. It was believed, however, that the inclusion of Borneo's natives would result in the maintenance of the balance of ethnic groups.¹⁰²

The population of Borneo and the Borneo states were needed not only to achieve an overall population balance, but probably more important, to offset or make bearable the *other* consequences of bringing Singapore into the fold. In Malaysia the Malay identity of the State would be less threatened and more assured than in a United Malaya. Taking in the Borneo territories would also dilute the impact of Singapore's chauvinist Chinese element

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ In July 1961, Tunku Abdul Rahman said, 'If Sarawak joins the Federation we will do our best to improve the position of the Dayaks so that they will not remain in darkness forever' (*Malay Mail*, 24 July 1961).

¹⁰² Those who work on the basis of objective data on Borneo's racial composition have often come to the conclusion that the racial balance argument could not have been an important factor in decision-making — because the Borneo natives cannot be regarded as Malays (See Simandjuntak, for example, *op. cit.*, pp. 130, 132, 134). The fact of the matter, however, is that the Tunku and other UMNO leaders regarded the natives of Borneo as Malays or ethnically close enough to the Malays as to be considered Malays — within the context of the 'racial balance' equation — though not necessarily in all contexts. This assessment is explainable in terms of limited knowledge but also in the context of the move in certain elite Kuala Lumpur quarters to re-define the meaning of the term 'Malay' to divest it of its Islamic requirements and to extend it to include all indigenous peoples.

and prevent the 'sinocization' of the State. For this purpose, it was not absolutely necessary that the native peoples of Borneo be Malays. Even the non-Malays of Borneo were seen as a dampening factor; for as the Tunku noted 'even the Chinese and Indians in Borneo speak the Malay language'.¹⁰³ The psychological impact on the Malay sense of security of being outnumbered (to many synonymous with being overwhelmed) by the Chinese would also be markedly lessened or averted within a Malaysia. Further, in a United Malaya, Malay political power and domination would be gravely threatened. The possible threat to Malay power would be reduced in a Malaysia. The Tunku was possibly so confident that it could even be increased that he was prepared to offer Sabah and Sarawak (which would constitute about 12 per cent. of Malaysia's population), a quarter of the seats (forty) in the Malaysian Parliament.

The incorporation of Singapore alone would have significantly prejudiced the dominant political position of UMNO and the Alliance. The Tunku probably believed that in a wider federation this would not happen for the governing party would have great leverage in an unsophisticated and non-ideological political system; and UMNO already had the respect if not as yet the active support of Borneo's Malays.¹⁰⁴

The taking in of a great source of political instability, upheaval and militancy could not be so easily offset. Even here, however, Lee Kuan Yew's argument that in a state including Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei, Singapore's radicalism would be diluted — just as Penang's had been in the Federation — might have had some effect. The prospect of an over-powerful Singapore could be countered by making sure and by having it understood that its position in Malaysia would be similar to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom, by creating a separate citizenship for Singapore and by allocating a small number of parliamentary seats to the island. The danger of the expansion of Singapore's political parties (including the PAP) into the Federation could to a large extent be obviated by making it illegal for Singaporean citizens to stand as candidates in elections outside the island.

In mid-1961, unlike the six years before, there is little doubt that the formation of Malaysia was seen by Tunku Abdul Rahman as an extremely profitable venture. With relative ease, he carried the Cabinet, UMNO and the Alliance with him in the Malaysia enterprise.

One other advocate which had made a commitment to the Tunku's *Malaysia* scheme, albeit an unenthusiastic one at the very beginning, was to play a very major role in the formation of Malaysia: the Singapore Government.¹⁰⁵ The PAP Government's commitment to the Malaysia scheme

¹⁰³ *Straits Echo*, 12 July 1961.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Tunku Abdul Rahman.

¹⁰⁵ The PAP Government was enthusiastic from the beginning about merger with the

must be placed in the context of its campaign for merger and the position the government found itself in the first half of 1961. It saw Malaysia as the only means of achieving merger and, therefore, of bringing the fruits of merger. Merger had long become, of course, an end in itself. But more important, merger would mean independence from Britain, enhance the prospects of creating a common market (which would alleviate Singapore's chronic unemployment problem), and make it possible for the PAP to implement its socialist ideas; it would probably bring political stability, a return of capital to the island and general economic prosperity and development. It would make Kuala Lumpur's economic policies more responsive to the interests of Singapore. There were potential costs, of course, but these could be tolerated or minimized. Acceptance of the Federation's disagreeable and politically-damaging policies (on education and labour) could be avoided through negotiations. 'Inefficient' Malay rule and 'feudalism' could be stomachied.

The achievement of merger also entailed benefits for the PAP leadership itself. It would be a *coup* of the greatest order strengthening the PAP's chance of staying in power at a time when it clearly looked as though the Lee Kuan Yew faction was on its way out. Among other things, the stigma of crushing the communist and subversive elements within and without the PAP in Singapore would also be transferred to Kuala Lumpur.¹⁰⁶

THE CAMPAIGN FOR MALAYSIA

It was evident from the very beginning that to bring the Tunku's plan to fruition, the acquiescence or support of Britain, Sabah and Sarawak, Singapore, Brunei and the Federation itself was essential or extremely important.¹⁰⁷

Federation but regarded the bringing in of the Borneo territories as not much more than a means of facilitating this merger. Academic confusion of 'merger' and 'Malaysia' has obscured this point. On 10 July 1961, for example, Lee Kuan Yew stated that merger with the Federation was more important than a confederation with the Borneo territories and that the Malaysia proposal was accepted because the PAP believed it would help to reach the goal of merger (*Straits Times*, 11 July 1961. See also his speech on 3 June reported in *The Malay Mail*, 3 June 1961.)

¹⁰⁶ It has been suggested also that merger and Malaysia would provide a 'popular' issue on which the moderates in the PAP could force a break with the extremists in the full knowledge that the extremists would oppose merger and the mass of the people would support it and, therefore, the moderates (Pang Cheng Lian, 'The People's Action Party, 1954-1965' in *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. X No. 1 (March 1969), p. 150). This may be a rationalization on the part of the PAP's moderate leadership for it is nearer the truth to say that the militants in the PAP forced the break with the moderates than the other way round.

¹⁰⁷ Because Filipino and Indonesian opposition was not crucial to the formation of Malaysia, and because they could not veto its formation and their support was not essential for formation, we shall not deal with the Filipino and Indonesian opposition to Malaysia. For an interesting account on this aspect, see Brackman, *op. cit.*

Winning British Support

The charge that Malaysia was a British neo-colonialist plot, deductions made from assumptions regarding British interests, and the failure to-examine in detail the development of British policy on the formation of Malaysia, have obscured the fact that the British had to be won over to the Tunku's Malaysia scheme – for Whitehall and the British authorities especially in Sabah and Sarawak opposed essential elements of the Tunku's plan.

In mid-1961, Tunku Abdul Rahman despatched a memorandum on Malaysia to his British counterpart and stated his readiness to go to Britain for talks. Harold MacMillan complied with the Tunku's *self invitation* by welcoming the latter to London for discussions but stated at the same time that it would be a mistake to force the pace towards Malaysia without the agreement of the Borneo people. He argued that Malaysia should come some time *after* merger. The Tunku rejected the invitation for discussions on grounds that a basis for talks did not exist.¹⁰⁸

Whitehall's initial position is explicable in terms of its complex of motives as regards the Malaysia concept. Several considerations made the Tunku's Malaysia plan attractive. First, the transfer of sovereignty to the Federation of Malaya in a Malaysian state would allow Britain to decolonize – an objective of British policy. Transferring authority from the imperial power to the dependable Federation of Malaya would also ensure that there would be a 'bastion of peace and stability'¹⁰⁹ in an otherwise turbulent South-East Asia. This dependable bastion would ensure the security of British investments and her general economic interests in the Malaysia region. Its nationalist, and successful anti-communist government would probably be in a better position to contain communism in Singapore and Sarawak than a colonial power. The security of the Singapore base, a policy objective of paramount importance at the time, would also be ensured in a period when Singapore's radical left was strongly clamouring for its removal. The possibility of an Indonesian claim on the Borneo territories would be greatly reduced once they safely became part of an independent Malaysia. The Malaysia concept was also attractive because the long-term alternative to it was a set of pocket states or at best, a very weak federation which was certain to be unviable 'in a predatory world'. It should be noted, however, that while decolonization was an objective of British policy, the granting of immediate independence to Borneo was certainly not. The world pressure on Britain and other imperial powers to grant independence to colonial territories was still tolerable, and was insufficient to lead her to decolonize 'irresponsibly'. Indonesia was occupied with the West Irian dispute and was

¹⁰⁸ *Dewan Rakyat Proceedings*, III, No. 16, 16 October 1961.

¹⁰⁹ *Straits Times*, 19 October 1961.

disclaiming any desire for north Borneo. Although the Sarawak communists were gaining ground, the Borneo territories had not yet become a major trouble spot. Only in Singapore had the situation deteriorated to the extent of threatening her interests and making the British position untenable. That was why merger was more urgent than Malaysia.

If the case for the Tunku's Malaysia plan was not overpowering, it had several unattractive aspects from Whitehall's viewpoint. First, the British Government and especially the British authorities in Sabah and Sarawak feared the possibility of Federation and Singapore domination of the politically-unsophisticated peoples of the two territories.¹¹⁰ Second, Whitehall had to contend with the opposition of the Governors of Sabah and Sarawak and British expatriate officers to the timing, and several crucial aspects, of the Kuala Lumpur scheme.¹¹¹ Third, the Tunku's proposal that Britain relinquish her sovereignty over the Singapore base, that it cease to be 'a SEATO base', and that it be covered by arrangements similar to those in the existing Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement, was found unacceptable.¹¹²

Because of this complex of motivations, the British saw no urgent necessity for Malaysia. The benefits of the inclusion of the Borneo territories could be reaped and its costs avoided by bringing them in at a later stage. It was only when the British had been categorically told, and when they realized that merger before Malaysia was completely unacceptable to the Federation, and when they obtained assurances on their Singapore base, that the British came out in favour of the Tunku's proposal.

In August 1961, however, Lord Selkirk was still describing the Tunku's scheme as a 'sound long-term plan'.¹¹³ Later in the month, Tunku Abdul Rahman complained: 'The British Government is a hard nut to crack.'¹¹⁴ Whitehall was dragging its feet. Lee Kuan Yew threatened at the end of September 1961 that 'If the British refuse to budge, we can generate the heat against them.'¹¹⁵ On 3 October 1961, however, the Malayan Prime Minister received a message inviting him¹¹⁶ for 'exploratory talks'.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Federation of Malaya, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry, North Borneo and Sarawak* (Kuala Lumpur, Government Printer, 1962, hereafter referred to as the *Cobbold Commission Report*), p. 61.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-66.

¹¹² Editorial, *The Times* (London), 1 October 1961.

¹¹³ *Straits Times*, 14 August 1961.

¹¹⁴ *Sunday Times*, 27 August 1961.

¹¹⁵ *Sunday Gazette*, 1 October 1961.

¹¹⁶ *Dewan Rakyat Proceedings*, III, No. 16, 16 October 1961.

¹¹⁷ *Straits Echo*, 14 October 1961.

After a three-day conference in London, a joint statement was issued on 22 November which extracted agreement from the British that Malaysia was 'a desirable aim'.¹¹⁸

A five-man Commission to ascertain the views of the people of Sabah and Sarawak was agreed upon.¹¹⁹ But as the *Cobbold Commission Report* (published on 1 August 1962) was to indicate, basic disagreements still persisted. The Malayan members of the Commission felt 'most strongly... that the transfer of sovereignty must take place within the next twelve months'.¹²⁰ The British members in a separate set of recommendations agreed that a Federation of Malaysia be created roughly within the time suggested by their Malayan colleagues — *but only in law, not in fact*.¹²¹ They recommended that Malaysia 'be achieved in two distinct phases'.¹²² Only responsibility for external affairs, defence and internal security should be transferred to the federal government in the first phase. In the second ('transitional') phase lasting five years (adjustable to a minimum of three years and a maximum of seven years) further governmental functions should be gradually transferred to the federal government.¹²³ In the transitional period, the Governors of Sabah and Sarawak *should be retained* and should have jurisdiction as regards the untransferred federal functions.¹²⁴

In mid-July 1962, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak and Tan Siew Sin flew to London to settle the matter. The talks this time were tough and protracted over two weeks. Threats were made by the Federation to break off negotiations. The British were still evidently pushing for merger before Malaysia. The Tunku repeated that there would be no merger at all unless Sabah and Sarawak came in at the same time as Singapore.¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ *Straits Times*, 23 November 1961. British agreement that Malaysia was a 'desirable aim' followed agreement on the Singapore base and was secured at a high price. While the British agreed to relinquish sovereignty over the base, the Federation agreed to permit Britain to make such use of the Singapore facilities 'as Britain may consider necessary to assist in the defence of Malaysia, for Commonwealth defence and for the preservation of peace in South-East Asia' (*Singapore Free Press*, 24 November 1961. Italics mine.)

¹¹⁹ The Commission was chaired by Lord Cobbold and included two Malaysians (Ghazali Shafie and Wong Pow Nee) and two Britishers (Sir Anthony Abell and Sir David Watherston).

¹²⁰ *Cobbold Commission Report*, p. 76.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹²⁵ *Straits Times*, 26 July 1962.

The British gave in on 30 June 1962. On 19 July 1963, the House of Commons approved the Malaysia Bill without a division; and a week later, the House of Lords followed suit.

WINNING SABAH AND SARAWAK SUPPORT FOR MALAYSIA

The campaign for Malaysia in relation to the British consisted of winning the support of a government. In the case of Sabah and Sarawak, it was a campaign for the minds and hearts of the people but more so, of their leaders. In the first few months after the Tunku's 27 May 1961 speech, it looked like a steep uphill climb for there was a nearly unanimous rejection of the Malaysia plan from Sabah and Sarawak.¹²⁶

Sabah and Sarawak Motivations Regarding the Malaysia Plan

Sabah and Sarawak's opposition to Tunku Abdul Rahman's Malaysia scheme, and their subsequent support,¹²⁷ spring from a vast complex of motivations. A great deal of evidence suggests that initially, the desire for security was probably the most widespread and the most powerful consideration which repelled Sabahans and Sarawakians from the Malaysia proposal. The Tunku's constant call for the Borneo territories to 'join the Federation' was seen by Stephens and many other leaders as a request to the British 'to hand over North Borneo to Malaya to make it Greater Malaya, not Malaysia'.¹²⁸ They feared Malayan domination.

For the vast majority of the non-Malays of Sabah and Sarawak (who outnumbered the Malays almost ten to one) it is possible that there was an equally great fear of Malay domination.¹²⁹ The suggested name of *Malaysia*, the advocacy of Malay as Malaysia's national language and Islam as the official religion accentuated the misgivings on this score. The Bornean Chinese and native non-Malays also feared racial discrimination.¹³⁰

There were other important motivations but these were more limited in scope of operation. Thus, the political leaders of the two territories, who were big fishes in the small Sarawak, Sabah or northern Borneo pond, feared that they would become small fry in the Malaysian lake. This involved a loss of prestige, but probably even more so, a loss of political

¹²⁶ For a more detailed analysis of the Borneo reactions to the Tunku's plan, see J. Ongkili, *The Borneo Response to Malaysia, 1961-1963* (Singapore, 1967).

¹²⁷ This section on motivations refers to the whole period June 1961 to September 1963.

¹²⁸ *Straits Times*, 11 August 1961.

¹²⁹ In Dayak fairy and folk tales, the Malay is often depicted as a rascal, treacherous, and totally without scruples. See W.R. Geddes, *Nine Dayak Nights* (Melbourne, OUP, 1957). The despotic Malay rule of the Brunei Sultanate had not been forgotten.

¹³⁰ The native non-Malays constantly demanded a privileged position equivalent to that of the Malays in the Federation.

power. The top political elite, men like Ong Kee Hui, Donald Stephens, Stephen Yong, Stephen Ningkan, saw in Borneo's separate development towards self-government and independence their eventual inheritance of political power and rule. Malaysia was initially seen, therefore, as a proposal which would deny them their rightful legacy. They also feared that the identity of their states would be completely lost in a Malaysia in which the twin territories were merely two out of fifteen constituent units.¹³¹ Furthermore, they did not want their respective territories to be culturally Malayized. The Chinese business community in Sabah and Sarawak appeared to have also feared economic competition from their Singapore and Federation counterparts,¹³² and the raising of the level of taxation in Borneo to that of Malaya. In as far as the politically-interested masses were concerned, especially the native non-Malays, Malaysia was also seen as disadvantageous because it meant the passing away of British rule.

There was in addition a set of largely unconscious motivations which pushed Sabahans and Sarawakians towards opposition to the Malaysia scheme. First, the political elite was riled by the Malaysia proposal because it was considered improper, coming as it did from an outsider, and without prior consultation. The well-informed were angered by what they saw as the attempt to use the Borneo territories (in Stephen's words) as 'tools to solve what is regarded as the Singapore problem'.¹³³ To the top political elite also, the Malaysia plan ran counter to their ideological commitment to northern Borneo nationalism, federation and independence. A factor which had strong motivational force among the mass of the native peoples was the simple desire to maintain a tranquil *status quo* and the dislike and fear of change *per se*.

The motivational force of most of the factors pulling in the other direction, i.e. towards support of Malaysia, gained strength only after 1961. If considerations of security were at the beginning the most important disincentives to support, security considerations were later to become possibly the most important single factor working towards commitment to the Malaysia plan. The *Cobbold Commission Report* noted that in

... the absence of some project like Malaysia, the Chinese, with their rapidly increasing population and their long start over the other races in education, could expect when independence came, to be in an unassailable position in Sarawak. This in turn will put the communists... in an equally unassailable position.¹³⁴

Non-Chinese apprehensions about Chinese domination and the concomitant

¹³¹ *Sunday Times*, 23 July 1961.

¹³² See *Cobbold Commission Report*, p. 35.

¹³³ *Sunday Times*, 23 July 1961.

¹³⁴ *The Cobbold Commission Report*, p. 30.

communist threat had existed before the end of 1961. They did not have strong motivational force, however, because of the assumption of the continuation of British rule and, therefore, protection. The Malaysia proposal questioned that assumption and British support for Malaysia exploded it.

Two other security fears probably played more crucial roles. By January 1962, Borneo leaders had become seriously concerned with the threat posed by Indonesia and possible Indonesian intentions after West Irian.¹³⁵ This factor gained even greater motivational force after the Brunei revolt of December 1962. Another factor, one which had particular relevance to Sabah but a general impact through British Borneo, was the Philippines claim to Sabah which had gained unanimous approval in the Philippines House of Representatives on 24 April 1962.

The perceived security benefits of Malaysia coincided with the decreasing force of the security drawbacks of Malaysia in 1962. Adequate safeguards were conceded in 1962 to minimize most of the fears regarding Malayan 'colonialism', Malay domination and ethnic discrimination. By 1962 also, Malaysia appeared to have economic aid and development benefits for Sabah and Sarawak. Even SUPP leaders seemed to have been attracted by this aspect of Malaysia.¹³⁶

For most of the top political elite, Malaysia had by 1962 begun to be seen not as an attempt to disinherit, but as a means by which their inheritance could be greatly speeded up – and even made greater. While hints had been privately made as early as 1961, by August 1962 the Tunku had publicly declared that 'a few Cabinet posts' in the Malaysian Cabinet would be reserved for Borneo leaders.¹³⁷ Malaysia would also bring quick independence. It is doubtful whether many of the political elite really seriously desired independence by 1963. What became clear was that independence would willy-nilly 'come sooner rather than later as had hitherto been anticipated'.¹³⁸ Since 'the tide of opinion in the world today is running strongly against colonialism'¹³⁹ and the tide of British colonialism was ebbing fast, Sabah and Sarawak had to ensure their future viability in the only way

¹³⁵ *Sunday Times*, 14 January 1962.

¹³⁶ William Hardin, a founder and central committee member of SUPP, declared after one of the scores of study tours of Malaya organized by Kuala Lumpur: 'If SUPP leaders and members had only been given an opportunity to inspect the Federation's development projects and rural upliftment schemes, I am sure there will not be opposition to the Malaysia proposal' (*Straits Times*, 30 May 1962). The Federation eventually promised 300 million dollars for Sabah and Sarawak development over five years.

¹³⁷ *Straits Echo*, 10 August 1962.

¹³⁸ North Borneo White Paper, 'Northern Borneo and Sarawak', February 1962, reproduced in *Cobbold Commission Report*, p. 108.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

possible: membership within Malaysia. The legitimacy of Malaysia, meanwhile, had been increased by Sabah and Sarawak participation in decision-making on Malaysia¹⁴⁰ and by British advocacy of it.¹⁴¹

On 10 August 1961, Haji Mustapha (the 'Dato Bandar'), chairman of the largely-Malay Party Negara Sarawak (PANAS) came out in support of Malaysia, thus making PANAS the first pro-Malaysia Borneo party. A few days later, Stephens, Haji Mustapha, and Datu Mustapha (later leader of the United Sabah National Organisation (USNO)) visited the Federation on the first study tour organized by Kuala Lumpur. After a meeting with the Tunku, Stephens declared that 'all the misunderstandings have been cleared now, and the target date for Malaysia is in sight'.¹⁴² Datu Mustapha agreed.¹⁴³

Progress was clearly being made; and by the end of 1961, most of the leaders of the two territories had begun to modify their stand.¹⁴⁴ The British acceptance of Malaysia in principle was manifested in two official pro-Malaysia documents: the Sarawak White Paper (published on 4 January 1962) and the Sabah White Paper (published on 31 January 1962). At the third MSCC meeting held in Kuala Lumpur on 6-8 January 1962, accord was reached on several issues important to Sabah and Sarawak. On 25 January 1962, a pro-Malaysia party, BARJASA (Barisan Rakyat Jati Sarawak) was formed in Sarawak. The fourth and final session of the MSCC was held in Singapore on the 1-3 February 1962. Ong Kee Hui, chairman of SUPP and a member of the Sarawak delegation was cool, but not openly hostile.¹⁴⁵ At the end of the meeting, agreement was reached on a joint 'Memorandum on Malaysia'.¹⁴⁶ That Memorandum expressed 'the vital necessity of the realization of Malaysia as soon as possible'.¹⁴⁷ It was submitted to the Cobbold Commission by Donald Stephens (the Chairman of the MSCC) on 23 February 1962.

¹⁴⁰ Sarawak and Sabah participation came through the Malaysia Solidarity Consultative Committee (MSCC), which was set up at the end of July 1961, and later, the Inter-Governmental Committee made up of representatives of Britain, the Federation, Sabah and Sarawak.

¹⁴¹ The native peoples trusted the British to the extent of generally believing that Whitehall would not recommend the scheme if it was not going to be beneficial to them.

¹⁴² *Straits Times*, 15 August 1961.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 16 August 1961. On 23 December 1961, Datu Mustapha formed USNO after active encouragement by and with some assistance from the Federation.

¹⁴⁴ J. Ongkili, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁴⁵ *Straits Times*, 25 January 1962.

¹⁴⁶ *Malaysia in Brief*, p. 131. See also, *Sunday Times*, 4 February 1962.

¹⁴⁷ *Cobbold Commission Report*, p. 119.

The existence of two assessments of Sabah and Sarawak opinion (the Cobbold Commission which conducted its hearings from 20 February to 17 April 1962, and the United Nations MacMichael Mission of mid-1963) are useful aids in roughly judging the state of public opinion roughly one year after the Tunku's proposal and two years after it.

From submissions it received, the Cobbold Commission reported that in Sabah, Stephen's UMNO and Datu Mustapha's USNO (both native-based) were strongly in favour of Malaysia. The much smaller Chinese, Jesselton-based Democratic Party, the Sandakan-based Chinese United Party and the non-Muslim Dusun-based National Pasok Momogun Organization favoured independence before consideration of the Malaysia plan. In Sarawak, the largest party, SUPP, opposed Malaysia. Its erstwhile compatriot in opposition, Ningkan's Iban-based SNAP had, by the time of the Commission's hearings, switched to supporting the proposal. Also in support of Malaysia were Haji Mustapha's Malay-based PANAS and the recently-formed BARJASA. As regards the masses, the Commission came to the *rough* consensus that about a third in each territory strongly favoured early realization of Malaysia without concern about terms and conditions, and that another third, many of whom were favourable to the Malaysia project, asked for safeguards and conditions; the remaining third divided between those who strongly preferred the continuation of British rule and those who would oppose Malaysia on any terms unless it was preceded by independence and self-government.¹⁴⁸ Even if the Commission could have been somewhat biased in its assessment, it cannot be denied that great strides had been made in winning the support of Sabah and Sarawak by early 1962.

In early August 1962, the pro-Malaysia Sarawak Chinese Association (SCA) was formed. In Sabah, the Democratic Party and the United Party merged to form the Sabah National Party (SANAP) and declared support for Malaysia. Pasok Momogun became, therefore, the only party in Sabah which was opposed to Malaysia. After some hesitation, it too came out in favour of Malaysia. SUPP was thus left as the only party in the two territories still in opposition.

Sufficient Sabah and Sarawak political elite support had been won by mid-1962. What of 'mass' opinion? The UN Mission, sent in the middle of 1963 to ascertain public opinion on the Malaysia issue in Sabah and Sarawak, examined the district elections of Sabah and Sarawak.¹⁴⁹ It reported

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁹ In an attempt to appease Indonesia and the Philippines, the Federation had signed the tripartite Manila Accord of June 1963 which stated among other things that Indonesia and the Philippines would welcome the formation of Malaysia provided that the support of the peoples of Sabah and Sarawak was ascertained by the Secretary-General of the United Nations or his representative (*Malaysia, Malaya/Indonesia Relations*, Kuala Lumpur, 1963, Appendix XIV).

that in Sabah, with an average turnout of 79 per cent., the pro-Malaysia Sabah Alliance (made up of all the State's parties) had won 131 seats, and Independents six in the elections up to May 1963. In Sarawak the picture was almost equally good. After consulting 400 of the 429 Sarawak members elected, the UN Mission Report stated that of the 183,191 voters whose views could be classified with reasonable assurance, 73.3 per cent. were in favour of Malaysia and 26.7 per cent. were opposed.¹⁵⁰

The political campaign for sufficient support and acquiescence in the twin Borneo territories had been won. On 9 July 1963, representatives of the Governments of the Federation, Britain, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak initialled the Malaysia Agreement in London.

THE STRUGGLE FOR MALAYSIA IN SINGAPORE

The struggle for Malaysia in Singapore differed from the campaign for Malaysia *vis-a-vis* the British and Sabah and Sarawak in terms of the difficulty of gaining victory and the ferocity with which it was fought. It was clear almost from the very beginning that the battle for Malaysia would be lost if the moderate leadership of the PAP and the pro-Malaysia Singapore Government were ousted from power (because all possible alternative governments would have opposed Malaysia), and if the people of Singapore rejected merger within Malaysia.

The PAP Government's Fight to Stay in Power

For the PAP leadership in the first few months after May 1961, the struggle for merger and Malaysia in Singapore lay in its fight to stay in power. For the Singapore opponents of merger and Malaysia it consisted of ousting, from within and from without, the PAP Government under Lee Kuan Yew. The internal challenge to the PAP leadership by the party's powerful dissident left was by far the more serious.

As regards the PAP's dissidents, it is important to note that dissatisfaction among them had grown to serious proportions even *before* the Tunku's 27 May 1961 speech. The leftists had been antagonized by the PAP Government's policies regarding political detainees, Chinese education, the trade union movement, citizenship,¹⁵¹ the Internal Security Council, and the colonial masters. They could not have been anything but unhappy at the still obtuse but nevertheless public attack on them by the top PAP leadership in the party's organ, *Petir*.¹⁵² There was dissatisfaction too with the

¹⁵⁰ Malaysia, Department of Information, *United Nations Malaysia Mission* (Kuala Lumpur, 1963), p. 61. As figures of mass support, these should be treated with some circumspection. The real import of the UN mission lay in its legitimizing of Malaysia.

¹⁵¹ Pang Cheng Lian, *Singapore's People's Action Party* (Singapore, OUP, 1971), p. 11.

¹⁵² A *Petir* article entitled 'The Open Conspiracy' was serialized in the *Sunday Mail* in February and March 1961.

lack of intra-party democracy and consultation. Personal antipathies, especially those revolving around Lee Kuan Yew, had probably also become strong. Further, the leaders of the party left were frustrated, like Ong Eng Guan had been, by their limited governmental and party power and authority¹⁵³ and with their 'air-conditioned cells'.¹⁵⁴ Like Ong also, it is possible that the radicals feared that the moderate leadership was waiting for the right moment to smash them.¹⁵⁵

The opportune time for a pre-emptive strike against the moderate leadership might well have been the period immediately after the Hong Lim debacle of 29 April 1961. Yet the radical left, still uncertain of their strength and of themselves, were loath to mount an open challenge and to force a break. The Tunku's 27 May proposal for merger and Malaysia came as the last straw to break the camel's back. The struggle against the moderate leadership also became a battle against merger and Malaysia (and not the other way round). The leadership challenge and the campaign against merger and Malaysia, however, came only slowly, cautiously.

On 3 June 1961, six members of the ten-man Singapore Trade Union Congress Secretariat led by Lim Chin Siong announced their support for their own party in the coming Anson by-election – but at the same time called for the abolishment of the ISC and full self-government for Singapore.¹⁵⁶ No mention was made of merger or Malaysia. In another statement on 12 June, the 'Big Six' increased their demands. Eight days later, the threat to withdraw their support from the PAP leadership was made implicit. On 24 June, the *Straits Times* published a letter in which Lim Chin Siong categorically denied that anyone was against merger, but emphasized that 'merger should in no way restrict the advance of Malayan socialism'.¹⁵⁷ One week before polling day for the Anson by-election, the Big Six criticized their leaders for not having had the courtesy of discussing the merger issue with comrades both in Singapore and the Federation, called on them to disclose the intended form and substance of merger, and declared: 'Anyone who allows the colonial power to control us through the right-wing

¹⁵³ None of the detainees released on the PAP's assumption of office in 1959 (including the powerful Lim Chin Siong) were elected to the Central Executive Committee. The highest government positions they were given were the powerless posts of Political Secretaries.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with James Puthuchery.

¹⁵⁵ According to James Puthuchery (who was one of those released in 1959 and had good personal relations with Lee Kuan Yew and Dr. Goh Keng Swee) Dr. Goh told him: 'After we scrub Ong out, we must scrub a few others out: Chin Siong, Bani and all these chaps.' Puthuchery told Lim Chin Siong that if the PAP won Hong Lim, they would go after him next.

¹⁵⁶ *Straits Times*, 4 June 1961.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 24 June 1961.

[Kuala Lumpur] forces must be exposed.¹⁵⁸ In the last stages of the crucial Anson election, the radical left withdrew their ground-level electioneering machinery. The majority (apparently from 70 to 80 per cent.) of the PAP campaign workers, in the words of a PAP leader, 'just laid down their tools and left the place'.¹⁵⁹ On 13 July 1961, two days before Anson, eight PAP Assemblymen led by Dr. Lee Siew Choh (a Parliamentary Secretary) came out in open support of the Big Six. The PAP was shaken to the core. It lost Anson.

The PAP dissidents were apparently still unprepared to force an open and irreversible break and to mount a full-scale take-over. More time was needed to win more defectors at Assembly, cadre, and branch level. Significantly, there were still inadequate assurances that a government of the PAP left would be allowed to be established by the colonial power which still had a massive military force on the island. Lim Chin Siong, Sydney Woodhull and Fong Swee Suan accordingly met Lord Selkirk three days after the Anson election (18 July 1962); Lord Selkirk was purported (by Lee Kuan Yew) to have led them to believe that so long as the British bases were untouched, the British were prepared to accept a government 'even more left than the PAP'.¹⁶⁰

The decks were cleared for a takeover. But before any attempt could be made, Lee Kuan Yew forced the issue. The PAP dissidents had demanded and pinned their hopes on the convening of an immediate party conference at which the moderates stood a very good chance of being ousted.¹⁶¹ Lee Kuan Yew chose to fight on his own ground and as soon as possible. The rot had to be stopped quickly.

On 20 July, five days after Anson, he introduced a motion of confidence in the Legislative Assembly. Those still loyal to the leadership had to stand and be literally counted. After a record session, twenty-seven PAP members voted for the motion, thirteen abstained. On 21 July, one Parliamentary Secretary (Dr. Lee Siew Choh) and three Political Secretaries (Lim Chin Siong, Sydney Woodhull and Fong Swee Suan) were sacked; four Parliamentary Secretaries and fourteen branch officials were suspended. To all intents and purposes the attempt of the radical left to take over the PAP and prevent merger and Malaysia by an internal *coup* was virtually over. The dissidents applied for the registration of the Barisan Sosialis party on 29 July

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9 July 1961.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in J.T. Bellows, *The People's Action Party of Singapore* (Mimeograph Series no. 14, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1970), p. 43.

¹⁶⁰ *Straits Echo*, 21 July 1961.

¹⁶¹ According to one source, thirty-one out of the fifty-one PAP branch committees resigned *en bloc* in 1961. In 1961, apparently 80.4 per cent. of the PAP members were expelled, resigned or let their membership lapse. According to Dr. Lee Siew Choh,

and exactly two weeks later, the Barisan was registered. The struggle to unseat the PAP quickly became transformed into a campaign to generate and mobilize mass opinion against merger and Malaysia.

Motivations of the Singapore Opponents for Merger and Malaysia

Before dealing with how the Singapore Referendum on merger was contested, it is important to examine why the opponents of merger and Malaysia fought against merger at all. Because of their importance, we will concentrate on the motivations of the Barisan Sosialis.

One of the most important motivations for opposition to merger and Malaysia — insofar as the PAP dissidents and later, the Barisan were concerned — was the fear for their personal security. Merger and Malaysia at a time when a strongly anti-communist regime flourished in Kuala Lumpur would not only result in their detention — a powerful consideration to men who had so recently emerged from years in gaol — but also in the dilution of Singapore's radical potential in Malaya and the crushing of the forces of the revolutionary left.¹⁶² A third factor possibly had even greater motivational force. If merger was frustrated, there was a strong probability that the PAP would be thrown out of office at the next general election. Power would then fall into their hands. This was an important consideration to the PAP dissidents, especially to those whose defections arose out of the desire to abandon what was seen as a sinking ship and to hitch their wagons to a rising star.¹⁶³ In addition, Singapore's incorporation within Malaysia was opposed because it was regarded as British inspired and instigated.¹⁶⁴ Merger and Malaysia were illegitimate also because it was being supported, in their eyes, by an arch-reactionary regime in Kuala Lumpur, but more important, because the Lee Kuan Yew 'clique' also endorsed them. To a significant extent, merger and Malaysia were opposed simply because they were being put forward by Lee and his group. Out of anger with the PAP leadership probably grew the desire among many in the

Chairman of the Barisan Sosialis, practically all the seventy or so PAP cadres left the party. The PAP maintains that less than 30 per cent. did so (Pang, *Singapore's Action Party*, *op. cit.*, p. 15).

¹⁶² In contrast to the PAP moderates, most of the radicals believed in socialism (and some in communism) above merger. They believed that the heartland of socialism had to be protected.

¹⁶³ The majority of the PAP members who defected to the Barisan were very probably *not* communists and a very large segment of these were attempting to follow exactly in the footsteps of those in government who had sought (prior to 1959) to utilize the strength of the communists and pro-communists to come to power. Lee Kuan Yew placed both Dr. Lee Siew Choh (Chairman of the Barisan) and Dr. Sheng Nam Chin (Vice-Chairman) in this category (*Straits Times*, 27 July 1961).

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Dr. Lee Siew Choh.

Barisan group to frustrate those who, in their eyes, had maltreated, frustrated, prostituted them and now sought to stab them and their friends in the back.

These factors pushing the PAP dissidents and the Barisan towards opposition were balanced – but not over-balanced – by considerations which attracted them towards the idea of merger itself. First, to a great many of the radical left and to virtually all Malayan communists, the unification of Singapore and the rest of Malaya had probably been an article of faith ever since Singapore was separated from the mainland in 1946.¹⁶⁵ Here was a classic example of ideology *versus* self interest. In 1961 they still favoured merger (as they do today) – but for the most part, not at the cost of their destruction and the frustration of their struggle for power. It is within this context and the quandary which many PAP dissidents faced that the slogan of 'genuine merger' (as opposed to a 'phoney merger') must be seen. It fulfilled, in the early stages at least, the psychological function of reconciling the ideological commitment to merger with active opposition to it. Use of a 'genuine merger' slogan probably indicated also the belief that merger had a mass appeal and that public opposition to merger would forfeit a great deal of popular support. It is to be noted that the Barisan never attacked merger as such but only 'phoney merger'. Third, the PAP dissidents were aware that merger and Malaysia would mean independence from British rule.

Despite these strong counter-pulls, however, the motivations for opposition were such as to cause determined opposition to merger and Malaysia. For almost a year, the Barisan's commitment was channelled in the direction of winning the Singapore Referendum.

The Singapore Referendum

The suggestion that the issue of merger 'must ultimately be decided by the collective will of the people' was first made by Lee Kuan Yew within a week of the Tunku's 27 May speech at a Singapore National Day rally.¹⁶⁶ After the Anson debacle and the PAP defections, it was clear that consultation of the 'collective will' would not come through a general election but through a national referendum.

On 23 August 1961, the first formal meeting on merger between the Federation and Singapore was held. The joint communique issued at the end of the talks stated agreement on federal control over defence, external affairs and internal security and Singapore autonomy in education and labour. The PAP apparently decided that the time had come to force the

¹⁶⁵ *Loc. cit.* See also 'Draft Political Report of Comrade Lee Siew Choh, Party Chairman' reprinted in *Plebian*, Special Issue 8, 31 August 1969.

¹⁶⁶ Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 172. It must be noted that a referendum or a general election was not legally necessary. No doubt the referendum would not have been held if the PAP was uncertain of its outcome.

various opposition parties to state their public positions (thus limiting their room for future manoeuvre) and to trap them into taking up untenable positions — something they were likely to do since they were still largely in the dark on the details of merger and because of their somewhat neurotic responses towards the PAP and its actions.

On 28 August 1961, Dr. Toh revealed that he had written to the Barisan, SPA and UPP to declare their stand on the already-agreed points.¹⁶⁷ It was a cunning gambit. If the PAP's opponents supported all these points, the PAP stood to gain for its position and negotiations would have been endorsed and legitimized. If opposition to autonomy on labour and education was declared, the Singapore public would be antagonized — for the Federation's policies on these subjects were generally very unpopular in the island. If federal control over external affairs and defence was opposed, the opponents could not claim to be pro-merger. If the Barisan opposed Kuala Lumpur control over internal security, its 'communist' nature would have been publicly revealed.

The SPA-UMNO-MCA Alliance immediately endorsed the Tunku-Lee joint communiqué.¹⁶⁸ Marshall was on honeymoon in Australia. Ong Eng Guan merely quoted the UPP constitution's stated objective of 'complete merger and the establishment of an independent national state of Malaya', called for more details and the immediate convening of an all-party conference to discuss the constitutional future of Singapore.¹⁶⁹

The Barisan, unlike the UPP, refused to opt out of the PAP game. On merger, it had the theoretical option of straightforwardly rejecting it. Rejection, however, would have confirmed PAP allegations that it was anti-merger, reduced whatever prospect there was of causing further PAP defections, and forfeited the support of a substantial segment of the electorate, a popular slogan and a popular cause; it could have caused division within the party at a time when consensus and unity were of the greatest import: it would have seriously damaged the party's credibility, for the Barisan's leaders had consistently proclaimed their support for 'merger'. Yet genuine acceptance of merger would have meant all the drawbacks of immediate merger.

The Barisan decided to avoid the drawbacks of openly rejecting merger by publicly supporting merger. Indeed, it probably tried to maximize its credibility, minimize internal dissension, confound the PAP's allegations, capitalize on a popular cause, and win PAP adherents by appearing to outbid the PAP. On 29 August, Dr. Lee stated that the Barisan sought 'full and complete merger with Singapore as the twelfth State of the Federation.

¹⁶⁷ *Straits Echo*, 29 August 1961.

¹⁶⁸ *Straits Times*, 31 August 1961.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

not the PAP's phoney merger'.¹⁷⁰ To ensure rejection of 'full and complete merger' by the Federation — with the onus thus resting on the Tunku — and to embarrass the PAP, the Barisan demanded 'full merger', with automatic federal citizenship and proportionate representation in Parliament, two additions which were expected to be unacceptable to Kuala Lumpur but very popular in Singapore.¹⁷¹ Within the circumstances in which the Barisan found itself, wherein it could not say 'nay' and yet it could not say 'yea', the stratagem of saying 'no' by saying 'yes' was, on the surface at least, brilliant.¹⁷²

The PAP had succeeded in limiting the opposition parties' room for manoeuvre. Since all the major parties supported 'merger', the PAP sought to place before the people from the outset a set of loaded alternatives on the form of merger. There could, Lee argued, be three theoretical options: *Proposal A*: a complete Penang-type merger under which probably 227,000 Singapore citizens would be disenfranchised; *Proposal B*: a merger with Singapore coming in as 'a very special state' retaining reserve powers along the Northern Ireland model; and *Proposal C*: 'a super Penang-type merger', a complete merger plus automatic federal citizenship for Singapore citizens (as proposed by 'communist-front organizations'). Quoting the Tunku's 16 October speech in the Federation Parliament in which he stated that the communists would 'demand merger on terms unacceptable to the Federation', Lee argued that Proposal C was completely out of the question.¹⁷³ Lee argued, and the PAP continuously stressed, that the real choice was between Proposal A, a simple Penang-type merger and the PAP's Northern

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 August 1961.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* The party also stated that it was prepared to accept a confederal arrangement under which Singapore would have full internal autonomy in internal affairs, including internal security.

¹⁷² Bellows agrees with the view of 'one high government official' who informed him that 'If the Barisan had opposed merger and demanded the Independence of Singapore, a referendum could never have been held because the PAP merger proposal would have been crushingly rejected' (*op. cit.*, p. 80). This is a fallacious view, one no doubt arising after merger turned sour. Comparison of the referendum results and the results of the elections one year later — however dangerous — does suggest that merger was more popular than the pro-merger parties, the anti-merger parties more popular than opposition to merger. Roughly 20 per cent. who were to vote for the anti-merger parties in 1963 voted for some form of merger in the 1962 referendum. From 1954 Singapore's politicians almost without exception appeared to regard merger as a popular cause. It is difficult to believe that they were all wrong. The Barisan certainly believed that merger was a popular cause. If the Barisan had opposed merger, of course, 'the PAP merger proposal' would probably have been a better package from Singapore's point of view.

¹⁷³ *Straits Times*, 27 October 1961.

Ireland model. The choice was heavily loaded, for it was a choice between having some real local autonomy and practically none at all. And it was a choice between having Singapore citizenship and federal nationality and the loss for an estimated 227,000 citizens, of both their citizenship and their vote.

Second, the drawbacks of Barisan's 'complete merger' were brought home to the people with some force. The PAP reduced them to specific, concrete and thus, meaningful terms. It was constantly argued that under a Barisan-type merger – which through sheer repetition came to be identified inaccurately as 'the Penang-type merger' – Singapore would have to introduce the Federation's discriminatory four-to-one ratio in the civil service and the Federation's discriminatory regulations governing business licences; there would be unequal treatment for the different linguistic streams of education, unfavourable conditions for aid-grants to Chinese secondary schools, non-recognition of Nanyang University degrees. Singapore would have to give up its 'pro-labour' policy and multilingualism in the Assembly and would be reduced from being 'a very special state' with a Prime Minister, to a mere unit, like Penang or Malacca with a mere Chief Minister and very narrow state powers. It was even suggested later that even Singapore's free-port status could not be guaranteed.¹⁷⁴ Under the PAP type of merger, on the other hand, all these drawbacks would be avoided. Thus, the PAP's Northern Ireland model had some appeal for, and 'complete merger' some cost to, the English-educated civil servant, the Chinese businessman, the Chinese chauvinist worried about Chinese education, language and culture, the Nanyang student and graduate, the labour leader, the big merchant and the proud Singapore patriot.

Marshall consistently used the term 'smokescreen' to refer to the PAP's tactics in the early stages of the 1961 struggle for merger. It might be more accurate to characterize at least the information side of the Government's strategy as a blackout. From the outset, according to a Singapore Minister, the Federation and Singapore Governments agreed to keep the opposition parties (even the Singapore Alliance it seems) in the dark about the details of merger. This manoeuvre had several advantages. First, the PAP was in a position to release each detail when it wanted to, thus influencing the course of public debate and giving it the initiative. Second, the Government could release carefully-packaged details at the most opportune moments. Third, it enabled the governing party to present *fait accompli*. Fourth, the opposition was put in a severely disadvantageous position in the beginning where it could attack a very vague but legitimate cause, 'merger', or only the imaged terms of merger.

For this and other reasons, the Barisan's conduct of its referendum campaign was understandably somewhat less effective than the PAP's. It

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 18 August 1963.

attempted to present the PAP negotiations with the Federation as a 'sell out' on citizenship and proportionate representation. What the PAP got, it argued, was 'second class citizenship' with Singapore citizens gaining a useless federal nationality. The PAP countered with two persuasive arguments. First, under the PAP terms, 'Nobody's going to lose any of the rights he has got; everybody is going to get something more.'¹⁷⁵ This had the virtue of being true. Second, the reasonable and persuasive argument was put that Singapore could not expect to have everything it wanted. The same sort of point was put across as regards Singapore's small allocation of fifteen seats in a Malaysian Parliament.¹⁷⁶

All the while that the clash of words was raging, the PAP continued with the basic tactics which it had initiated from mid-1961: putting forward the urgent need for merger and its inevitability, creating a communist scare, discrediting the Barisan, the UPP, the Workers Party and their leaders, and boosting the image of the PAP. In presenting the case for merger, the PAP correctly emphasized the forceful bread-and-butter issues: without merger there would be less business, less profit, less pay, fewer jobs.¹⁷⁷ To emphasize that merger was 'as inevitable as the rising and the setting of the sun', the Government stressed that Singapore and the Federation were so intertwined and interwoven socially, economically, militarily, culturally and politically that no force on earth could maintain the 'artificial' separation. The oneness of the two territories no Singapore politician would openly deny. It was also pointed out that even the MCP and the Barisan acknowledged the inevitability of merger.

The communist scare was a master stroke. It had contributed greatly to the Tunku's initiative on Malaysia; it ensured that there would be no slowing in the momentum towards Malaysia; it also strengthened Singapore's negotiating position. The PAP could negotiate from strength because it came to the negotiating table from a domestic position of weakness. In Singapore, the air of conspiracy allowed the PAP to exploit the real fear of communism of the majority of Singaporeans.¹⁷⁸

The communist scare and the PAP skill in linking communism with the Barisan ensured that the latter would be placed beyond the pale of respectability in as far as the middle and upper classes and the vast majority of the English-educated were concerned. The Government sought to discredit the Barisan in other ways. Personal abuse was heaped on the Barisan's leaders.

¹⁷⁵ *Straits Times*, 16 November 1961.

¹⁷⁶ Lee Kuan Yew revealed that fifteen was a compromise figure. In return for less than proportionate representation, Singapore was being granted autonomy in labour and education and greater local autonomy generally, and she would be allowed to keep three-quarters of her state revenue.

¹⁷⁷ See Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-6.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Dr. Sheng Nam Chin.

They were rogues, and dangerous rogues at that, jokers and incompetents. On the radio, the opposition were consistently out-talked by articulate men who had done their homework. Politicians assuredly do not live by words alone. But the leaders of the opposition were being forced to eat so many of them, in public and before attentive listeners, that by the crucial stages of the referendum campaign, Marshall was the only one left who was willing to participate in radio debate — and he was made to look ridiculous. The Queensbury rules were cast to the wind. Opposition leaders were branded as hypocrites and cowards who were against merger, but did not have the courage to openly state their stand. The Barisan was thus goaded into vehemently protesting its devotion to 'merger' — with disastrous consequences in the end.¹⁷⁹ Further, Barisan's leaders were portrayed as men who were really not interested in the welfare of the workers and of Singapore (which had so much to gain from merger) but interested only in their dogmatic ideology and their unscrupulous craving for power. They were also prepared to place merger in jeopardy merely in order to have a form of citizenship which would allow them to stand as candidates in Federation elections (which they could not do under the PAP terms). The PAP seized on a statement attributed to Lim Chin Siong and published in the pro-communist Indonesian newspaper, *Bintang Timor*, to claim that the Barisan desired merger not with the rest of Malaya but with Indonesia.¹⁸⁰ The linking of the Barisan with the Indonesian Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) also seriously hurt the party's image.

While discrediting their opponents and especially the Barisan, the PAP continued with the job of boosting the tarnished image of the party, its popularity and its resources. The PAP leadership tried very hard to portray the internal party split as a communist stab in the back — thus dispelling suspicions held by many that the break had been solely the machiavellian handiwork of Lee Kuan Yew and his cohorts. To show party unity and solidarity over merger, the PAP completely closed ranks. The solid rock of the PAP and its consistency contrasted to good effect with the shifting sands of the opposition parties. The PAP tried its best also to demonstrate to the people that it was getting the best possible deal for Singapore.¹⁸¹ Partly in order to win third-world support for merger, but as much to boost his prestige and image, Lee Kuan Yew left on 20 April 1962 on a successful five-week world tour, meeting and seen to meet among others, Nehru, Nasser and Tito, the prestigious leaders of Afro-Asia. The PAP also tried hard to

¹⁷⁹ It resulted in confusion among its mass supporters and lower echelon activists.

¹⁸⁰ *Straits Times*, 23 May 1962

¹⁸¹ To shouts of 'sell-out'; it challenged the opposition to try and get a better package. Marshall was the only one foolish enough to accept the challenge. After a trip to Kuala Lumpur, he was forced to admit that the PAP had got as much as there was to be got.

win the support of the Singapore right and centre and the English-educated. The mass exodus of party activists from the PAP throughout 1961 forced the party to rely more on the machinery of government. One of the first things Lee had done when he came to power was to cut the supplementary allowances of civil servants earning over 2,200 dollars per month. With appropriate excuses, the sizeable cut was restored by the end of 1961. By 1962, as a PAP Minister was to admit, 'In many ways, the PAP and the government machinery [had] become one and the same.'¹⁸²

While believing that it was on a winning merger wicket, the PAP was nevertheless unprepared to take any chances. It attempted to legally ensure that merger would be unbeatable by ensuring a referendum with a loaded set of choices. Voting being compulsory in Singapore, the Barisan responded with the only alternative way of saying 'no' to merger: blank votes. The Government countered with the ingenious argument that a blank and uncertain ballot would indicate that the voter was undecided and would, therefore, be content to leave the issue to be decided in a manner in which the elected representatives in the Assembly had already decided. With the support of the Alliance Assemblymen, the Government completely got its way in the Legislative Assembly. The Assembly resolved that three alternatives be put before the people: (i) merger on the PAP model, subsequently labelled (Alternative A); (ii) complete merger on the Penang model with its citizenship and autonomy drawbacks (Alternative B); and (iii) a vague merger on terms no less favourable than those for the Borneo territories (Alternative C), a concession to Lim Yew Hock. The date for the Referendum (1 September 1962) was announced merely two weeks before polling day.

To gain international sanction and respectability for their somewhat negative blank-vote policy, to discredit the 'phony' Referendum and thus the PAP, the opposition formed a makeshift Council of Joint Action and submitted memoranda to the UN Secretary-General and Committee on Colonialism, calling in the end for a UN presence during the polling. These moves failed. The opponents of merger had fired their last bolt; the PAP was yet to play its trump-card.

Lee Kuan Yew had flown to the UN to refute the charges brought against his government by the Council of Joint Action. On his way home, he stopped over in London (on 27 July 1962) where the Tunku was negotiating with the British Government. On 14 August the federal citizenship which the Barisan had demanded so incessantly was at last conceded by the Tunku. The credit went to Lee Kuan Yew, not to the Barisan, even though the concession was by this time essentially a non-substantive one. To capitalize on this trump card, Lee argued that Singapore's citizens were now not only on par with their Federation counterparts; they were even more privi-

¹⁸² Quoted in Bellows, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

leged. They would, in Singapore, have priority over housing, entry to schools, welfare relief, unemployment benefits, sickness benefits, and jobs in the state civil service. Marshall, pinned down on the radio to accepting the PAP-type merger if the citizenship concession was genuine, announced the ludicrous position of the Workers Party nine days before the Referendum. It supported the PAP's proposals *but* would continue to agitate for blank votes because it was against the 'shameless' and 'immoral' Referendum Ordinance.¹⁸³

The Barisan had also been out-manoeuvred and had cornered itself into an untenable position. In the end, the Barisan's policy of saying 'no' to merger by saying 'yes' proved too clever by half. The value of merger in principle had become part of conventional wisdom before 1961. In certain circles it was in fact sacrosanct. It had not been sufficiently challenged in 1961 and 1962.

The Barisan, in the concluding stages of the referendum campaign, also made the mistake of exasperatingly declaring that whatever the outcome of the Referendum, merger would be imposed.¹⁸⁴ This reinforced the idea which the PAP had tried to foster all along, the inevitability of merger. Since merger was inevitable, it logically followed that there was little point in wasting one's vote by casting a blank ballot. It logically followed also that the best thing to do was to choose the best option available. This was *without doubt* the PAP's alternative. The credibility of the Barisan also suffered when, on the one hand and up to the very end, it protested its devotion to merger, and on the other, it urged the electorate to vote against even what was seen by many as its proposal, complete Penang-type merger.¹⁸⁵ Voter perplexity among its supporters was inevitable. Dr. Lee Siew Choh now believes that the Barisan should have asked the public to vote for Alternative B.¹⁸⁶ It would have undermined the party's credibility less but it is doubtful if the Barisan would have done very much better.

It is to be noted that the PAP's presentation, in the last days of the campaign, of the disagreeable Alternative B as a possible winner over Alternative A probably played a crucial role in causing the bulk of those who wavered over casting a blank vote to vote for Alternative A. This possibility was brought home forcefully when the PAP stated at the last minute that if more people voted for Alternative B than for Alternative A, then the Assembly might consider the blank votes as votes for Alternative B.

¹⁸³ *Straits Times*, 23 August 1962.

¹⁸⁴ *Straits Echo*, 20 August 1962.

¹⁸⁵ The Barisan's leaders indignantly (and correctly) charged, apparently to little avail, that the 'Penang-type merger is purely an invention of the PAP in order to distort the stand of the opposition parties' (*Plebian*, 18 April, 1962), p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Dr. Lee Siew Choh.

The PAP's actual detailed presentation on paper of the alternatives was equally clever. All the tricks in the psychologist's and electioneer's manual were employed. For example, the familiar and patriotism-evoking flag of Singapore was used as the symbol for Alternative A. On Referendum information posters, all hands were seen putting a cross beside Alternative A. On polling day itself, at school polling centres, the Singapore flag was hoisted; election officers instructed many voters on how to *mark* their ballots — a normal voting procedure but clearly partisan in the context of the campaign for the blank vote. Rumours to the effect that through the use of the statutory Serial Numbers, every voter who cast a blank vote could be identified and dealt with, were (if not started by the PAP, as the Barisan charged)¹⁸⁷ certainly not squashed by the Government.

The Singapore Referendum was held one day after the Federation's Merdeka Day, on 1 September 1962. Of the 90 per cent. who went to the polls, 71 per cent. (397,626) voted for Alternative A; 1.7 per cent. (9,422) for Alternative B; and 1.4 per cent. (7,911) for Alternative C. A total of 144,077 (25 per cent.) of the voters cast blank votes. Three days after the Referendum, Lee Kuan Yew announced over the radio that the battle for merger was over. In essentials this was true. Once the merger referendum had been won, there was no turning back.¹⁸⁸

In outlining how the Referendum battle was conducted and won, we have concentrated on the skills with which the PAP waged it. Victory cannot, however, be explained purely in terms of one type of leadership asset. It must be traced back, first, to the PAP's very strong commitment to engineering public support for merger in general and Alternative A in particular, commitment arising out of its intense desire for merger, and its awareness of the necessity of fighting tooth and nail for such support. Determination was matched by brain and muscle.

While the PAP's skill was probably its most important leadership asset, other leadership assets also played significant roles; the PAP leaders' persistence and single-mindedness, their verbal and linguistic proficiency, their intelligence and capacity for empathy and insight, their ability to appear supremely self-confident, cool and assured, and their unity and cohesion. The PAP had, in addition, control of considerable influence over radio and the press. It is also apt to be forgotten that, while the activists and opinion leaders on its side were not in general as active or vociferous as the

¹⁸⁷ *Plebeian Express*, mid-November 1965, p. 8.

¹⁸⁸ Despite the puffing and huffing in the subsequent detailed Federation-Singapore negotiations on the financial terms, there was in reality little probability of a complete breakdown. And even if the Barisan had emerged victorious in the general elections held one week after the inauguration of Malaysia, there seems little chance that it would have been allowed to form the government if this threatened the existence of Malaysia. For a good, detailed, account of the financial negotiations see especially Osborne, *op. cit.*, and of the 1963 elections, Osborne and Bellows, *op. cit.*

Barisan's, the Government probably possessed the bigger battalion on the ground made up of the PAP organization, the civil service and those who strongly believed in merger. It is also often forgotten that the PAP did not suffer from the shortage of funds which plagued the Barisan. The PAP, moreover, was the only party which could negotiate terms. This, plus the fact it possessed the powers and authority of a government and could rely on sufficient support in the Legislative Assembly, placed it in a superior position to manipulate events.

One of the basic reasons behind victory also was the fact that the task of winning support for merger was not as difficult as the task of generating opposition to it. As Dr. Goh stated exactly a year before the referendum, 'We could not have parted company with them [the PAP dissidents] on a better issue and under more favourable circumstances.'¹⁸⁹

Besides the fact that the majority of the people were, in various degrees, sympathetic to merger, what mitigated the difficulty of generating sufficient support was the comparatively inferior persuasive power and counter-mobilization of the opponents of merger. This was to some extent due to their generally weaker commitment to the mobilization of opposition.

The Barisan as a whole was probably less committed to engineering opposition than the PAP was to engineering support. The Workers Party and the UPP never really put their hearts into it. One very important reason for this is the likelihood that deep in the hearts of many of their leaders was the uncomfortable belief that merger was right. Over merger, a great segment of the leadership of the Workers Party, the UPP and the Barisan were operating as split personalities.

The Barisan was not a solid monolith. It was the reservoir into which flowed those from the PAP left, right and centre who had become disenchanted, and self-seekers who wanted to jump on a bandwagon seen to be rolling towards victory, as well as communists and communist sympathizers. The Barisan's comparatively ambivalent policy over merger,¹⁹⁰ at least in the beginning, reflected to a large extent the lack of intra-party consensus on the merger issue and appeared to have been as much as anything a consensus-building mechanism.

The communists did not infiltrate only the Barisan but also the Workers Party.¹⁹¹ The latter as well as UPP¹⁹² lacked the cohesion which the PAP was able to achieve. The opponents of merger also lacked the PAP's public self-confidence and confidence in the righteousness of their cause; in addi-

¹⁸⁹ *Straits Times*, 1 September 1961.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with James Puthucheary; and another ex-Barisan source.

¹⁹¹ Interview with David Marshall.

¹⁹² One of the two PAP Assemblymen who defected with Ong returned to the PAP fold.

tion, they could not match the governing party's prestige, image of dependability and sheer cleverness. They could not come near to matching the Government's skill; and unlike the PAP, the opponents of merger were not only unable to exploit the mass media but were often at their mercy.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR MALAYSIA IN RELATION TO THE FEDERATION

The drive for Malaysia in the Federation differed significantly from the campaign in Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore in that there was *no strong opposition* from any quarter. A permissive, indeed generally supportive popular consensus existed on the issue of Malaysia. There was never the expectation of or even a really serious demand for elections or a referendum. Implementing Malaysia thus consisted largely of passing the appropriate motions and legislation, opposition to it (except in the later stages) largely confined to skirmishes in the Federation Dewan Rakyat. The Government, which had seventy-four members in a Chamber of 104,¹⁹³ faced a rather ineffectual set of opposition members, who were by no means all opposed to Malaysia.

According to Arnold Brackman, the PMIP 'was horrified' by the Tunku's Malaysia proposal; the Party Rakyat and the Labour Party 'were equally appalled'.¹⁹⁴ This by no means uncommon view grossly overstates and distorts the reaction of the Federation's opposition parties. Indeed, the immediate reactions to the Tunku's speech of 27 May from these parties were, to say the least, far from being unsympathetic. The Vice-President of the Labour Party on 28 May 1961¹⁹⁵ and the President of the Party Rakyat two days later¹⁹⁶ supported the Tunku's idea but politely suggested that merger be accomplished before Malaysia. The PMIP, which along with Party Rakyat had earlier advocated the Malaysia concept, issued a statement which expressed neither support nor opposition.¹⁹⁷ In August 1961, the Labour Party was reported to have passed a resolution accepting the Tunku's proposal at its Annual Conference.¹⁹⁸ On 15 October 1961, the PMIP at an Extraordinary Meeting of Delegates explicitly rejected merger between the Federation and Singapore (but not Malaysia) and argued

¹⁹³ The PMIP had 13 members; the Socialist Front (made up of Party Rakyat and the Labour Party of Malaya) 8; the PPP 4; Party Negara 1; the Malayan Party 1; there were 3 Independents.

¹⁹⁴ Brackman, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁹⁵ *Straits Times*, 29 May 1961.

¹⁹⁶ *Malay Mail*, 31 May 1961.

¹⁹⁷ *Straits Times*, 29 May 1961.

¹⁹⁸ *Malay Mail*, 13 August 1962.

that Malaysia should include Indonesia and the Philippines.¹⁹⁹ A day later, on 16 October, Boestamam, leader of the Party Rakyat called for 'complete merger' and Malaysia after self-determination.²⁰⁰

The strength of opposition by 16 October 1961 may be judged by the proceedings of the Dewan Rakyat on the same day. The Tunku introduced a motion stating agreement in principle with the concept of Malaysia and endorsing the Government's initiative in taking action for its realization. While criticisms were made and apprehensions expressed — directed it appears more at Lee Kuan Yew than at the motion — the motion itself was not challenged to a division. Lim Kean Siew, Secretary-General of the Socialist Front, stated his support for the motion in principle but disagreed with the details *as stated by the Singapore Prime Minister*. It was merger, not Malaysia, which was uppermost in the opposition parties' minds. Relations between them and the Alliance were still relatively good enough for the Government to finance a Socialist Front five-man study tour of northern Borneo in November 1961.

The posturings of the opposition parties and the pious and sectionally legitimate provisos attached to their support of Malaysia throughout the period can to a large extent be traced to the natural desire to embarrass the Government and to score points against the Alliance.

The strongest opposition to Malaysia had come from the PMIP. By the end of 1961, however, even the PMIP appeared to have accepted Malaysia as more or less a *fait accompli*. On 5 January 1962, at its tenth annual General Assembly, the party's president did reiterate the demand for the inclusion of Indonesia and the Philippines; he did strike a heroic pose: 'We will fight the [Malaysia] plan everywhere we can.'²⁰¹ But the PMIP decided in principle to expand its political activities throughout the Malaysian territories; and it decided to send a delegation to northern Borneo to study the possible establishment of the party there.²⁰² In September 1962, the Peoples Progressive Party also announced its intention of establishing branches in Singapore and Sarawak.²⁰³ In the meantime, the split in the PMIP over Malaysia (and other issues) had been brought into the open. In June 1961 the former Secretary-General of the party crossed the floor to join the Alliance.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ *Straits Times*, 16 October 1961.

²⁰⁰ *Singapore Free Press*, 17 October 1961.

²⁰¹ *Straits Echo*, 6 January 1962.

²⁰² *Malay Mail*, 11 January 1962. A year later, the party amended its constitution to allow it to operate in Borneo (*Straits Times*, 2 January 1963).

²⁰³ *Straits Times*, 8 September 1962.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 2 July 1962.

As far as the Socialist Front was concerned, it appeared to have become somewhat more antagonistic towards Malaysia by the beginning of 1962. It sponsored a conference of Socialist parties of the Malaysia region near the end of January which was attended by the PAP, the Barisan, the Workers Party, SUPP, the Party Rakyat of Brunei, of Singapore, and of Malaya, and the Malayan Labour Party. It should be noted that the strongest criticism of Malaysia came from the Brunei Party Rakyat, and of merger, from the Barisan.²⁰⁵ SUPP and the Federation parties were more sedate.²⁰⁶ The *Straits Echo* reported that on 28 January, the conference rejected the Malaysia plan as 'hostile to the concept of *Melayu Raya*' or Indonesia Raya, and directed against 'progressive forces in the region and a military threat to Indonesia' and argued that the closer association of the Malaysian peoples should be based on self-determination and negotiation with the 'true representatives of the people and not with the British Government'.²⁰⁷ The strength or rather, the weakness of the Socialist Front's opposition is indicated by the fact that for months afterwards, it did not take any significant steps to oppose Malaysia.

Seven months after the conference, the SF announced a proposal for a united front to oppose the Malaysia plan.²⁰⁸ The PPP opted out immediately.²⁰⁹ Boestamam, president of the Party Rakyat, was forced to issue a defensive statement. He declared that he was not anti-Malaysia, never had been and never would be. Malaysia should, however, be formed democratically.²¹⁰ The Socialist Front's initiative did not amount to much. On 25 April 1963, it held a joint rally with the PMIP, the UDP, and Party Negara. It should be noted that at that rally, all the opposition party leaders expressed support for the concept of Malaysia though they stated their opposition to the method, manner, and timing of its implementation.²¹¹

On 20 August 1963, the Malaysia Bill was passed in the Dewan Rakyat by seventy-three votes to fifteen.²¹² In a last minute attempt to block the inauguration of Malaysia, the Kelantan State Solicitor and Mentri Besar (both PMIP men) filed a court order suing the Federation Government and Tunku Abdul Rahman for amending the Federation Constitution without

²⁰⁵ *Straits Echo*, 27 January 1962.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 29 January 1962.

²⁰⁸ *Malayan Times*, 22 September 1962.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Malay Mail*, 26 September 1962.

²¹¹ *Straits Echo*, 26 April 1963.

²¹² *Straits Times*, 21 August 1963. The 73 votes came from the Alliance; 8 PMIP, 6 Socialist Front and 1 UDP member voted against. The PPP abstained.

the prior consent of the Rulers and in particular the Sultan of Kelantan. In reply to their case, the Federation Attorney-General asserted that 'no process of law could prevent the Malaysia Act coming into force on 16 September 1963'.²¹³ He was right. The Federal High Court dismissed the legal action two days before Malaysia was formed.

The success of the drive for Malaysia in the Federation may be attributed directly to the fact that the objective was relatively easy to achieve. The apparent futility of opposition, the great prestige of the Tunku and the confidence and strength of the Alliance was such that those who opposed Malaysia could not put their hearts into opposition. The idea of Malaysia which appeared to have fired the imagination of the Federation's by now confident political and administrative establishment did not leave the leaders of the opposition parties completely untouched. With so comparatively easy a task, no great determination or resources and assets were required even though they existed.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR MALAYSIA IN RELATION TO BRUNEI

By the end of 1962, the campaign for Malaysia in relation to Britain, and in Sabah, Sarawak, Singapore and the Federation had more or less been won. The only serious reversal to Federation policy was suffered in relation to the tiny but oil-rich state of Brunei.

The Brunei Party Rakyat, for long the only political party in the state (and always by far the strongest) had, of course, been sympathetic to the Malaysia idea from its formation in 1956. Ironically, it was the Brunei Sultan who had been opposed to the concept. By the time of the Tunku's speech of 27 May 1961, the roles had been reversed. By then, Party Rakyat had become strongly committed to the objective of a united and independent Kalimantan Utara under the historic Brunei Sultanate; the concepts of a Greater Brunei and of Malaysia were irreconcilable.

Probably more important a cause of Party Rakyat opposition to Malaysia, insofar as the leadership was concerned, was the well-founded belief that in Malaysia, they would be denied political power. They were in the bad books of the Tunku and could certainly expect no post in the Malaysian Cabinet, little say in national matters, and a vigorous attempt to displace them even in Brunei. In an independent Kalimantan Utara under the sway once again of the Brunei Sultanate and the influence of a ratherly Indonesia, however, they could expect to rule. Third, the Brunei party and its supporters feared Federation colonialism (which they felt they were already experiencing with hundreds of Malayan Malays holding posts in the Brunei state services, and scores at the highest levels). There was anger not only with the seconded Malay officers but also with Tunku Abdul Rahman who stood firmly by his men when they were attacked (on occasions physically)

²¹³ *Malayan Times*, 15 September 1963.

and whose statements on their behalf were often not the epitome of diplomacy. There was also the fear of Brunei being robbed of its revenue and of the tiny state's identity and prestige being submerged in a wide and populous federation.²¹⁴ Unlike the politicians of Sabah and Sarawak, Party Rakyat's leaders did not fear Indonesia expansionism and, with a cowed Chinese population, Chinese domination. The popularity of the party, and presumably its anti-Malaysia stand, was demonstrated in the first district council elections on the eve of the Singapore Referendum. Having previously won thirty-two uncontested seats, the party emerged on 30 August 1962 with a victory in twenty-two of the remaining twenty-three constituencies. The pro-Malaysia Brunei National Organization and the Brunei United Party, recently formed and given every encouragement by the court establishment, suffered humiliating defeats.

Public support for Malaysia in Brunei had been lost by 1962 simply because, as far as the Federation was concerned, it had never been fought for. The Federation had not really bothered itself with mass Brunei opinion because it was initially preoccupied with other apparently more important segments of the Malaysia equation. In addition, Kuala Lumpur believed that Brunei mass support was *not* essential. It was believed, essentially correctly, that the Sultan's agreement to the inclusion of Brunei was all that was necessary. Related to this was probably the assumption that the Brunei public would not be aroused to the extent of becoming a real obstacle to Brunei's entry. The Tunku early on expressed his appreciation (or rather, lack of appreciation) of the Party Rakyat when after his unpleasant July 1961 trip to Brunei, he dismissed it as a party which had 'only a few Government daily-rated workers as members'.²¹⁵

An overriding cause of the general neglect of Brunei public opinion was the assumption that the entry of that state (in the Tunku's words) 'only the size of Perlis, maybe smaller'²¹⁶ could be taken for granted. Added to this (at times of severe disenchantment with Brunei) was probably the uncomplimentary belief that the inclusion of a state whose population could be accommodated in a large football stadium was not essential.

The assumption that Brunei would join in Malaysia (and thus the unwillingness to pander overmuch to the State's demands) pervaded the Federation's efforts with regard to the Sultan also. It was inconceivable that a state so Malay in character, so apparently dependent on the Federation, with such a good record of goodwill and mutual help with Kuala Lumpur, so linked by language, religion, culture and family ties at the highest elite levels, so attractive an economic prize (and thus so threatened), so small

²¹⁴ Brunei's population (84,000) amounted to less than 1 per cent. of the total population of the proposed Malaysia.

²¹⁵ *Sunday Gazette*, 9 July 1961.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*

(and, therefore, so vulnerable), so unviable as an independent entity,²¹⁷ and so sympathetic to close relations with the Federation in the past, would stay out of the Malaysia grouping.²¹⁸ To be fair also, there was little in the words or action of the Brunei monarch to strongly suggest otherwise. He and his representatives did blow hot and cool on Malaysia – but never cold – up to the very end. These fluctuations could have been regarded by the Federation as mere attempts to strengthen Brunei's negotiating position.

By June 1962, preliminary and apparently unofficial negotiations on the terms of entry had been started. From the beginning, however, things did not go smoothly. After leaving Kuala Lumpur in something of a huff, Pengiran Yusof, a *confidant* of the monarch, declared that the Sultan simply could not renege on his promise to the people that the State's oil revenue would be held by his Government and that there would be no changes as regards taxation.²¹⁹ Within two weeks, however (on 7 July) five Brunei representatives including Yusof arrived in Kuala Lumpur to ask for complete 'clarification on the Malaysia issue'.²²⁰ Eleven days later, the Sultan straightforwardly informed his Legislative Council that while the State's Commission of Inquiry had heard the views of 'only a small percentage', the people of Brunei had conveyed the impression that they agreed in principle to the concept of Malaysia.²²¹ Announcing his acceptance of Malaysia in principle, he nevertheless threatened that if agreement could not be reached with Britain and the Federation on 'important conditions which my Government insists on' Brunei would probably not join Malaysia.²²² By a vote of twenty-four to four, the Council gave the Sultan a mandate to proceed with official negotiations.

Before negotiations could proceed, however, Party Rakyat won a massive victory in the 30 August elections. Assured of sixteen elective seats in a 33-member legislature, and expecting the support of several nominated official

²¹⁷ Sarawak in fact surrounds and divides the state into two halves.

²¹⁸ Brunei had been classified as an unfederated Malay State alongside Kelantan, Kedah, Trengganu and Perlis before the war. It was a very 'penetrated state' in the Rosenau sense. Seconded Federation officers in September 1962 held the posts of Attorney-General, State Financial Officer, Commissioner of Police, Head of the Special Branch, State Education Officer, State Medical Officer and State Engineer (*Malayan Times*, 9 September 1962). There was also a sizeable contingent of the Federation Police in Brunei. The royal family was closely related to the Selangor royal family. Even Azahari had a wife and family (one of three) in Johore Bahru. It had also become traditional for children of the Royal circles to be sent for secondary education in Malaya.

²¹⁹ *Straits Times*, 27 June 1962.

²²⁰ *Malayan Times*, 8 July 1962.

²²¹ Hanna, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

²²² *Malayan Times*, 19 July 1962.

members, the party immediately sought to submit a motion calling for a north Bornean federation. After three postponements of the Legislative Council meeting in September, October and November, the motion was disallowed in early December 1962.²²³ On 24 November, Azahari had threatened (in Manila) that the people 'will fight' if the British forced the formation of Malaysia.²²⁴ On 7-8 October 1962 the Brunei revolt was set in train. It was crushed within days.

Traeger, among others, have argued that the December revolt in Brunei 'caused that Protectorate to withdraw from the proposed Federation' of Malaysia.²²⁵ In fact, once the Sultan got over the initial shock of the rebellion, he became keener than ever on Malaysia. Previously, security had been a major but by no means the most important consideration. On 21 January 1963, the Sultan described the Malaysia plan as a 'sound and attractive proposal' and announced that Brunei would draft detailed recommendations governing the essential terms of entry which 'most important of all... will ensure the safety of the state'.²²⁶ On the arrival in Kuala Lumpur of Brunei's six-man delegation, the State's Menteri Besar declared that the 'people now fully realize the necessity to join Malaysia'.²²⁷

The first round of serious official negotiations started on 5 February 1963 with a 'holidaying' Sultan at hand for close consultations. On the eve of talks, the head of the Brunei delegation expressed the hope of completing the negotiations within 'four or five days'.²²⁸

The initial demands of Brunei as gleaned from statements made by the Sultan on 6 February and his Legal Adviser, Dato Neil Lawson, Q.C., the next day, were that the State (i) be given not less than ten seats in Parliament,²²⁹ (ii) retain its oil revenue in perpetuity, (iii) be given complete financial autonomy in the early stages, and (iv) keep its very substantial accumulation of investments (estimated at 1,000 million dollars), (v) main-

²²³ Simandjuntak, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

²²⁴ *Malayan Times*, 25 November 1962.

²²⁵ Frank N. Traeger, 'The Federation of Malaysia: An Intermediate Failure?' in Thomas M. Franck (ed.), *Why Federations Fail* (New York, 1968), p. 129. See also Brackman, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-44.

²²⁶ *Malayan Times*, 22 January 1963.

²²⁷ *Straits Times*, 4 February 1963.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5 February 1963. In fact it was to continue with interruptions for well over a month.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7 February 1963. If given ten seats, the Brunei voter would in effect have just about eight votes to his Federation counterparts' one. In the Federation, each M.P. would represent an average of 65,000 people; in Sabah and Sarawak, 30,000; in Brunei, 8,400. If representation is calculated on the basis of citizens, Brunei's demands appear greater, as its Chinese (who amounted to a quarter of the population) were not eligible for Brunei citizenship.

tain the present level of low taxation, and (vi) continue its educational and welfare programme. References to 'the Special Position of His Highness' also indicated some concern with the Sultan's seniority in the Council of Rulers.²³⁰ Sultan Omar apparently wanted his seniority to be dated from his accession to the Brunei throne in 1950 rather than from Brunei's entry into Malaysia.²³¹

On 19 February 1963 the constitutional and financial working parties were reported to have submitted their reports to the Sultan and Tunku Abdul Rahman. A few days later, the leader of the Brunei delegation expressed his confidence that 'we will initial a draft agreement soon'.²³² On 25 February 1963, the Sultan prayed that 'our aim to become a member of Malaysia for the security and happiness of our country will be successful'.²³³ At the resumption of the plenary session, on 1 March, a Brunei spokesman announced that there were 'one or two things to be cleared up. Otherwise the meeting is as good as ended'.²³⁴ The talks were reported to be successfully concluded on the night of 3 March. By then the leader of the Brunei delegation declared that complete agreement on financial and constitutional matters had been reached. Brunei would keep 'our money'. The Sultan would contribute to federal finance by annually granting a lump sum. This unsatisfactory system (from the Federation viewpoint) was no doubt made more galling by the announcement that the Sultan had 'not decided how much he will give'.²³⁵ 'We are waiting', he continued, 'for a signal from the Prime Minister's Department as to the date of the signing of the formal agreement'.²³⁶

Naturally enough, the signal never came. Instead, on the next day, Tun Razak, the leader of the Federation delegation stated that he expected the final round of talks to continue for a couple of days more.²³⁷ On 6 March disagreement on the question of import duty and income tax was re-

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 February 1963. These demands were not exorbitant if they are placed in the context of the terms for Sabah and Sarawak entry. Brunei probably did not realize that it was *because* Sabah and Sarawak had been conceded so much that the Federation could not be so accommodating to her demands. For one thing, the fact that so much financial assistance had been promised to the twin territories meant that the Federation had to stick very hard to their financial conditions for Brunei (and Singapore) entry.

²³¹ Gould, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

²³² *Straits Times*, 23 February 1963.

²³³ *Malay Mail*, 26 February 1963.

²³⁴ *Straits Times*, 2 March 1963.

²³⁵ *Malay Mail*, 4 March 1963.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ *Straits Echo*, 5 March 1963.

ported.²³⁸ It soon transpired that Brunei was still holding firm to its demand for not less than ten seats.²³⁹ On his departure for Brunei on 24 March, however, the Sultan announced that 'all the *main* issues have been settled and we will *definitely* join Malaysia on August 31'. However, there were 'two or three minor issues to be settled before the agreement is signed next week'.²⁴⁰ He admitted that one of the 'unsettled issues' was the financial question.²⁴¹

The Sultan stated that he expected no further negotiations and that he would not be attending personally the final round of Malaysia talks in London. The 'two or three minor' issues outstanding would be settled by correspondence between Kuala Lumpur and Brunei.²⁴² It is probable that the correspondence necessitated another round of negotiations, which in fact began on 10 June 1963. The only outstanding issue at that point appeared to have been the question of oil revenue. The Federation had offered Brunei retention of oil revenue for a period of ten years, while Brunei still pressed for its retention for an indefinite period.²⁴³ The Sultan (now in Kuala Lumpur) and his representatives were reported to have reached a decision on 15 June that unless the Federation could present better terms, Brunei might decide to wait for another opportune moment to join Malaysia and that the listing of the Sultan as the most junior monarch was 'too damaging to be acceptable'.²⁴⁴

The Sultan and the Tunku met twice. On 19 June 1963, the Federation Cabinet meeting decided on the 'final terms' for Brunei (and Singapore) entry. Due to leave for the London initialling of the Malaysia Agreement within days, the Tunku stated that Brunei (and Singapore) were expected to reply within forty-eight hours after receipt of the Federation's final offers. The next day the Tunku threatened that Malaysia would come into being on 31 August with or without Singapore or Brunei.²⁴⁵ The same day, a Brunei source was quoted as saying: 'We are anxious to join Malaysia but we will only join it on *our own terms*'.²⁴⁶ Without much warning, the Sultan left Kuala Lumpur on the morning of 21 June. Razak, at the airport to see His Highness off, was still making optimistic statements. 'I

²³⁸ *Malayan Times*, 6 March 1963.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12 March 1963.

²⁴⁰ *Malay Mail*, 23 March 1963.

²⁴¹ *Straits Echo*, 25 March 1963.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Straits Times*, 11 June 1963.

²⁴⁴ *Malayan Times*, 17 June 1963.

²⁴⁵ *Malay Mail*, 21 June 1963.

²⁴⁶ *Straits Times*, 21 June 1963. *Italics mine.*

still think Brunei will join Malaysia by August 31', he said, 'because the difficulties are not too great.'²⁴⁷

We can only conjecture about the 'not too great' difficulties. From numerous newspaper reports, it appears that the Federation had offered Brunei retention of her oil revenue from the existing fields for a period of ten years after Malaysia but demanded control of revenue from all future discoveries of oil fields.²⁴⁸ Brunei on the other hand wanted the State to keep all oil revenue for ten years after which time fresh negotiations would be conducted on the issue.²⁴⁹ On financial autonomy, Brunei apparently refused to concede to the future Central Government the right to levy an export duty on oil or to impose income and company taxes in Brunei as it thought fit.²⁵⁰ On 6 July 1963, the Tunku revealed that the Federation had offered Brunei retention of her oil income (presumably from the existing fields) and no federal taxes for ten years provided that Brunei made a *mandatory* annual contribution of 40 million dollars. On Brunei contribution to federal finance, the Sultan 'insisted', according to the Tunku, 'that the 40 million dollar contribution must be a voluntary one and not an annual one'. The Tunku declared that it was 'impossible for us to accept that'. As an incentive to acceptance, the Sultan had promised to add an extra 5 million dollars for the first year provided that the contribution was a voluntary one. The Tunku argued that after Malaysia, new minerals or oil fields should be subject to tax as in all the other states. It was, for the Federation, a matter of principle.²⁵¹ It seems probable that by this time (indeed by March 1963) the Federation Government had promised to persuade the Council of Rulers (which had exclusive jurisdiction on the matter) that the Sultan's seniority should be counted from 1950. Agreement had also been reached on four seats for Brunei²⁵² — a seat-population ratio significantly better than that for Sabah and Sarawak and more than three times better than that for the Federation.

The third round of tough negotiations started in London in early July in a 'still hopeful' atmosphere. Stanley Hoffman, who was in close touch with the Federation delegation, reported on 7 July 1963 that there was a real chance that if the Sultan of Brunei's position in the table of precedence of Malay Rulers could be resolved satisfactorily, Brunei would accept the financial and other terms put forward by the Federation Government 'and

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 June 1963.

²⁴⁸ Revenue from existing fields had been declining since 1959. It was expected to decrease from 1962's 70 million dollars to about 10 million dollars by 1973 (*Malayan Times*, 10 June 1963).

²⁴⁹ *Straits Times*, 21 June 1963.

²⁵⁰ *Sunday Mail*, 23 June 1963.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7 July 1963.

²⁵² *Malay Mail*, 17 July 1963.

that everyone in London was optimistic that a way out will be found so that the Sultan will put his signature along with the others at the initialling ceremony²⁵³ of the Malaysia Agreement on the next day. A few hours before the appointed time, the Sultan decided not to sign.

In the midst of conflicting statements on both sides, statements designed more to justify the positions taken than to clarify, the course of the negotiations can only be a subject of speculation. Two possibilities appear more credible than the others. First it is possible that Brunei's concessions on finance were conditional and depended on a satisfactory resolution of the Sultan's seniority. Second, and more probable — at least on the basis of two *Federation* statements issued on 9 July 1963 (one by the Tunku, and the other by a Federation spokesman), the Sultan, having already made concessions on the financial issues, had second thoughts and brought up the issue of his seniority as a stratagem by which the package may once again be renegotiated.²⁵⁴ In an interview in Tokyo on 14 July 1963, the Sultan stated that he planned to return to London to continue negotiations on Brunei's entry into Malaysia.²⁵⁵

What seems reasonably clear from Brunei as well as Federation statements is that precedence did become an issue and a major issue at that. The Tunku revealed in London on 9 July 1963 that in the June talks in Kuala Lumpur, he had suggested that he bring the matter up at the Conference of Rulers, but that the Sultan replied that when other questions had been settled, agreement on his seniority would automatically follow. 'It is very regrettable that he should at this late hour have brought this matter up when I have no opportunity to refer to the Conference of Rulers' he said.²⁵⁶ Shortly before the time fixed for the signing of the Malaysia Agreement on 8 July, Tun Razak had informed the Brunei delegation that the question of precedence could only be solved by reference to the Conference of Rulers.²⁵⁷ Shortly afterwards, the Sultan declared in a statement:

Today the Government of the Federation of Malaya have informed the Brunei delegation that they now find themselves in a position where they are unable to give effect to terms previously agreed or to assurances repeatedly given.²⁵⁸

²⁵³ *Straits Times*, 8 July 1963.

²⁵⁴ *Straits Echo*, 1963. See also *Malayan Times*, 10 July 1963 and *Straits Times*, 10 July 1963. The Federation spokesman said: 'The talks broke down on the one new issue, namely, the precedence of the Sultan of Brunei. Agreement had been reached on all other issues.' Italics mine.

²⁵⁵ *Straits Times*, 15 July 1963.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1963.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

A week later, Dato Setia Pengiran Yusof stated in Singapore that the Federation had 'given a *one-sided* picture of the breakdown in the negotiations by saying that the question of the Sultan's precedence...was the cause of disagreement'.²⁵⁹

The other half of the picture, evidently, was oil. In a radio broadcast on 17 July, the Sultan stated that the issue of oil revenues was the real reason for Brunei's refusal to join Malaysia.²⁶⁰

There had been some prospect of another round of negotiations; but a great deal of muddy water had flowed under the bridge in the week following the breakdown. Neither side was now prepared to humble itself by taking the initiative. On 27 July 1963, Dato Yusof declared that Brunei had 'put a full stop on the Malaysia issue'.²⁶¹ Three days later, the Tunku declined to state that the door for Brunei's entry into Malaysia was still open.²⁶²

The breakdown of negotiations and thus, the non-inclusion of Brunei in Malaysia, was a defeat not only for the Federation but also for official British policy. Since the Federation was the main mover of the Malaysia plan, however, we shall concentrate on it in our examination of the causes of the failure of the talks. Probably the most important reason for failure was the fact that the Federation had by June and July 1963 become somewhat less than strongly committed to successfully concluding the negotiations – within the context of Brunei's demands and gaining the accession of Brunei by 31 August 1963. Had there been strong commitment, Kuala Lumpur would probably have been willing (as it had been in relation to Sabah and Sarawak) to make sufficient concessions to gain Brunei's entry.

The Federation's limited commitment was in turn probably due first to the expectation that ultimately the rich but weak protectorate of Brunei would willy-nilly be forced to join in. Her negotiating position then could be expected to be a weaker one. The Federation (and Brunei) could countenance a breakdown in the talks in early July 1963 because future negotiations were expected. Second, there was not that much to be gained from the entry of Brunei, its somewhat assertive and strong-headed monarch and its antagonistic and troublesome populace – under the financial terms the protectorate was prepared to offer. The Brunei Malays had done little to endear themselves to their Malayan kith and kin and the inclusion of a state of only 45,000 Malays (and over 21,000 Chinese) could not significantly contribute to the maintenance of the racial balance and the miti-

²⁵⁹ *Malayan Times*, 16 July 1963. Italics mine.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 18 July 1963.

²⁶¹ *Straits Times*, 23 July 1963.

²⁶² *Malayan Times*, 26 July 1963. On 28 November, however, the Sultan insisted that the door was open for further negotiations if the terms of entry were made acceptable to Brunei (*Ibid.*, 29 November 1963).

gation of the drawbacks of taking in Singapore. On the other hand, Brunei's non-entry by August 1963 served one useful political and diplomatic purpose in that it could be held up not only to Indonesia and the Philippines but also in the international arena as concrete proof that no state was being pushed or cajoled into joining Malaysia against its will.

Personal antipathies had also crept into the negotiations. Tunku Abdul Rahman, on his departure to London (on 6 July 1963) and referring to the June talks, intimated that on many issues, the Sultan had 'unfortunately been evasive... very evasive'.²⁶³ After the July break-down he affirmed that he would consider any new proposals Brunei might care to make but added: 'I regard sincerity of purpose as the main factor in ... negotiations.'²⁶⁴ Personal antipathies of this nature probably helped to strengthen the Federation negotiating team's weariness with round after round after round of tough, protracted and often bitter negotiations. The negotiations on Brunei's entry suffered from the fact that they coincided with some loss of enthusiasm for Malaysia engendered by Indonesian, Filipino and Singapore's actions. By early July, the Tunku had become so disheartened with the Federation-Singapore negotiations in London that on 4 July 1963 he announced that since there was no possibility of agreement with Singapore, 'I have asked for certain proposals [probably as regards Sabah and Sarawak] to be put to the British Government. If these are accepted, well and good. If not, there is no point in going on [with Malaysia]'.²⁶⁵ Singapore came to terms in the end. Brunei did not.

A less important, but nevertheless important cause of the failure to gain Brunei's entry was the Federation's deficiency in certain resources and assets. As regards negotiation skills, Kuala Lumpur could have shown greater consideration for the sensitiveness of a monarch who expected better treatment and more deference than he was given, and made more allowances for the proud and nationalistic Brunei delegations.²⁶⁶ As it was, the Sultan and his representatives were slotted into a hectic schedule of activity to suit the convenience — or so it must have seemed to them — of the Tunku and the Federation Government. In truth, a great deal of what appeared to have been a mishandling of Brunei was to a large extent the result, not of ignorance and lack of skill, but simply of the shortage of resources and assets such as time and energy. Compared to the problems of Indonesian con-

²⁶³ *Sunday Mail*, 7 July 1963.

²⁶⁴ *Malayan Times*, 26 July 1963.

²⁶⁵ *Straits Times*, 5 July 1963. The *London Daily Herald* reported that the Singapore-Federation negotiations in early July were 'probably the stormiest talks in the history of the Commonwealth Relations Office' (*Straits Echo*, 10 July 1963).

²⁶⁶ According to a senior member of the Federation's negotiating team, the Sultan asked, for instance, for the records of the proceedings and the documents to be translated into Malay. The Federation argued that there was insufficient time to do so.

frontation and Singapore's intransigence, the issue of Brunei's entry naturally had for Kuala Lumpur a much lower priority. Negotiations with Brunei could only take place when the Tunku and Tun Razak (the two men who were central to the whole Malaysia operation) could find the time and the energy to undertake them. One value which could have in the end been bestowed to successfully resolve the negotiations, the Federation Government did not possess: the offer of Paramount Rulership. Dato Setia Pengiran Yusof intimated on 15 July 1963 that even if the Sultan had been offered the position of Yang di-Pertuan Agong, he 'would have been reluctant to accept'.²⁶⁷ There seems little doubt however that had the Conference of Rulers offered that august position, Brunei would have entered Malaysia.

One last factor was the inherent difficulty of the task of gaining the Sultan's acceptance of the terms of entry. The task was not very difficult, but it was by no means an easy one. This was probably due in part to the fact that Sultan Omar was in a weakened position in his state. The majority of Bruneians were, in varying degrees, against Brunei membership of Malaysia; and the revolt had indicated in clear terms that his position was a tenuous one.²⁶⁸ Like Lee Kuan Yew, he had to get the best terms possible. The Federation's terms were simply not good enough. It can be conjectured that had a serious drive for mass Brunei support been mounted and resoundingly won, Brunei would have become a constituent state of Malaysia.

The case of the formation of Malaysia demonstrates the limited significance of many of the conditions which are often cited as essential for or conducive to the formation of states and political unions: conditions such as ties of kinship and sense of community, cultural and religious homogeneity, and historical association. The Malaysia case challenges in fact the use of the terms 'natural' and 'artificial' in characterizing states or political units. Thus it would have been 'natural' if Brunei had joined Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak had stayed out. Yet Sabah and Sarawak became member states while Brunei remained outside. It would have been 'natural' too if nearby Singapore had continued to be a member of the Malaysian federation and for far-away Sabah and Sarawak to cease being constituent units. Yet less than two years after the formation of Malaysia the 'natural' political relationship between Malaya and Singapore broke, whilst the 'artificial' link with the two Borneo territories remained intact. It is to the fascinating question of the separation of Singapore that we shall now turn.

²⁶⁷ *Malayan Times*, 16 July 1963.

²⁶⁸ It is possible that the Sultan's request for a Malay version of the proceedings was not unrelated to a desire to facilitate the propaganda task of conveying the impression to Brunei Malays that he strongly championed their and Brunei's interests.

VII

THE SEPARATION OF SINGAPORE FROM MALAYSIA

On 24 May 1963, four months before the formation of Malaysia, the Prime Minister of Singapore argued that the 'political, economic and military reasons are so compelling that we would be committing national suicide if we refused to merge in Malaysia'. On that occasion, Lee Kuan Yew declared, probably correctly, that the first pre-condition for the success of Malaysia was 'National unity of all the races comprising Malaysia with undivided loyalty to the elected Central Government of Malaysia.'¹ Two years later, it was altogether too clear that the races in Malaya and Singapore were dangerously polarizing towards the Chinese and Malay extremes. And there was no longer any talk on the part of the PAP of undivided loyalty to the elected Central Government of Malaysia. Yet Tunku Abdul Rahman was still maintaining that 'Since the independence of Malaya, we have made a success of everything; there is no reason why we can't make Malaysia a success too.'² As late as UMNO's eighteenth General Assembly in mid-May 1965, he was still openly declaring that 'every right thinking person... feels that Singapore's place is with Malaya'.³ By early August 1965, however, the Tunku had clearly changed his mind. Without much warning, he spoke in Parliament on 9 August 1965 of a 'State Government that has ceased to give even a measure of loyalty to the Central Government',⁴ and announced the separation of Singapore.

Since by far the most crucial factor which led to separation was the decision of the Alliance Central Government to evict Singapore, the bulk of this chapter will concentrate on the events which resulted in Kuala Lumpur's commitment to expelling the island. That commitment can be explained largely in terms of the conflict between the People's Action Party and the Alliance, and by that very fact, between the Singapore Government and the Central Government of Malaysia.

PRE-MALAYSIA PORTENTS OF FUTURE PAP-ALLIANCE CONFLICT

With the advantage of hindsight, it is clear that most of the major factors which were to lie at the base of PAP-Alliance dissension after the formation of Malaysia had reared their heads even before it. The clash of Singapore

¹ Quoted in Alex Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore, 1968), pp. 254-5.

² *Straits Echo*, 25 April 1965

³ Quoted in C.P. Bradley, 'Rupture in Malaysia' in *Current History*, Vol. 50 No. 294 (February 1966), p. 100.

⁴ *Malayan Times*, 10 August 1965.

and Malayan interests which was to plague PAP-Alliance relations after September 1963 revolved around exactly the same economic issues as before Malaysia Day.

In the protracted March to July 1963 negotiations over the economic terms of Singapore's entry into Malaysia, the Federation quite naturally wanted as substantial a financial contribution to federal finance and the development of Sabah and Sarawak as it could get from Singapore; the smaller Singapore's contribution, the greater would be the overall financial burden on Malaya.⁵ Singapore's great emphasis on its industrialization programme understandably led it to strongly advocate a common market. The Federation, apprehensive about the capacity of its industrial sector to compete against Singapore (with its free-port status) was naturally not as keen on a common market. These three issues were constitutionally resolved only (after rounds of always tough and often bitter talks) in early July 1963, four months after the talks commenced.⁶ Unfortunately, the issues of Singapore's contribution to federal and development finance and the common market were only temporarily resolved. They were to be repeatedly reopened after the formation of Malaysia.

The way in which the Singapore-centred PAP had tried to negotiate the best possible economic terms for Singapore's entry had reflected a style of politics which was to continuously clash with the Alliance's and with the latter's attitudes as regards proper political behaviour throughout the period Singapore was in Malaysia. The PAP brought the points of disagreement into the open and was not unduly averse to discussion, debate and quarrelling in public. This was a natural style for the PAP, a party whose power after 1961 depended not upon vote banks or institutionalized and socially rigidified constituencies of support but upon a direct appeal to the voter and upon rational persuasion and argument.

The Alliance was temperamentally and ideologically the reverse. Operating in a qualitatively different, very much more heterogeneous society, and accustomed to compromise, conciliation, accommodation, consensus-building before action on contentious issues, constant depoliticizing of disruptive or even potentially disruptive questions, searching for and stressing agreement and unity in a severely truncated society, the Alliance believed in the resolution of conflict and the airing of differences behind closed doors, in more confidential and secretive surroundings.

The dispute over the economic terms of entry had also made evident another unfortunate and enduring aspect of the political behaviour of the

⁵In this chapter, Malaya is used to refer to what was previously the Federation of Malaya.

⁶For a detailed account of the negotiations see M. Osborne, *Singapore and Malaysia* (Cornell University, Department of Far Eastern Studies, Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper No. 531, 1964), chapter 5.

PAP and some Alliance leaders. They found great difficulty in refraining from replying — in the PAP case, in forcefully responding — to almost every criticism made by one against the other. Thus, every critical comment threatened to develop into a verbal dogfight.

A fourth important factor which was to lie at the base of Singapore Government-Central Government disagreements after the formation of Malaysia had also come into evidence in the period leading up to Malaysia Day. This was the island's excessive sense of self-importance and the importance of its role in Malaysia. The PAP was not the progenitor but the sympathetic carrier, and sometimes the victim, of this sense of self-importance. Kuala Lumpur was apt for the most part to think of Singapore as one unit out of fourteen, Singapore to regard itself as one out of four (Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak, Singapore) at least on par with Malaya.⁷ Singapore's entry into Malaysia had come too long after its separate and distinctive political development; and its political traditions, practices and attitudes had become too set to allow many of its politicians to adjust to the concept of a quiet subordinate role within a Malaya-dominated federal structure. Few at elite or mass level appeared to have recognized that 'independence through merger' was meaningful *only* in relation to colonial rule, that Singapore would have much less freedom after merger than before it.

A fifth factor was the assertiveness of the PAP and the Singapore Government's apparent fondness of 'standing up' to Kuala Lumpur. The most dramatic example of this was the PAP's criticism of the Tunku's decision to postpone (by two weeks) the date for the inauguration of Malaysia, and Singapore's declaration of (temporary) *de facto* independence on 31 August 1963 — against the strong and public advice of the Malayan Prime Minister. Used to mild political opposition (by Singapore standards), before Malaysia Day and after it, the Alliance could not understand and did misinterpret much of the actions and words of the PAP, a party which was supposed to be friendly to the Alliance. The PAP, hard-pressed by the Barisan, found great difficulty in refraining from playing to the Singapore gallery at every opportunity.

A sixth factor and an extremely important one which was to undermine PAP-Alliance amity in 1963-5 was the PAP insensitiveness to UMNO, MCA, MIC and sometimes Malayan nationalist feelings which had intermittently come to the surface long before Malaysia was formed. This ranged from discourtesy and brashness to rudeness, insult, insolence and open expressions of contempt.⁸ A very good example of *kurang ajar* on the part of Lee Kuan

⁷ Singapore's politicians did little to counter this lack of realism and often seemed to foster it. In early July 1963, for example, Lee Kuan Yew declared, 'Calculate any way you like, a peaceful happy prosperous Malaysia is only possible if we keep Singapore the centre of Malaysia' (*Straits Budget*, 3 July 1963).

⁸ The importance of politeness and propriety in Malay culture is attested by the fact

Yew was the statement he made two weeks before Malaysia Day in response to Kuala Lumpur's condemnation of his unilateral declaration of independence. Unlike the Federation, he declared, Singapore had had to fight for independence. Even more insulting, Lee talked of the 'naive approach' of some people to whom power had been handed over 'on a silver platter with red ribbons by British Royalty in uniform'.⁹

Lee's statement on the *naiveté* of the Alliance leadership betrayed his disrespect for some of the Federation's leaders. These feelings were often reciprocated. The very strong personal antipathies which were to greatly affect PAP-Alliance relations after September 1963 had too evidently come to the surface before Malaysia Day, although they were by then still largely limited to a few PAP and UMNO-MCA leaders only.

If the PAP was often insensitive to Alliance feelings, there were already numerous occasions on which the Alliance and certain Alliance leaders had shown over-sensitiveness to the Singapore Government's and Lee Kuan Yew's actions, comments and criticisms. The Federation's strong, perhaps over-strong reaction to Lee's declaration of *de facto* independence and the response among certain UMNO circles to Lee's criticisms of Maphilindo were indicative of this. The PAP leadership's habit of proffering unsolicited advice which was always rendered with a full accompaniment of publicity, was consistently regarded as not only gratuitous but arrogant and insulting.

Long before the formation of Malaysia, Lee had repeatedly talked of the 'terrifying' consequences of allowing communalists 'to get out of hand and trigger into motion communal passions'; he had repeatedly declared that 'Malaysia will succeed if we all know what are the dangerous issues and where the danger points...'.¹⁰ A great deal of PAP behaviour after Malaysia Day cannot be comprehended unless it is realized that from the beginning, the PAP took upon itself (since it was the 'innovating force' in a 'feudal society') the almost messianic duty of educating the Malaysian public on the dangers of communalism, and later, of Malay extremism.¹¹ The party was not to fully comprehend the consequences of what was seen by the Malays as a Chinese party attacking Malay communalism.

Unlike the PAP's educative pursuits, the political rivalry between the PAP and the MCA was a factor which did not have to await Malaysia's formation to have a marked deleterious effect on PAP-Alliance relations. Reconciled to the fact that in the short run no party could rule Malaysia without the support of the Malay mass base, the PAP had apparently decided by 1963 to supplant the MCA within the Alliance, an idea which

that one of the worst charges that can be made against an individual is that he is *kurang ajar*, or insufficiently instructed as regards his manners.

⁹ *Straits Times*, 4 September 1963.

¹⁰ Quoted in A. Josey, *op. cit.*, pp. 257-8.

¹¹ The basic sentiments and assumptions on Singapore's role were succinctly expressed

it had considered for several years.¹² As a preliminary step, it tried in mid-1963 to replace the MCA in the Singapore Alliance by coming to some arrangement with Singapore UMNO for the coming Singapore elections – a move of which the MCA leadership were fully aware and felt very unhappy about. It was unfortunate throughout the time Singapore was in Malaysia that it was never in the MCA's party interests to engender a close and friendly relationship between the PAP and UMNO. It was in her direct interest in fact to see that such a relationship did not come about.

One of the political factors which was to lead ultimately to separation was the emergence of the PAP as a second centre of political power challenging the Alliance core. The potential for this had been demonstrated even before Malaysia was formed. Despite the Tunku's entreaties, Sarawak as well as Singapore declared *de facto* independence and Sabah proclaimed the establishment of 'Sabah State' on 31 August 1963. The Alliance Government could not but have seen Lee as the principal instigator of this defiant move¹³ in view of the fact that in the fourth week of August 1963, Lee Kuan Yew had flown to Jesselton and openly conferred with leaders of the Sabah and Sarawak Alliance on the necessity of sticking to the August 31 date for Malaysia's inauguration.¹⁴

Finally, it should be noted that one of the basic factors behind PAP-Alliance enmity in the period after Malaysia was formed was the absence of trust, goodwill and charity and the erosion of whatever *bonhomie* there had been in their relations with each other. A whole series of pre-Malaysia disagreements had ensured that the small reservoir of friendship which had existed in 1961 and which could have been relied upon to weather trying times had all but dried up by the time Malaysia was formed.

Many of the seeds of Alliance-PAP dissension after Malaysia had clearly been sown before the State was established. All these factors notwithstanding, however – and it is to be noted that many of them had powerful impact only some time after the formation of Malaysia – it would be false to assume that the Malaysia enterprise was doomed from the start. Unfortunate from the viewpoint of the preservation of the integrity of the State was the fact that after Malaysia Day, these factors were not sufficiently

by Lee in December 1968, on this occasion in relation to South-East Asia. 'I take comfort', he said, 'from the fact that even in the dark ages there were places like Venice which shone out and lit the way back into the Renaissance. And perhaps that is the role we must play.'

¹² See the PAP Central Executive Committee policy statement of 1960 entitled 'The Fixed Political Objectives of Our Party', reprinted in Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for Merger* (Singapore, Government Printer, 1961), p. 165.

¹³ *Sunday Times*, 8 September 1963.

¹⁴ *Malayan Times*, 23 August 1963.

counteracted. On the contrary, they grew in strength and were joined by others which contributed to a further exacerbation of PAP-Alliance enmity. Yet it would be incorrect to assume that the deterioration of PAP-Alliance relations was a unilinear process, a steep downhill slide uninterrupted by pauses and even improvements — albeit, as it turned out, temporary ones.

THE HONEYMOON PERIOD IN ALLIANCE-PAP RELATIONS:
SEPTEMBER 1963 — MARCH 1964

In fact, for a five-month period after the formation of Malaysia (on 16 September 1963), relations between the PAP and the Alliance were relatively good. It was a time of internal calm unmatched by any subsequent period — despite the events of the first two weeks after Malaysia Day. The adjustment to a new set of relationships was complicated by the fact that Singapore's bitterly-fought elections were held five days after the establishment of Malaysia. The PAP emerged with a landslide victory. In terms of representation in the Singapore Assembly, the Singapore Alliance was wiped out.¹⁵

The reaction of UMNO, especially of Singapore UMNO, to the loss of three constituencies with Malay majorities which it had previously held, was an emotional one. On 27 September, Singapore UMNO members burned an effigy of Lee Kuan Yew. Syed Jaafar Albar, still Chief Publicity Officer of the national UMNO, vowed with his usual rhetoric, that he would fix Lee at the proper time.¹⁶

Presumably in reaction to this emotional meeting, Lee Kuan Yew made a fighting if not an altogether fitting speech at a mass rally held the next day to celebrate the PAP victory. In a fiery outburst, Lee warned Kuala Lumpur against thinking of doing anything stupid and hoped that the Central Government did not believe it could 'keep Singapore down'. Lee irresponsibly conjured up a vision of a Kuala Lumpur takeover of Singapore by force and stated that the PAP was not afraid 'of what the Central Government can do to Singapore'. He urged the Central Government to leave Singapore 'to resolve the problems which they could not understand' and to realize that Singapore was really 'the hub of the overseas Chinese in Malaysia'.¹⁷ Kuala Lumpur was advised that it could overcome the communist threat in all of Malaysia's towns if it did what was right by the people without differentiating between various races. Attacking 'people

¹⁵The PAP won 46.9 per cent. of the votes (37 seats), Barisan 33.3 per cent. (13 seats) and the Singapore Alliance a mere 8.4 per cent. In 1959, the aggregated total for the parties forming the Singapore Alliance had been 27.4 per cent. They had previously had seven seats. Pang Cheng Lian, *Singapore's People's Action Party* (Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 80.

¹⁶*Malayan Times*, 28 September 1963.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 30 September 1963.

like Senator Khaw Kai Boh' (of the MCA) who lacked 'an intelligent approach to the urban Chinese', Lee announced the willingness of the Singapore Government to work with *UMNO*.

In immediate reply (on 29 September 1963) Tunku Abdul Rahman declared that he would stand by the MCA, and denounced Lee's attacks on the MCA leadership.¹⁸ By then, a calmer Lee Kuan Yew was obviously anxious to defuse the situation. No progress in persuading *UMNO* to take in the PAP as a political partner — a top priority of the PAP for over a year after the formation of Malaysia — could possibly be made in the prevailing atmosphere.¹⁹ Lee immediately seized on the Tunku's 29 September statement as an offer of cooperation on the condition that no more attacks be made on MCA; he declared that the PAP accepted the condition.²⁰ In the following five months, the PAP tried hard to please.

The results of the Singapore elections created emotional outbursts which were defused without too great an effort. They had one more unfortunate, more permanent, consequence. The PAP victory in the three Malay-dominated constituencies in Singapore previously held by *UMNO* suggested that the PAP had made great strides in winning the island's Malays to its side. *UMNO*, *Utusan Melayu*, even the PMIP were worried, especially after the PAP's participation in Malaya's elections in March 1964, about the capacity of the PAP to win the Malay intelligentsia in Malaya. Another root cause of future Alliance-PAP dissension was added to the already long list.

THE PERIOD OF OPEN ELECTORAL CONFLICT:

MARCH — APRIL 1964

1 March 1964 marks an important date in the story of separation. On that date, Toh Chin Chye, Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore and Chairman of the PAP, declared that the PAP 'should consider itself a national party' and announced that the party would play a 'token part' in the April 1964 Malayan elections.²¹ According to Alex Josey, a *confidant* of Lee's, the formal decision to participate was taken while Lee Kuan Yew was on his 'Malaysia Goodwill Mission to Africa',²² i.e., between 20 January and 26 February 1964. This was most convenient in view of Lee Kuan Yew's solemn undertaking to the Tunku made before the formation of Malaysia that the PAP would not participate in the 1964 Malayan elections.²³

¹⁸ *Malay Mail*, 30 September 1963.

¹⁹ Indonesian confrontation also engendered political solidarity.

²⁰ *Straits Echo*, 1 October 1963. The Tunku's statement did *not* in fact constitute such an offer.

²¹ *Straits Times*, 2 March 1964.

²² Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

²³ Contrary to Nancy Fletcher's view, there is a great deal of evidence to support this

It has been argued that beginning with its decision to contest the 1964 Malayan elections, the PAP leadership repeatedly erred in its political judgment.²⁴ What is beyond doubt is that the announcement of participation immediately resulted in a serious deterioration in PAP-Alliance relations as a whole. This occurred despite the PAP's attempt to challenge only the MCA, and despite its call to the people to support UMNO. One does not have to look too far for the reasons. First, given UMNO's commitment to keeping the Alliance intact, i.e. not to replace the MCA with the PAP, any erosion of support for the MCA would have definitely weakened the Alliance as a whole.

Second, while the PAP tried very hard to refrain from any criticism of UMNO, it was not always successful. Certain criticisms of the MCA necessarily implied criticism of the Alliance as a whole, and very often led to remarks which hit UMNO directly, remarks which were likely to undermine non-Malay trust in and respect and support for UMNO which the Tunku and UMNO valued. For example, one of the PAP's major election tactics was to present itself as the defender and upholder of urban interests. To emphasize the necessity for such a champion, the PAP tried to create a dichotomy of urban and rural interests and to very subtly create the impression that UMNO was a defender of rural interests *only*. To show that MCA could not be the champion of the urban areas and, *ipso facto*, non-Malay interests, it was necessary to demonstrate that it was submissive to UMNO. UMNO, it was tangentially as well as directly argued, wanted a submissive urban party and thus found the MCA acceptable.²⁵

Several speeches referring to the Alliance as a whole also angered Alliance leaders. In an election rally in Kuala Lumpur, for example, Lee Kuan Yew

contention (*The Separation of Singapore from Malaysia*, Cornell University, Department of Far Eastern Studies, Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper, 1969, p. 30). First, there is the evidence from interviews I had with Alex Josey and with a very high-ranking PAP leader. On the Malayan side, it is corroborated (in interviews) by Tan Sri Sardon Jubir, Khir Johari and Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie. See also the interview data in Pang, *op. cit.*, p. 18. Second, there are the statements made by the Tunku himself. In September 1964, for example, the Tunku stated that the PAP's participation 'was quite contrary to what we agreed' (*Straits Times*, 21 September 1964). There is also a great deal of circumstantial evidence to support this view. The Tunku's allegations, for example, were never denied. On 30 September 1963, Lee Kuan Yew stated: 'I do not intend to start a branch in Kuala Lumpur and won't want to for quite a long time' (*Straits Echo*, 1 October 1963). According to both my above-mentioned Singaporean interviewees, Lee Kuan Yew was over-ruled on the question of the PAP's participation. See also Pang, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

²⁴ J. Norman Parmer, 'Malaysia 1965: Challenging the Terms of 1957' in *Asian Survey*, Vol. VI No. 2 (February 1966), p. 113.

²⁵ See, for example, Lee Kuan Yew's March 1964 speech reprinted in Lee Kuan Yew, *The Winds of Change* (Singapore, 1964), p. 9.

said that if the people demonstrated that they were 'in favour of an *honest* Government with a *dynamic* social and economic policy, then the winds of change will begin to sweep throughout Malaysia'.²⁶

The PAP's advice to its supporters on voting was also patently anti-Alliance. They were told that in areas where there were no PAP candidates, they should vote for a pro-Malaysia party other than the MCA, i.e. for anti-Alliance parties.

The PAP entry into the 1964 Malayan elections led not only to a direct clash with the Alliance as a whole; it also led to the further erosion of trust in and goodwill towards Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP. It was a violation of Lee's solemn undertaking that the PAP would not contest the elections. Lapses of honesty on the part of the PAP leadership also emerged during the election campaign. On 15 March 1963, for example, Rajaratnam, who headed the PAP's Malayan campaign stated barefacedly: 'We are not trying to supplant the MCA nor do we want to align ourselves with the UMNO.'²⁷ Unfortunately for Rajaratnam, on the same day, Lee Kuan Yew made a speech in which he argued that 'the Chinese leadership in the Alliance as represented by the MCA is replaceable'.²⁸

From the viewpoint of the PAP, one of the worst results was the alienation of the Tunku himself. On 28 March, Tunku Abdul Rahman referred bitterly to Lee Kuan Yew's Seremban speech of two days before in which Lee was purported to have said in Chinese that he, the Tunku, was not of the right calibre to lead the nation.²⁹ Tunku Abdul Rahman also strongly resented Lee's unsolicited advice and remarks which seemed to imply that he was a naive child. On 22 March, for example, Lee declared that 'Half of the problems Malaysia faces have been created by his [the Tunku's] old friends who skilfully and cynically exploit his personal loyalties. To save the country from harm, we have to save the Tunku from his so-called "friends".'³⁰ Tunku Abdul Rahman bitterly remarked: 'The PAP wants to teach us what is good for us, and what is bad.'³¹

Another unfortunate consequence of the PAP's entry into the Malaysian elections was the fact that previously, the party had been accorded a twilight status between friend and foe by the Alliance Government. In Parliament, the five PAP ministerial Members of Parliament sat on the Government benches; seven other PAP MP's sat opposite. After the PAP's entry,

²⁶ *Malayan Times*, 23 March 1964. Italics mine.

²⁷ *Straits Times*, 16 March 1964.

²⁸ Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

²⁹ *Straits Times*, 29 March 1963. Lee denied having said this.

³⁰ Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 297. Italics mine.

³¹ *Straits Times*, 20 April 1964.

the party was regarded as an out-and-out political enemy whose every action was suspect. All the PAP Members of Parliament were moved to the opposition benches.³²

The PAP's participation also resulted in the genuine fear that Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP represented a direct political threat to UMNO and the Malays. Lee's election rallies were the biggest Malaya had seen. To the leaders of the Alliance and to the Malays, they demonstrated the political potential of the PAP in the urban areas – among the non-Malays.³³

The PAP was opposed in principle to communal politicking.³⁴ Yet its campaign in the Malayan elections had communal characteristics.³⁵ Lee Kuan Yew's advice to the urban population to vote for the party so that UMNO leaders would have 'to adjust their social and economic policy to take into account the wishes of the people *in the towns*...' ³⁶ clearly implied that UMNO had neglected the welfare of the non-Malays. Its leaders' call for 'a more egalitarian society', 'more equal opportunities' and 'a more just and equal society' was clearly an attack on Malay privileges. UMNO certainly saw it as communal politicking.

The very aggressiveness of the PAP campaign also had an unfortunate

³² *Utusan Melayu* editorials – which were later to evoke uncontrolled anger from Lee Kuan Yew – also clearly showed this change in attitude. Its leader of 28 February 1964 described as most fitting the choice of Lee as leader of the 'Malaysia Goodwill Mission' to Africa. The success of the Mission was described as astounding. Within a week and a few days after Toh Chin Chye's announcement of the PAP's participation, it had begun a series of editorial attacks on Lee and the PAP, an offensive which did not end even after the separation. From the beginning of March till the end of April 1964, the *Utusan* criticized the PAP on eleven occasions, nearly as many times as it attacked all the other opposition parties put together. The figures for editorial attacks on opposition parties were: PAP 11, PMIP 7, Socialist Front 2, Party Rakyat 1, UDP 1.

³³ A statement of party objectives and policy by the PAP's Central Executive Committee, published in November 1964 on the occasion of the PAP's tenth anniversary, admitted: 'The fear and anxieties of the Malay rural base, which would be aroused by large urban crowds mainly of Chinese and Indians rallying to our Party banner [in the April 1964 elections], was underestimated' (PAP, *Our First Ten Years*, 1964, p. 112).

³⁴ This is something which can probably be said of the top leadership of UMNO, the MCA, the MIC, and almost every other party in Malaya.

³⁵ All of its nine parliamentary candidates who actually campaigned were Chinese – and they all stood in the non-Malay dominated urban areas. An electoral understanding was apparently reached with the communal (non-Malay) People's Progressive Party (R.K. Vasil, *Politics in a Plural Society*, Singapore, OUP, 1971, p. 244). Championing the interests of the urban areas meant in effect championing non-Malay interests. The PAP was also seen by the Malays as a Chinese party. Pang Cheng Lian (who was given access to the PAP's membership files) has estimated that at the beginning of 1961, 92.9 per cent of the PAP members were Chinese, 4.1 per cent. were Malays and 2.8 per cent. were Indians (Pang, *op. cit.*, p. 61).

³⁶ Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 297. Italics mine.

effect. The PAP leadership did not seem to appreciate in March-April 1964 or subsequently that the mere existence of an assertive or aggressive Chinese party would be regarded by a substantial segment of the Malays as a threat to their rights and interests. The PAP and especially Lee Kuan Yew emerged from the 1964 elections not only as a political enemy, but to a large extent as an enemy of the Malay community.³⁷ What had been a political contest had started to become a dangerous communal one.

Within the framework of the PAP's commitment to the maintenance of Malaysia, its decision to contest the Malayan elections was, therefore, a disaster. In terms of the specific motives for its participation, the decision was also largely a dismal failure. Probably the most important reason for the PAP's entry was its desire to supplant the MCA in the Alliance.³⁸ Gentle persuasion having led nowhere at all, it tried to force UMNO into changing its mind. To do this, the PAP tried, first, to make the party, in the words of Toh Chin Chye, 'a force to be reckoned with'. Second, it tried to discredit and weaken the MCA (which it mistakenly believed was bound to fare very badly in the elections). Lee Kuan Yew stated: 'If the MCA cannot hold the urban population, the choice before UMNO is to govern without the support of the towns or come to terms with groups which can command the loyalty of urban areas.'³⁹ The PAP's aspirations were severely condemned by the UMNO leadership. Its tactic of praising UMNO and condemning the MCA (which it dubbed 'the Money Collecting Association') was seen as a shameless attempt to split the Alliance.

Two weeks before Election Day, Lee Kuan Yew expressed his confidence that after the heat of the elections had worn off, UMNO leaders would 're-appraise the situation'. That reappraisal never came for on 25 April 1964, the Alliance emerged with 89 seats out of a possible total of 104, a gain of 15 seats. The MCA, pronounced dead by the PAP, won 27 seats, 9 more than in the 1959 elections. The PAP, which had expected to win most of its 9 constituencies, won one — and that with a majority of a mere 808 votes (in the biggest constituency in Malaya).

The ten weeks which succeeded the 25 April elections may be characterized as a period of cold peace. It merited the epithet 'cold' because little

³⁷ It was unfortunate that, throughout the time Singapore was in Malaysia, Lee never believed in leading his regiments from behind. The result was that many in UMNO and the Alliance developed an almost obsessive antipathy towards his person.

³⁸ For speculations as to the other reasons, see Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 79-83 and J.T. Bellows, *The People's Action Party of Singapore* (Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, Mimeograph series No. 14, 1970), p. 54. Nancy Fletcher believes that it is 'unclear' that the PAP intention was to displace the MCA (Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 35).

³⁹ When told that the Tunku had rejected the PAP's wooing of UMNO, Lee Kuan Yew stated (in Penang on 24 March 1964) that it did not matter whether the Tunku liked or disliked him or he liked or disliked the Tunku. It was a matter of basic political factors (*Straits Times*, 25 March 1964).

goodwill and friendship infused Alliance-PAP relations. In comparison with the PAP-Alliance war of words after November 1964, however, their relations were comparatively peaceful.

THE PERIOD OF COLD WAR, JULY 1964 – FEBRUARY 1965

The event which was to break the relative calm of May and June was the Singapore communal riots which broke out on 21 July 1964 and festered for over a week thereafter. At least twenty-two people lost their lives in the clashes.

For an understanding of the consequences of the riots on PAP-Alliance relations, it is not necessary to understand the objective realities of the outbreak. Whatever the real causes, the PAP held the communal politicking of Syed Jaafar Albar, *Utusan Melayu*, and the Singapore UMNO responsible. On the other hand, these three accused parties blamed the riots on what they saw as the PAP's attempt to humiliate the Malay community in Singapore and to divide it.⁴⁰

Before the July 1964 outbreaks, the PAP leaders had quietly taken the abuse heaped on them – by a small section of UMNO and Malay extremists and the *Utusan Melayu* – and the spread of what it called 'communal poison'. After the riots, they appeared to have come to the conclusion that they had to aggressively agitate for the suppression of these extremists, to actively counter the latter's poison, to actively educate the public and their political leaders on the bankruptcy of the existing political system of communal balances and communally-structured parties, and to press for a multi-racial, Malaysian approach transcending racial divisions. This was to be one of the most unfortunate long-term consequences of the riots.

On 30 July 1964, Lee Kuan Yew publicly demanded that the Malay leadership 'Smack down their ultras.'⁴¹ Three days later, with *Utusan Melayu* particularly in mind, Toh Chin Chye pressed for a law to ban newspapers publishing inflammatory articles. On 4 August, Lee condemned the 'Malays Must Unite' slogan and urged that the slogan had to be 'Malaysians Must Unite.'⁴² Two days later, Lee declared the PAP Government's readi-

⁴⁰ Albar was by now Secretary-General of the pan-Malayan UMNO. The *Utusan* was a Malay newspaper printed in the Jawi script in which several UMNO leaders had a sizeable holding of shares. For an objective account of the riots, see M. Leifer, 'Singapore in Malaysia: The Politics of Federation' in *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. VI No. 2 (September 1965).

⁴¹ Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 312. This, as far as I am aware, was the first occasion on which Lee used the term 'ultras'. G.P. Means may well have contributed to this addition to Lee's political rhetoric. One of the three examiners of Mean's Ph.D. thesis, 'Malayan Government and Politics in Transition', completed in 1960, was the Singapore Prime Minister. At one point Lee underlined in thick pencil the word 'ultra' and placed an exclamation mark over it.

⁴² *Straits Echo*, 5 August 1964.

ness to help the Central Government *keep down* the Malay extremists.⁴³ In the context of these public statements, it was inconceivable that the governmental leadership of UMNO could have taken action against its extremists. The PAP's actions suggest, however, that they were not fully cognizant of this fact.

When the July riots broke out, the Tunku had been abroad. While he was in London, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the British Prime Minister, had urged him to form a coalition government with the PAP. Five days after the Tunku's return to Malaysia, on 18 August 1964, Lee and Tunku Abdul Rahman had a private (unpublicized) discussion on the subject. The PAP power strategy now was not to displace the MCA but to persuade the Tunku to accept an Alliance-PAP coalition government.⁴⁴ On 23 August, Lee made a speech which in tone and content could easily have passed as an Alliance statement. Very conciliatory and reassuring to the Malays and full of praise for the Tunku, he argued that 'the indigenous people ... need and deserve the assistance and cooperation of the other races in Malaysia...'.⁴⁵

Then, on 2 September 1964, riots broke out again in Singapore, apparently instigated on this occasion by Indonesian agents. This time, it was Lee Kuan Yew who was in England. The over-sensitiveness of Alliance leaders to overseas press opinion was more than amply demonstrated in their reaction to an ill-informed editorial in the (London) *Sunday Telegraph* which the Alliance believed had been inspired by Lee Kuan Yew. The leader deplored Tunku Abdul Rahman's 'Complacent attitude about the pace of Chinese advancement to parity', compared it to Sir Roy Welensky's attitude towards African advancement in the Central African Federation, and called upon the British Prime Minister 'to bring the strongest possible pressure on the Tunku to give the Chinese a fair deal....'⁴⁶ Since Sir Alec Douglas-Home had previously already pressed for a coalition government, it was understandable if Alliance leaders believed that Lee was trying to persuade the British Government to increase the pressure for such a coalition.⁴⁷ In a statement on 20 September 1964, the Tunku referred to the goings-on in London and stated with acerbity: 'There is an undercurrent to contest my

⁴³ *Straits Times*, 7 August 1964.

⁴⁴ According to a PAP account released in July 1966, 'The Tunku told Lee that he could not accept this proposal for at least two years, for although he was not against it, his party, UMNO, would never accept it' (Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, pp. 493-4. Cf. Tun Abdul Razak's statement on the PAP's approaches reproduced on p. 492).

⁴⁵ *Straits Times*, 24 August 1964.

⁴⁶ *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 September 1964.

⁴⁷ Lee revealed after separation that while in London, he lobbied Mountbatten, Peter Thornycroft (the British Minister of Defence), Duncan Sandys (the Commonwealth Secretary), Arthur Bottomley, and Harold Wilson (Cited in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 417).

leadership of the Malaysian people by trying to make out that I am a leader of Malays only...⁴⁸

To de-escalate the raging war of words, a meeting between the PAP and the Alliance was arranged. On 29 September 1964, following talks between Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak, Tan Siew Sin, Lee Kuan Yew, Lim Kim San and Dr. Toh Chin Chye, Dr. Toh announced that a two-year 'truce' had been agreed upon. He stated (according to press reports) that both sides had agreed (i) that they 'will not raise any of the sensitive issues regarding the respective positions of the communities in Malaysia' and (ii) that 'party differences will be relegated into the background'.⁴⁹

Interesting in view of later developments were the PAP and Alliance reactions to the October 1964 rumours in Singapore that the island wanted to secede. Tan Siew Sin, in a speech in Singapore on 17 October 1964, condemned the wild rumour and stated that secession was impossible as any change to the Constitution needed a two-third majority.⁵⁰ Senu, one of those Lee Kuan Yew labelled 'ultra', also condemned the idea. Rajaratnam categorically stated that there was no truth in the rumours that Singapore was attempting to secede.⁵¹ Lee Kuan Yew declared on 30 October 1964 that in order to ensure a bright future for the island, she must become a permanent member of the Malaysian family.⁵²

By the time Lee was discouraging talk of secession, the PAP-Alliance truce, barely a month old, had come into question. On 26 October, Dr. Toh Chin Chye asked for a clarification on the Alliance position on the 'truce'. Seizing on Khir Johari's speech the previous day, Dr. Toh declared that Khir's

...ostentatious call to the Singapore Alliance to reorganize itself now to oust the PAP in the next general elections 'in 1967' ill accords with the two-year pause.... It was in this spirit that the PAP called upon its branches in Malaya not to extend their activities beyond areas where the party contested in the recent Malayan elections.⁵³

The Tunku stated on 28 October, however, that the truce was only with respect to communal issues.⁵⁴ Merely four days after the Tunku's clarification, Dr. Toh had a meeting with D.R. Seenivasagam, President of the Perak-based People's Progressive Party with which the PAP had apparently co-

⁴⁸ *Straits Times*, 21 September 1964.

⁴⁹ *Sunday Times*, 20 September 1964.

⁵⁰ *Straits Times*, 18 October 1964.

⁵¹ *Malay Mail*, 19 October 1964.

⁵² *Sin Chew Jit Poo*, 30 October 1964.

⁵³ *Straits Times*, 27 October 1964.

⁵⁴ *Malayan Times*, 30 October 1964.

operated in the 1964 elections.⁵⁵ While in Ipoh, Dr. Toh menacingly declared that the PAP was to be 'reorientated and reorganized so that we can get at Malaya'.⁵⁶

This reorganization did *not* immediately result in a resumption of the war of words. The party's policy statement made on the occasion of its tenth anniversary in November 1964 indicated that the PAP was still pinning its political hopes on a coalition government. On the same occasion, Dr. Toh stated without any qualification that at the present stage, 'An Alliance of communal parties is a contributing factor towards maintaining racial peace and harmony and thus providing political stability in the country....'⁵⁷ The Tunku sent a congratulatory message.

Unfortunately, at this stage of public cordiality, financial and economic issues which represented a clash between Singapore's and Malaya's interests arose afresh. In the Budget debate of late November and early December 1964, Tan Siew Sin, faced with a gigantic federal deficit (543 million dollars) resulting largely from expenditure connected with Indonesian Confrontation, introduced a payroll tax and a turnover tax.⁵⁸ He also expressed the hope that the 1963 financial agreements regarding Singapore could be reviewed with a view to Singapore agreeing to contribute 60 per cent. of its state revenue to federal finance (instead of the 40 per cent.).⁵⁹ In the budget debate, pressure was also exerted on Singapore to fall in line with Malaya's boycott of South-African imports.⁶⁰ In addition, Tan Siew Sin announced the Central Government's decision to close the Bank of China operating in Singapore, a move which the PAP believed would adversely affect the island's trade with mainland China. In reaction, Lee Kuan Yew hit hard. Singapore, he said, could not be threatened or intimidated.⁶¹

By December 1964, intergovernmental cooperation between the Singapore and Central Governments had seriously deteriorated. Tan Siew Sin sub-

⁵⁵ For the possible motivations for the PPP's attraction to the PAP, see Vasil, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

⁵⁶ *Straits Times*, 2 November 1964.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 November 1964.

⁵⁸ These would hit all businessmen equally, but Singapore's commercial-industrial sector was a large one. Alliance leaders felt that since the Singapore Government would receive 60 per cent. of the increased revenues (and the Central Government only 40 per cent.), the PAP should not make too much of it.

⁵⁹ The initial agreement on finance was subject to review and revision from 31 December 1964 and every two years thereafter (See Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 16).

⁶⁰ Certain imports Singapore could not get more cheaply from other sources. In fact, however, Singapore had already agreed to but not yet implemented the boycott of South African imports.

⁶¹ *Straits Echo*, 5 December 1964.

sequently likened it to a relationship between a married couple whose relations had turned so sour 'that they could not even agree on who should use the bathroom first'.⁶² On 9 December 1964, the Tunku, probably in an exasperated state of mind, told a Singapore audience that 'If the politicians of various colours and tinges in Singapore disagree with me, the only solution is a breakaway, *but what a calamity that would be for Singapore and Malaysia*'.⁶³

Current literature on separation tends to neglect and often altogether avoid examination of the slow development of the idea of separation as a means of resolving Singapore-Kuala Lumpur conflict, preferring to see the break decision as a bolt out of the blue. It should be noted that by December 1964 and subsequently, separation as a solution to Singapore Government-Central Government disagreements had very probably begun to be talked about and more seriously discussed between Alliance Ministers.⁶⁴

The immediate catalyst for such discussions appeared to have been what Tan Siew Sin later revealed as a proposal 'that there should be what you might call a partial break whereby the Central Government would retain authority in certain matters and Singapore would have *more autonomy* in certain matters'.⁶⁵ The proposal appeared to have come from an Alliance source.⁶⁶ Lee Kuan Yew disclosed four days after separation that after the Budget debate, the Central Government were 'just fed up with us and suggested that we should have a looser arrangement'. He added:

So we were thinking it over: what kind of looser arrangement? Then it fell through One of the proposals was that we run everything... we could have the police, but the Army would be under their control. In other words, we would be a Colony of Malaysia. We cannot accept that.⁶⁷

This particular proposal alluded to by Lee clearly bordered on complete separation. It partially corroborates the Tunku's statement:

I think about six months before the separation we [Goh Keng Swee and

⁶² *Siaran Akbbar*, PEN. 3/65/204 (Finance) 'Y.B. Enche Tan Siew Sin opens MCA Training Course', Speech delivered on 15 August 1965, p. 2.

⁶³ *Malayan Times*, 10 December 1964. Italics mine.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Tan Siew Sin later confided that 'the Tunku first discussed the matter with me as early as December 1964...'. It must also have been discussed within the PAP.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Italics mine.

⁶⁶ On 4 June 1965, Lee stated that 'about 27 December [1964], Tun Abdul Razak [the Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister] suggested a rearrangement in the Federation to make Singapore more like a confederacy' (*Straits Times*, 5 June 1965).

⁶⁷ Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

he] were discussing it [separation] when playing golf and so on, discussing it whenever we meet.⁶⁸

In his December 1964 discussion with the Tunku, Tan Siew Sin maintained 'that Singapore had to be fully integrated with Malaysia, unless there should be a complete break, but no half-way house...'.⁶⁹ From the Tunku's statements up to mid-1965 it is clear that he agreed with Tan on the inadvisability of granting Singapore greater local autonomy. It is also clear that up to mid-1965, both the Tunku and Tan Siew Sin were still doves on the separation question.

THE HOT WAR OF WORDS, FEBRUARY – APRIL 1965

The verbal conflict between the PAP and the Alliance – damaging enough in 1964 – was to escalate greatly in 1965 and was to ultimately turn both Tan and the Tunku into hawks.

On 26 January 1965 Rajaratnam argued that the flames of communal discord could be prevented from spreading not by ignoring them but by sounding the alarm and calling on the people to help out. He concluded: 'Silence, far from sobering [Malay] extremists, will be a stimulant.'⁷⁰ By February 1965, it was clear that the PAP would be very far from silent. By that time also, the party had probably ceased to believe that in the short run there was any real possibility of a coalition government including the PAP, or of an UMNO-PAP Alliance, considered till the end the 'ideal solution' to the PAP's political aspirations.⁷¹ It is probable that by this time the PAP had begun to step up its initiatives for an alliance of pro-Malaysia, anti-Alliance parties. Without doubt Lee had begun once again to actively and deliberately project his image as champion of the non-Malays. The direct assault on the Alliance, including UMNO as a whole, was begun, the attacks on the UMNO 'ultras' escalated.

One type of Malay response to the verbal warfare between the PAP and the Alliance was to be the response finally adopted in mid-1965. Rahman Talib, a former federal Cabinet Minister, argued in February 1965 that the time had come for the people of Singapore to decide whether they preferred to live under the rule of Lee Kuan Yew or Tunku Abdul Rahman. If they preferred Lee, then the Central Government should reconsider Singa-

⁶⁸ Interview with Tunku Abdul Rahman. The Tunku was not completely certain about when he 'discussed' separation with Goh. In an interview published in *The Asia Magazine* on 5 February 1967, the Tunku said: 'I don't think it [separation] came as a surprise to him [Lee Kuan Yew]. He knew almost a year before that.'

⁶⁹ *Siaran Akbbar*, PEN 8/65/204 (Finance), p. 2.

⁷⁰ *Straits Times*, 27 January 1965.

⁷¹ Interview with a non-attributable PAP source.

pore's position in Malaysia.⁷² The issue of *Utusan Melayu* (20 February 1965) which reported the statement also supported it.

By early March 1965, the PAP's initiatives on an anti-Alliance alliance had reached the stage where it could be publicly announced. The alliance, Lee declared on 3 March, would 'include the Peoples Progressive Party, the United Democratic Party and Sabah and Sarawak parties'. The PAP had entered the 1964 Malayan elections openly accepting Malay political dominance. Malay political dominance was now openly challenged by Lee Kuan Yew. On 5 March 1965 Lee Kuan Yew used, apparently for the first time, the slogan, 'Malaysian Malaysia'.⁷³ The Tunku irately replied that everyone was trying to create a Malaysian nation: 'Young men, however, want to rush things.' He continued: 'Instead of doing what they want in a quiet and practical way, they spread chaos, suspicion, misunderstanding and hatred and troubles.'⁷⁴

On 5 March 1965, Lee Kuan Yew left Singapore for a month-long tour of New Zealand and Australia as a guest of the two governments.⁷⁵ Reports of Lee's overseas remarks caused dismay and anger in Alliance and Central Government circles. On 7 April, *Utusan Melayu* strongly advised Lee to air his complaints to the Central Government, not to foreign correspondents.

A few days after his return home, in mid-April 1965, Lee met the Tunku. There are indications that Lee may have tried to assure the Tunku about what he had said on his tour,⁷⁶ and that he may have suggested a constitutional rearrangement granting Singapore more local autonomy.⁷⁷ The

⁷² Quoted in Singapore, Ministry of Culture, *Separation* (Singapore, 1965), p. 10.

⁷³ *Malayan Times*, 6 March 1965.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 March 1965.

⁷⁵ It has been suggested that one of the reasons Lee went on the tour was to establish an 'interested' foreign sympathy to forestall any repressive action on the part of the Central Government (Bellows, *op. cit.*, p. 59).

⁷⁶ *Straits Times*, 16 April 1965.

⁷⁷ At the third annual Malaysian Alliance Convention, held a few days after they met, the Tunku said:

- (i) Singapore came into the Federation with its eyes wide open and they came in on their own accord.
- (ii) Now having joined the Federation, the party in power in Singapore must try to make Malaysia workable;
- (iii) We can never make any further openings until we have given the Constitution time to work.... The only matters Singapore [had] wanted were autonomy in education and labour with concurrent jurisdiction in many other subjects. I personally cannot see any good reason for this sudden change of attitude by Singapore.

The Tunku then said that the Central Government was, however, prepared to consider any matter which would bring about better understanding and cooperation without

meeting was not a success. The Tunku irately declared on 17 April 1965 that 'we must not be pushed around by a State Government...'.⁷⁸

Neither side now took positive steps to narrow the increasing gulf. On 27 April Dr. Toh announced that a convention to form a 'United Opposition Front' was to be held shortly.⁷⁹ On the same day, Lee filed two suits for libel against Albar.⁸⁰

THE PERIOD OF POLITICAL REALIGNMENT, VERBAL OVERKILL AND EXTREME RACIAL POLARIZATION, MAY - AUGUST 1965

Despite all that had gone before, a halt to incriminations and recriminations was still possible at this late stage. On 28 April Albar was reported to have welcomed the proposed opposition front 'if it really works for a united *Malaysian Malaysia*'. He said: 'This is in line with Alliance policy.'⁸¹ There was still some calm reflection on Lee Kuan Yew's part. On 1 May 1965, in a Singapore State Day address, he sedately argued: 'We will make the final realization [of a *Malaysian Malaysia*] easier if we are patient and even forbearing.'⁸² The UMNO Mentri Besar of Perlis proposed to Lee that if the latter would respect the rights of the Malays, 'then let us all be friends'.⁸³ Lee welcomed this suggestion, pointed out that the verbal battle was started by 'them' (the 'ultras') and 'their newspaper' (the *Utusan*) and loosed one of those statements which incensed the Malays to a man. In a pseudo-academic vein, Lee examined the pattern of Malay migration and came to the conclusion that none of the three races in Malaysia could claim to be more native than the others because all their ancestors came to Malaysia not more than 1,000 years ago.⁸⁴ He apparently was making the point that all Malaysians were in Malaysia as of right.⁸⁵ Lee should have realized the

contravening the terms of the Constitution (*Sunday Gazette*, 18 April 1965). On 4 June 1965, when accused of wanting partition after he had talked of 'alternative arrangements'. Lee declared: 'The only alternative arrangements I have ever envisaged are all within Malaysia and the Tunku knows that' (*Straits Times*, 5 June 1965).

⁷⁸ *Sunday Gazette*, 18 April 1965.

⁷⁹ *Straits Echo*, 28 April 1965.

⁸⁰ *Straits Times*, 28 April 1965.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 29 April 1965. Italics mine.

⁸² *Sunday Times*, 2 May 1965. Lee added, however, that 'we need never be cowed or submissive'.

⁸³ *Straits Times*, 3 May 1965.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 May 1965. It should be noted that as late as 15 March 1965, Lee was referring to the Malays as the indigenous people. See his speech at Canterbury University, New Zealand, in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

⁸⁵ *Straits Times*, 5 May 1965.

natural consequences. The Malay community saw his speech as a *deliberate* attempt⁸⁶ to challenge their indigenous heritage, and the idea of Malaya as their native homeland. On these had rested their claim to special privileges, and the status of Malay as the national language; some also went to the extreme of charging that the speech was a threat to the Malay Sultanate and Islam as the official State religion. UMNO's *Malaya Merdeka* specified two available courses of action: review of Singapore's position in Malaysia and 'concrete action against leaders who have sown communal hatred....'⁸⁷ The strength of the defensive solidarity of the Malay community in their reaction to what was seen to be a Chinese attack on their core beliefs and interests appeared not to have been adequately understood by the top leaders of the PAP.⁸⁸

By early May 1965, the actions and public stance of the PAP and of the Malay extremists had resulted in a serious racial polarization between the Malays and the Chinese (and to a lesser extent, the Indians). The polarization was significantly increased by the formation (on 9 May 1965) of the PAP-led Malaysia Solidarity Convention, its (non-Malay) communal membership and the subtly (though later crassly) communal appeals it made.⁸⁹ On 24 May, Lee Kuan Yew declared that 'if it is necessary to have

⁸⁶ On this and numerous other occasions, Lee was possibly a victim of his own reputation as a cool, calculating politician who never did anything without a reason and who thought 'four steps' ahead of his political opponents.

⁸⁷ *Straits Times*, 8 May 1965.

⁸⁸ Three years after separation, Alex Josey, a close *confidant* of Lee's, could still write: 'At the end of the first two years [of Malaysia] there was probably as much disunity within the Malay community because of quarrels over Malaysia, as there was between the Malay and the Chinese communities'! (Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 102).

⁸⁹ The main reason behind the MSC for the PAP, its principal instigator and leader, and for the rest of the members (UDP, SUPP and the small and newly-formed Sarawak Machinda party) seems to have been the desire to immediately enhance their individual political power through aggregation, and in the longer run, to become the ruling political coalition of Malaysia. This was the view taken by the Barisan Sosialis (*Plebian Express*, No. 24 (June 1965)). Bellows somewhat naively states that 'The intention [behind the MSC] was to launch a "logical" united opposition front to combat the twin dangers of external aggression and internal dissension' (*op. cit.*, p. 59). These aims were enunciated in the Declaration issued by the Convention). He also states that 'by appearing to be the antithesis of communal appeals, the MSC may have had some hopes of forcing the Tunku and the moderates who formed a majority of the UMNO leadership to restrain the ultras or expel them' (p. 60). If the MSC had such hopes, and it is not impossible that elements in the PAP did, it was a most unrealistic hope. It is probable that many saw in the MSC a means by which agitation for and the creation of a 'Malaysian Malaysia' might be advanced. It is not impossible, of course, that the PAP leadership saw the MSC as a means by which pressure could be mounted to the extent of forcing UMNO to accept the PAP in a coalition government — in the end.

a Malaysian Malaysia through [the MSC parties] making an effort to win the majority of seats in Malaysia to form the government, well, so be it. It has to be done.⁹⁰

The MSC and its 'Malaysian Malaysia'⁹¹ clarion call strongly repelled the Malays but attracted a substantial segment of the non-Malays — for very much the same reasons. According to Bellows, by no means a detractor of the PAP leadership, those he talked with at the time (evidently non-Malays) 'invariably interpreted' the MSC's statements as implying 'doing away with the special privileges of the Malays', 'protecting Chinese education so every Chinese could learn to read, write and speak Chinese [or] putting an end to Malay domination'. These statements represented to the majority of the non-Malays 'the instrument by which legal or political advantages the Malay community held would be removed and a non-Malay government instituted.' Bellows continues: 'Tragically, the MSC became only a slightly more subtle form of communalism than that preached by the Malay ultras'. He concluded: 'the impact of the MSC was to unite non-Malays against Malays'.⁹²

The timing of the inauguration of the MSC on the eve of UMNO's General Assembly could not have been more unfortunate. At UMNO's

⁹⁰ Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP had argued many times prior to 1965 that UMNO was a necessary component in any government of Malaysia. Some reappraisal had apparently been made. On 2 March 1965, Lee argued in Seremban that 'Patient non-communal politics preaching tolerance and policies designed to resolve not only urban poverty but also rural poverty *must inevitably* lead to a situation where there will be more than 80 parliamentary seats for non-communal Malaysian-minded parties [in a Parliament of 159 members]' (Quoted in Bellows, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Italics mine.) Apparently this calculation was based on the idea of winning all of Singapore's 15 seats, Sabah's 16 seats, Sarawak's 24 seats and 25 seats in Malaya (*ibid.*, p. 147). After the 1969 Malaysian elections, the parties comprising the MSC won or would have had forty seats (if the Gerakan Rakyat's 8 seats are included).

⁹¹ To the majority of the Malay masses to whom the idea of nationalism was meaningful only with reference to *bangsa* (race), and to whom the idea of Malaysian nationalism was largely meaningless (since there was no Malaysian race as such), the concept of a Malaysian Malaysia tended to be connected with the one forceful and feared alternative: a Chinese Malaysia.

This is an interesting case of vocabulary seriously affecting attitudes and assumptions. The word *nasional*, accepted into Indonesian vocabulary for some time, had not yet entered Malay usage at mass level. The word for nation was *bangsa*; national, *kebangsaan*. Thus the national language is *babasa kebangsaan*, not *babasa nasional*. In 1946, the *Malayan Union* was criticized because the word 'Malayan' was taken to mean non-Malay. A similar meaning was taken of the slogan 'Malaysian Malaysia' by a great many Malays. Norman Parmer suggests that the choice of the slogan 'Malaysian Malaysia' was 'near-brilliant' (*op. cit.*, p. 115). It appears to have been 'near-brilliant' only in English. According to Professor Wang Gungwu, it is extremely awkward to translate it into Mandarin (Talk with Professor Wang).

⁹² Bellows, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

eighteenth General Assembly convened on 15 May 1965, the governmental leadership had to struggle hard to water down a resolution calling for Lee's detention to one urging the Central Government to take 'strong action' against the PAP leader.⁹³ The Tunku and Dato (Dr.) Ismail, the Home Minister, were chided for being too 'soft' on Lee Kuan Yew.⁹⁴ The *Utusan Melayu* however, advised the Malays not to fall into Lee's 'trap' and called for moderation for fear of racial trouble.⁹⁵

Immediately on his return from a two-week Asian tour on 21 May 1965, Lee poured another gallon of petrol on the already raging fire. He stated: 'If we must have trouble, let us have it now instead of waiting for another five or ten years. If we find Malaysia cannot work now then we can make *alternative arrangements*.'⁹⁶ The very next day, he declared that the MSC wanted to get acceptance of the fundamental Malaysian Malaysia concept written into the Constitution. For good measure, he added that the reservation of certain rights for Malays was *not a fundamental provision* in the Constitution.⁹⁷ Lee, on the face of it unrealistically, stated that the prospect for Malaysia was fair: 'It is not bleak.'⁹⁸ Tan Siew Sin, apparently worried about the possibility of secession, warned Singapore of the dangers of being surrounded by 100 million Malays.⁹⁹ Albar, strongly opposed to the idea of secession, challenged Lee to 'say it now' if he wanted to get out of Malaysia.¹⁰⁰

On 23 May 1965 Lee stated that 'other arrangements' did not mean secession.¹⁰¹ A day later, he said: 'Let us be quite frank. Why should we go back to old Singapore and once again *reduce the non-Malays* in Malaya to a minority?'¹⁰² If ever Lee Kuan Yew sounded a racist, this was it. Lee did not seem to realize that by this time he was as much an 'ultra' in Alliance eyes as Albar was in his. It was not a hopeful augury on the eve of a crucial session of Parliament.

⁹³ *Straits Times*, 16 May 1965.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17 May 1965.

⁹⁵ *Utusan Melayu*, 17 May 1965.

⁹⁶ *Straits Times*, 22 May 1965. Italics mine.

⁹⁷ *Sunday Mail*, 23 May 1965. Amendment of Article 153 on Malay privileges in fact requires not only a two-thirds majority in Parliament, but also the consent of the Conference of Rulers.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

⁹⁹ Editorial, *Malayan Times*, 24 May 1965.

¹⁰⁰ *Straits Echo*, 24 May 1965.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Straits Times*, 25 May 1965. Italics mine.

The parliamentary session which began on 26 May was climacteric because Lee instituted a move to censure the Central Government over the Speech from the Throne. In the bitter tumult unprecedented in the annals of the Dewan Rakyat, dirt was hurled on both sides. Tan Siew Sin summed up the Alliance view when he said that

So long as Mr. Lee Kuan Yew is Prime Minister of Singapore... it would be far easier for the camel to pass through the eye of the proverbial needle than for the Central Governmental to co-operate with the Government of Singapore.¹⁰³

The Tunku said not a word during the lengthy debate.¹⁰⁴

On 7 June, in the Senate debate on the King's Speech, Senator T.H. Tan, General Secretary of the Alliance, urged the Central Government to take drastic steps to put Lee away to sober him up or to exclude Singapore from Malaysia.¹⁰⁵ By now, criticism of the initial decision to incorporate Singapore within Malaysia coming from the UMNO rank-and-file and middle-level leadership had reached such proportions as to have merited public rebuttal by the top UMNO leaders.¹⁰⁶

It was in this situation of verbal overkill and the groundswell of dissatisfaction with Singapore which had reached the *kampong* level that the Tunku left for London to attend the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference. At a pre-departure conference, he revealed that it was only with great difficulty that he had forced himself not to rise and attack Lee Kuan Yew during the King's Speech debate. It seems probable, however, that the Tunku was still not thinking of separation; for he stated

I do not think any issue cannot be solved provided we are sincere about making Malaysia a success.... If there is something worrying Mr. Lee I will be glad to look into it and see how best we can settle things.... I am prepared to listen again to what he has to say ...

The Tunku's disillusionment was obvious, however, for he added: 'I wish I had not listened to all that persuasive talk before.... Then Malaya would still be a very happy Malaya - no confrontation, nothing.'¹⁰⁷

As late as 15 May 1965, at UMNO's General Assembly, Tunku Abdul

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 2 June 1965.

¹⁰⁴ The probable gross misinterpretation of the significance of the Tunku's silence and the PAP's apparent ignorance of the temper of the top Alliance leadership were demonstrated by Alex Josey's article which appeared in the Australian current affairs magazine, *The Bulletin* on 19 June 1965. Josey, a close friend of Lee and Rajaratnam, reported that 'Lee's friends claim that, in this way [by remaining silent], the Tunku indicated his disapproval of UMNO extremism'

¹⁰⁵ *Straits Echo*, 8 June 1965.

¹⁰⁶ *Sunday Times*, 13 June 1965.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 12 June 1965.

Rahman had openly opposed the idea of separation.¹⁰⁸ While he was in London, the war of words continued. The Central Government continued to get a bad press in Britain. On 25 June, stricken by a painful attack of shingles, the Tunku entered the London Clinic. He later disclosed that while in hospital (presumably in a depressed state of mind) he got down to calculating the *pros* and *cons* of keeping Singapore in Malaysia.¹⁰⁹ The Tunku's initial decision on separation was apparently made on 29 June 1965.¹¹⁰

Nancy Fletcher bases her study on the separation of Singapore on two basic premises. The first is that 'the break decision was made by the Tunku alone'.¹¹¹ This is true if it means that the Tunku was the catalyst and the central figure; untrue if it implies (i) that the Tunku's 29 June decision was irreversible or unalterable (ii) that the final irrevocable separation decision (made in early August) was made by him *alone*, or (iii) that he did not have the full support of the majority of the Malaysian Cabinet.

There is some evidence to suggest that the Tunku's 29 June decision on separation was conditional. Referring to the decision, Felix Abisheganadan, a veteran Malaysian journalist, wrote (after an interview with the Tunku on 9 August 1965, the day of separation) that, 'If there could be no agreement with the PAP to call off the heavy politicking which he [the Tunku] feared would lead to racial bloodshed', the Tunku had felt that Singapore had to go.¹¹² Second, the Tunku instructed Tun Razak to proceed with the 'legal chores' necessary before separation could be effected only on 25 July 1965.¹¹³ Further, shortly after making his decision of 29 June, the Tunku, in a letter to Tun Razak requested him to talk to Lee Kuan Yew to try to eliminate the causes of friction.¹¹⁴ On 29 July 1965, Tun Razak did meet Lee in what was later reported to have been 'one of Tun Razak's last efforts to heal the rift between the State and Central Government'.¹¹⁵

Even if the Tunku's commitment to separation was not conditional on agreement 'to call off the heavy politicking', there was a real possibility that the Tunku might have changed his mind if important factors had arisen to seriously undermine his commitment. Had Lee Kuan Yew resigned from his party and governmental posts and the PAP convincingly promised

¹⁰⁸ Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁹ His 'balance sheet' ran into several pages of foolscap (*Sunday Times*, 15 August 1965).

¹¹⁰ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1965. See also *Straits Times*, 10 August 1965.

¹¹¹ Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

¹¹² *Straits Times*, 10 August 1965.

¹¹³ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1965.

¹¹⁴ *Straits Times*, 10 August 1965.

¹¹⁵ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1965.

a low-key posture and retreat to being merely a Singapore party, it is likely that separation would not have been pushed through in August 1965. It was possibly to give the PAP a last chance of averting the break that the Tunku took Lim Kim San, Singapore's Minister for National Development (one of his hospital visitors) 'into my confidence and told him exactly how I felt about Singapore' some time between 29 June and 5 July 1965.¹¹⁶ As it was, many events in late June and the month of July served to reinforce the Tunku's initial decision.

The Tunku wrote a letter either on 29 June or 1 July 1965 to Tun Abdul Razak outlining the lines of his thinking, asking Razak to discuss separation with the Cabinet seniors, and requesting the Deputy Prime Minister to meet Lee Kuan Yew.¹¹⁷ As fate would have it, before the important letter reached Kuala Lumpur, Lee Kuan Yew and Razak had held a meeting on 20 July 1965 — at Lee's request. The meeting was a fiasco. It clearly indicated that there was little possibility of an end to the war of words.¹¹⁸

Fate was not kind also in determining that an election campaign be fought in the first half of July 1965. The Hong Lim by-election of 1961 had played a key role in increasing the Tunku's initial commitment to forming Malaysia. The second Hong Lim by-election of 10 July 1965 probably played a very significant role in reinforcing the Tunku's commitment to expelling Singapore and in convincing his senior Cabinet colleagues that the island should be evicted from Malaysia. It did so in two ways. First, the results of the election of 10 July 1965 negated to a large extent the main reason for having Singapore in Malaysia in the first place. In the by-election of April 1961, the PAP had won less than 30 per cent. of the votes cast. On 10 July 1965, the PAP won the seat in a straight fight with the Barisan Sosialis — emerging with no less than 58.9 per cent. of the votes

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* Even after all the post-separation revelations, it is uncertain if the Tunku told Lim that he had made an undeflectable decision to separate or if he merely said that there would be separation if the PAP did not make a complete *volte face*. How did Lim present the Tunku's intimations to his colleagues and how were they interpreted? Was separation seen as a threat or an unavoidable future event? The fact that the PAP acted in July as though it was unaware of impending separation suggests that separation was seen as a threat and not as a foregone conclusion (See below).

¹¹⁷ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1965.

¹¹⁸ Razak revealed in 1966: 'I asked Lee Kuan Yew and his colleagues not to make statements which hurt the Malays and not to interfere in UMNO's domestic affairs. Unfortunately, Lee Kuan Yew declined to give the assurance....' (Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein, 'Permisahan Singapura Dari Malaysia' in *UMNO 20 Tahun*, Kuala Lumpur, 1966, p. 8. My translation). According to Lee's 1966 account, 'I listed my complaints about the dual-faced policy of UMNO. I told him [Razak] that any future agreement must be in writing and made known to all including the secondary leaders [of UMNO], and this shriek in the Malay press must stop. Otherwise any political accommodation is meaningless' (Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 494). Separation was evidently not discussed.

cast. A Singapore securely in the hands of the PAP would pose no great security threat to Malaysia. Second, the PAP, in fighting the by-election with its customary electioneering ferocity, strongly attacked the Central Government as much as its electoral opponents.¹¹⁹

There were other reinforcing events. On 8 July, Dr. Toh called a press conference to explain the Singapore Government's stand on the expulsion of Alex Josey, a veteran British journalist closely associated with the PAP leadership. He declared that the PAP knew that soon after the MSC meeting on 6 June, 'instructions were given to make a case for Mr. Lee's arrest'.¹²⁰ In an editorial published on 8 July, and headed 'Clumsy and Weak', *The Times* (of London) described Josey's expulsion as a 'clumsy and unjustifiable act'. The Tunku felt the heat of the English press. On 6 July, he had issued a statement justifying the Central Government's decision to close the Bank of China in Singapore. Two days later, he was pressed into making another justifying Josey's expulsion. On 13 July, he again felt it necessary to publicly deny that a case was being made for the arrest of Lee Kuan Yew.¹²¹

Despite all these events which reinforced the Tunku's initial commitment, it is probable that had his senior Cabinet colleagues strongly opposed separation, the Tunku might well have changed his mind. It was only nearly *three weeks* after the Tunku's letter to Tun Razak instructing his deputy to discuss separation with the Cabinet seniors that their agreement to a break was communicated to the Tunku.¹²²

As late as 9 July 1965, Tan Siew Sin was publicly attacking Lee's musings regarding partition as 'a philosophy of despair'.¹²³ He appears to have been one of the last among the senior Cabinet to be converted to separation.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ It was alleged that Ong Eng Guan had resigned his seat and thus necessitated a by-election because certain persons associated with the *Central Government* had promised him shares in a tin mine, that if the PAP candidate lost the election, it would indicate that it would be safe for the Alliance Government to arrest Lee Kuan Yew and/or suspend the Singapore Constitution and rule the island from Kuala Lumpur (Bellows, *op. cit.*).

¹²⁰ *Straits Times*, 9 July 1965. The PAP leadership appeared to have sincerely feared the arrest of Lee Kuan Yew, not only for Lee's sake but also for Singapore's and Malaysia's sake.

¹²¹ *Straits Times*, 14 July 1965. According to the Attorney-General, no such proceedings were undertaken (Interview with Tan Sri Abdul Kadir bin Yusof).

¹²² *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1965. This statement does not imply that there was any strong division of opinion.

¹²³ 'TV Malaysia Forum Interview with Enche Tan Siew Sin' (Kuala Lumpur, 9 July 1965. Mimeograph.)

¹²⁴ In one of the first academic accounts of the separation, Norman Parmer seems to suggest that Tan was a hawk on the matter (Parmer, *op. cit.*, p. 113).

His conversion may not have been unconnected with Singapore's intransigence over the ongoing negotiations on economic issues. On 19 July 1965 Dr. Goh Keng Swee, Singapore's Finance Minister, not only publicly rejected the Central Government's call for an increase in Singapore's contribution to federal finance from 40 to 60 per cent. but countered with the demand that it be reduced from 40 to 30 per cent. He criticized Tan's 'clumsy hint' that unless Singapore was amenable, the common market might be sluggish in coming into operation. As regards Singapore's 150 million-dollar loan to the Borneo territories, Dr. Goh said that he saw 'no reason why this money should be made available' on grounds that 'the Borneo States concerned have still not given an unqualified agreement in principle that they will accept employment of Singapore labour in development projects financed by Singapore money', a basic condition of the loan. Dr. Goh also went into detail on how the Central Government had done its best to deprive Singapore of new industries.¹²⁵

On 22 July 1965, Tunku Abdul Rahman received a reply from Tun Razak stating that 'all the senior Cabinet Ministers' (he, Dato Dr. Ismail, Tan Siew Sin, and V.T. Sambanthan) were agreed that no agreement with Singapore could be reached¹²⁶ and that Singapore should be separated. The full agreement of his Cabinet seniors was probably a decisive event in the Tunku's decision-making, for on 25 July, he wrote back to Tun Razak instructing the latter to 'proceed with the legal chores and the amendments to the Constitution' and to arrange for the recall of Parliament.¹²⁷

On 29 July 1965, Tun Abdul Razak flew to Singapore to meet Lee Kuan Yew. Of this meeting Razak later revealed: 'I met Mr. Lee. I found it impossible. Our minds did not meet on most points.' When asked if Lee knew the consequences of what would happen if he did not see eye to eye with the Central Government, Tun Razak replied, 'Certainly he did.'¹²⁸

6 August 1965

The Tunku flew into Singapore after having spent fifty-three days in Europe in the early hours of 5 August 1965. The next day, he and the four other senior Cabinet Ministers met to discuss Tun Razak's written report on his talks with Lee Kuan Yew. The meeting decided that there was no

¹²⁵ *Straits Echo*, 20 July 1965.

¹²⁶ *Straits Times*, 10 August 1965.

¹²⁷ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1965.

¹²⁸ *Straits Times*, 10 August 1965. According to Lee, he was not convinced that there was no other way out than separation until his meeting with the Tunku on 7 August 1965 (Cited in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 410). It is not certain that Lee was fully cognizant that the Tunku had already seriously decided on the break by the time of the 29 July meeting with Razak.

alternative to immediate separation. The irreversible decision was thus probably made on 6 August 1965. That evening, Dr. Goh Keng Swee and several other PAP leaders, who had been in the federal capital for a few days, were informed of the break decision.¹²⁹ Lee immediately drove down from Cameron Highlands where he had been holidaying since 1 August. Around midnight, Lee telephoned Dr. Toh to drive up to Kuala Lumpur 'at once'. Dr. Goh had already apparently reached the conclusion that there was no alternative to separation.¹³⁰

7 August 1965

At 12.30 p.m. on 7 August, Lee met the Tunku.

In Lee's words, he still believed before this meeting that he 'could still convince the Tunku that there were a number of other ways of reducing communal tensions in Malaysia, such as a looser federation'.¹³¹ Lee apparently also proposed a political truce.¹³² The Tunku was completely resolute. Their private meeting was short. According to Lee, he emerged convinced that 'there was no other way...'.¹³³ Lee signed the separation agreement. The Tunku later revealed that Lee had informed him that Dr. Toh and Rajaratnam were unwilling to sign the separation agreement. Lee asked for a brief personal note to Dr. Toh and assured the Tunku that with the note, both would sign. It was written on the spot. Lee assured the Tunku that he would have the agreement signed and returned the same day.¹³⁴

Before he left the Tunku's Residency, Lee told Tan Siew Sin: 'Today is the day of your victory, the day of my defeat; but five or ten years later, you certainly will feel sad about it.'¹³⁵

8 August 1965

At 10 a.m. on Sunday 8 August, the Alliance National Council (made up

¹²⁹ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1965.

¹³⁰ Lee Kuan Yew's 9 August 1965 press conference televised by Television Singapura, reproduced in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 410.

¹³¹ *Loc. cit.* Lee repeated this in a television interview with Lord Chalfont shown on BBC Television on 4 January 1972.

¹³² Lee Kuan Yew's press conference on 11 August 1965, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 411.

¹³³ Lee's 9 August 1965 statement (*ibid.*, p. 410).

¹³⁴ The agreement was in fact signed only around midnight and returned on 8 August (*Sunday Mail*, 15 August 1965).

¹³⁵ Lee Kuan Yew's speech of 3 October 1965, quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 421. In a speech on 15 August 1965, Tan Siew Sin said that 'just before he was about to sign, [Lee] told me, in his exact words, 'This is a defeat for me but this is your hour of personal triumph!' (*Saran Akbbar*, PEN 8/651/204 (Finance), p. 4).

of Alliance representatives from all the Malaysian territories) was convened. The Tunku was elected chairman; he duly informed the Council of the separation decision.¹³⁶ That there was little debate is attested by the fact that by 11 a.m. the Tunku was able to address another meeting (of Alliance Ministers and Mentris Besar) and to let them into the secret. They were informed that the Separation Bill would be introduced the following morning. All Alliance parliamentarians were instructed to be present in Parliament at 9.30 a.m. for a 'special announcement'.¹³⁷

Meanwhile, a 'shocked' Sabah delegate present at the Alliance National Council meeting purportedly leaked word of impending separation to Lord Head, the British High Commissioner.¹³⁸ Lord Head made repeated efforts throughout the day to contact the Tunku — without success. That evening, he gate-crashed a party at which the Tunku, Tun Razak and Tan Siew Sin were present. Lord Head probably put forward a last-minute proposal to avert separation.¹³⁹ It was not accepted. Sabah's Chief Minister, Peter Lo, flew into Kuala Lumpur at 11.15 p.m. and was driven straight to the party. Stunned, he phoned his Sabah Cabinet colleagues who gave him authority in his own words, 'to do what you think is best'.¹⁴⁰

9 August 1965

At 8.45 a.m. on the fateful day of separation — 9 August — Lord Head met Tunku Abdul Rahman and made an unsuccessful plea for a postponement of the break 'at least by one day'. He handed the Tunku a letter from Harold Wilson, the British Prime Minister, which expressed 'grave disappointment' over the matter. The meeting was short. At 9.15 a.m., a personal friend of the Tunku's, Tom Critchley, the Australian High Commissioner, made a similar plea. The meeting was even shorter.

At 9.30 a.m. Alliance MP's gathered at Committee Room No. 1 of Par-

¹³⁶ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1965.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Dennis Warner, 'The Second Fall of Singapore' in *The Reporter* (9 September 1965). It has been alleged that Donald Stephens made a telephone call to Lee Kuan Yew. The line was tapped. (Interview.)

¹³⁹ According to Sam Lipski, one of the last suggestions was 'a plan whereby the Kuala Lumpur Government would have accepted two PAP Ministers, Dr. Goh Keng Swee and Lim Kim San, into the Alliance Government, in return for Lee Kuan Yew's acceptance of the Malaysian ambassadorship at the United Nations... it might have worked if Lee had not stipulated that he would accept the job but only for two years' (*The Bulletin*, 21 August 1965). According to Josey, 'The proposal was one of several conceived by the British High Commissioner, Lord Head, none of which were ever seriously considered by the Alliance Government — or by Lee Kuan Yew' (Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 415).

¹⁴⁰ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1965.

liament House and were told of the break decision — merely half-an-hour before the start of the Dewan Rakyat proceedings. The Tunku appealed to the Sabah and Sarawak MPs whose votes were necessary to ensure the necessary constitution-changing two-thirds majority to support the Separation Bill. At 10 a.m., as the House of Representatives was called to order, Lee Kuan Yew announced Singapore's separation from Malaysia. Separation was a *fait accompli*. After a mere two-hour debate in the Dewan Rakyat, the Bill was passed by 126 votes to nil.¹⁴¹ A few hours later, the Senate approved the Bill unanimously. The deed was done.

THEORIES: EXPULSION OR BREAKAWAY?

Many theories have been expounded to explain the separation of Singapore from Malaysia. A strong body of academic literature suggests that Singapore was asked to leave, that she was evicted or expelled.¹⁴²

This 'expulsion theory' has been challenged recently by Bellows who puts forward what may be called the 'breakaway theory'. According to him, separation was the result of active and deliberate PAP policy:

... on 9 August 1965, Malaysia *acceded* to the pressures Singapore had set in motion and *released* Singapore from Malaysia as a *sovereign and independent nation*, a goal a majority of the PAP's Central Executive Committee had been working toward for several months.¹⁴³

Bellows' explanation is evidently based upon interviews; it suffers from several natural failings of interview-based research, and is compounded in his case by his avoidance of specifying who or how many informed him of the PAP's breakaway policy. A stronger case than Bellows' can be made for the theory, a case based largely upon published reports of the PAP's words and actions and upon logical arguments.

First, why did the PAP make apparently unprovoked attacks upon UMNO, the Alliance and the Central Government — if not for the reason that it wanted to exasperate the Alliance to the extent of forcing it to resort to separation? Second, why did the PAP launch such a high-powered political campaign so soon after elections had been held and why did its 'heavy politicking' go on and on? Third, it is arguable that surely Lee Kuan

¹⁴¹ Syed Jaafar Albar, who subsequently resigned from his post as UMNO Secretary-General over the decision to break, was about to enter the chamber to speak against the Bill when he was met by Tun (then Dato) Dr. Ismail. Tun Ismail apparently argued that if Albar spoke against separation, Sabah and Sarawak might follow Singapore out of Malaysia. Albar absented himself from the Dewan Rakyat sitting (Interview with Syed Jaafar Albar).

¹⁴² Indeed, the second of Nancy Fletcher's two 'basic premises' in her study of the break is that 'the leaders of Singapore did not desire the separation....' (Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 1).

¹⁴³ Bellows, *op. cit.*, p. 65. Italics mine. See also page 66 of his monograph.

Yew, acknowledged a brilliant politician by friend and foe alike, must have realized that his actions severely threatened racial harmony, the preservation of which was of such importance to Tunku Abdul Rahman that the Tunku would be prepared to take drastic steps, including separation. Is it possible that such an intelligent man as Lee could have failed to realize that his non-stop agitation would inevitably lead to partition? Fourth, why did the PAP leadership not desist from or de-escalate their attacks when hints of separation were dropped from December 1964 and more particularly, after Lim Kim San was informed of the way the Tunku felt after 29 June 1965 — unless they were intent on forcing separation? Fifth, why did Lee repeatedly and openly talk of 'alternative arrangements' and various possible schemes for partition from early 1965? Sixth, why did the PAP leadership not inform the British, Australian and New Zealand Governments about the Tunku's separation decision, a move which the Tunku feared and which might have frustrated separation? Further, why did the whole PAP Cabinet sign the separation agreement — so hurriedly and without any great attempt to delay the break? If Bellows' interview evidence *and* these questions cannot be answered in terms other than a desire to break away, the breakaway theory will be markedly strengthened.

Let us take the last question first. Bellows does not cite his source but it does seem safe to assume that they (or it) were PAP sources. The fact that the breakaway theory implies that separation was not an abysmal failure of PAP policy but a triumph of their planning and ingenuity does nothing to enhance its credibility.¹⁴⁴ The difficulties of assessing confidential interview materials are too well known to require examination here. Suffice it to say that apart from abundant public statements by the top PAP leadership specifically declaring that Singapore was evicted against their wishes (which will be quoted later), there is the interview evidence of two top PAP leaders who (in March 1970) informed me that they never expected separation.¹⁴⁵

Apart from Bellows' interviewees, however, nine members of the 1965 Malaysian Cabinet (and several others close to the Alliance) suggested that Singapore was not 'kicked out' or 'evicted' but went out with the agreement of the Singapore Government.¹⁴⁶ Almost invariably in my interviews

¹⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that it has an Alliance counterpart. One of my interviewees put forward what may be called the 'excuse theory'. According to him, the Tunku never wanted Singapore in Malaysia but agreed to include the island in order to gain British support for the inclusion of British Borneo. Once Sabah and Sarawak were in, the Tunku was looking for the proper time and pretext for evicting Singapore. A case (though a weak one) can be made for this on the basis of non-interview materials.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with two non-attributable PAP interviewees.

¹⁴⁶ Interviews with Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tan Siew Sin, Sardon Jubir, Khir Johari,

with them, the fact that every single PAP Cabinet Minister signed the separation agreement was cited as proof of this. The Tunku's insistence upon their signatures in fact goes a long way to explain their interview statements. From the point of view of British, Australian and New Zealand consumption, of course, it was important for Kuala Lumpur to give the impression that Singapore was a willing adherent to the separation agreement. And in a sense, Singapore did agree to leave Malaysia — though at the immovable insistence of the Central Government.

Possibly a more convincing argument in favour of the breakaway theory on the surface at least — was the fact that the leadership of the PAP made what appeared to be totally *unprovoked* attacks on the Alliance.¹⁴⁷ The fact that unprovoked criticisms on the Alliance were made by the PAP long before Malaysia was formed, of course, weakens the force of this argument somewhat. And in truth many of the PAP's 'unprovoked' attacks were in fact not so much attacks as defensive statements. Very often, Lee Kuan Yew was merely responding to editorials in the newspapers; the speeches of others, and various degrees of misreporting of his own speeches published in the Jawi press, the *Utusan Melayu*, *Warta Negara* and UMNO's organ, *Merdeka*.¹⁴⁸

A significant amount of the PAP leadership's genuinely unprovoked 'attacks' was probably accidental rather than calculated. It is often forgotten — because the PAP leadership is almost invariably regarded as always cool and calculating — that much of their outpourings was as irrational as those of the UMNO ultras' in the sense that they were not the result of deliberation and calculation but of temper and aroused emotions.

At many points, of course, the psychology of the verbal dogfight simply took over. And unfortunately, even Lee's defensive statements were often not devoid of a sharp cutting edge. The deeply-based and long-standing contempt which many PAP leaders had for elements of the Alliance leadership and for many Alliance attitudes and policies was so real that it was naturally put across, sometimes the minute they opened their mouths. A great deal of the PAP's truly deliberate and unprovoked criticisms may be

Bahaman Shamsuddin, Khaw Kai Boh, V. Manickavasagam, Senu Abdul Rahman, Tun (Dr.) Ismail.

¹⁴⁷ The researcher who relies upon the English press is apt to get the impression that a great deal of the PAP's attacks were of this nature.

¹⁴⁸ The English language press attempted on the whole to defuse the political situation by not reporting many inflammatory speeches on both sides. Unfortunately for Lee, the leaders of the MCA, and MIC were not readers of the Jawi press. It is possible also that some of UMNO's leaders were not such studious readers of the *Utusan* as Lee was. Many were thus inclined to regard many of Lee's defensive speeches as unprovoked attacks.

explained in terms of its struggle for power and its self-allocated educative and innovative role in Malaysia.

As for the PAP's election-pitched political campaign based on the 'Malaysian Malaysia' slogan and mounted with federal elections half a decade away, this can also be explained in terms other than the desire to force separation. The campaign was election-pitched to a large extent because the PAP was fighting an election — the one to be held in 1969.

To a large extent, too, the 'Malaysian Malaysia' movement was part of the PAP's programme of education and innovation. 'Our business', Lee declared on 14 December 1964, 'is to educate everybody in Malaysia.'¹⁴⁹ It should be noted also that a great deal of what were seen as deliberate politicking, was not that at all. The PAP's constant 'standing up to the Central Government' and its criticisms were based to a large extent upon genuine grievances (over, for example, the textile trade, Bank of China, trade with South Africa and common market issues) and can be partly explained in terms of its desire to hold Singapore public support and to expand its non-Malay following in the rest of Malaysia. Partly, it was the natural consequence of the political spirit and style of the PAP. Lee proclaimed in May 1965 (with obvious pride): 'We love the open argument; we relish the prospect of a meeting of minds, a conflict of ideas.'¹⁵⁰

It might be argued that Lee Kuan Yew must have known that (i) the activities of the PAP and the MSC were causing dangerously intense racial tensions and that (ii) to prevent any outbreaks of racial violence or even the prospect of them, the Tunku would be forced to separate Singapore from Malaysia. Lee must have wanted separation.

According to Dr. Lim Chong Eu, then Secretary-General of the United Democratic Party (a partner in the MSC), 'When Tunku Abdul Rahman makes a mistake, people say it is natural; but when Lee Kuan Yew makes a mistake, people say it is impossible.'¹⁵¹ There is abundant evidence to show that while Lee was a brilliant political operator in the Singapore milieu, he showed little real understanding of the Malaysian theatre of politics.¹⁵² More particularly, Lee seemed to have seriously misjudged the Malay passions he aroused. Thus, up to the very end, he still apparently believed that the PAP could win Malay support, that the political pace the

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

¹⁵⁰ Speech by Lee Kuan Yew in Parliament on May 1965 reproduced in Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for a Malaysian Malaysia* (Singapore, Ministry of Culture, 1965), p. 45.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Dr. Lim Chong Eu. Dr. Lim is now Chief Minister of Penang.

¹⁵² In the view of Tun Ismail, the PAP had no experience of politics in a multi-racial society because Singapore was a 'homogeneous society with some racial minorities' (Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 393). The Tunku was certainly a book he did not know how to read.

PAP set was not 'too fierce, too rapid'.¹⁵³ The Alliance's warning of bloodshed Lee Kuan Yew seemed to have dismissed as attempts to cow the PAP. On 4 June 1965, he revealed that he valued 'a lot of what Dr. Lim Chong Eu has been telling me of his experience [when he was president of the MCA] ...' Lee declared: 'You know, every time they [UMNO] want to get their way in the Alliance, they used to tell him [Dr. Lim] blood will flow.'¹⁵⁴ The strongest argument against the view that Lee must have known that his non-stop agitation would inevitably lead to separation is the fact that almost all of the top leaders of UMNO were themselves taken completely by surprise.¹⁵⁵

The PAP's continuation of its agitation even after 'hints' – probably thickly-veiled – of separation (made apparently from the end of 1964) may be explained in terms of PAP perceptions of their intention. First, it is possible that the party saw the threat of separation as a means by which the Alliance sought to gain acceptance of what Lee subsequently called a 'colonial' system, a confederal arrangement by which Singapore would have complete autonomy – but with armed forces in Singapore under Kuala Lumpur control.¹⁵⁶ Second, the PAP leadership may have viewed talk of separation as attempts to 'cow' and 'browbeat' the PAP into 'submission' and 'silence'; indeed the constant use of these words, sometimes without readily apparent reasons, does tend to add credence to this possibility.

Third, the threat of separation may have been interpreted by Lee and the PAP as an attempt to split the party and its leaders and to cause a change of leadership. This interpretation would have been natural on the part of the PAP in view of several factors. The Tunku apparently discussed separation repeatedly with Goh Keng Swee, not with Lee Kuan Yew,¹⁵⁷ a move which may have been seen as an attempt to encourage Goh to challenge Lee. And from the turn of the year, Alliance Ministers publicly and repeatedly demanded the replacement of Lee Kuan Yew.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Lee's press conference of 9 August 1965 (*ibid.*, p. 410).

¹⁵⁴ *Malayan Times*, 5 June 1965.

¹⁵⁵ Interviews with Jaafar Albar and Sardon Jubir.

¹⁵⁶ It is important to note that the first hints regarding separation were probably dropped at the time that the proposal was forwarded (or shortly afterwards).

¹⁵⁷ See above. See also *The Asia Magazine*, 5 February 1967.

¹⁵⁸ It has also been suggested that Tun Abdul Razak held a secret meeting in Singapore three or four months before separation at which Singapore Alliance stalwarts as well as a few other prominent Singapore political leaders attended. According to Dr. Sheng Nam Chin, the main theme of Tun Razak's message was that 'If you get rid of Kuan Yew and put Keng Swee as the Prime Minister there will be no separation' (Interview with Dr. Sheng Nam Chin, then of the Barisan Sosialis). According to Dr. Sheng he was the only Barisan Sosialis leader present and he attended in a personal

As regards the Tunku's revelation to Lim Kim San (between 29 June and 5 July 1965) of 'exactly how I [the Tunku] felt about Singapore',¹⁵⁹ a great deal depends on exactly how explicit the Tunku was. It is a fact that for a period of two weeks starting from mid-July, Lee Kuan Yew (though not Goh Keng Swee) appeared comparatively more sedate and conciliatory.¹⁶⁰ Indeed Lee appeared to have been apprehensive for a time about separation. About three weeks before the day of separation, he apparently sent an emissary to one of the senior and the most moderate Alliance Ministers, with the message that he was prepared to go to London to talk to the Tunku. The emissary was told that matters had reached 'the point of no return'.¹⁶¹

It is possible that even so late in the day, Lee and the political leadership of the PAP might have suspected a bluff to get them to abandon their Malaysian Malaysia movement. This is not surprising if it is realized that they themselves appeared to be indulging in political brinkmanship. The Singapore and Central Governments apparently started negotiations as regards a rearrangement of the initial terms of merger several weeks before separation.¹⁶² Singapore purportedly wanted greater autonomy and the speeding up of the implementation of the common market. At one point Barker, Singapore's Minister for Law, presented a paper containing a draft agreement for separation. The External Affairs Ministry regarded the move as a tactic for eliciting concessions.¹⁶³ Second, the senior Alliance Ministers seemed to be acting as though they were completely oblivious of the Tunku's decision.¹⁶⁴ Thus, many days after Lim Kim San's return to Singapore (on 9 July 1965), Tan Siew Sin condemned the idea of partition as 'a

capacity. This meeting was corroborated by Mrs. Felice Leon-Soh who was also present at the meeting (Interview with Mrs. Felice Leon-Soh).

¹⁵⁹ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1965.

¹⁶⁰ See Lee's speeches as reported in *Straits Echo*, on 16 and 19 July 1965; in the *Straits Times*, on 26 and 27 July 1965.

¹⁶¹ Interview with an eminent non-PAP political leader.

¹⁶² *Sunday Gazette*, 1 August 1965.

¹⁶³ Interviews with Ghazali Shafie, Khir Johari, and an official of the then Ministry of External Affairs.

¹⁶⁴ Barker's paper may, of course be regarded as proof of the breakaway theory. I suggest, however, that it was a negotiating tactic. If this was so, it was essential for Singapore's negotiators to appear seriously prepared to accept separation. If they did so appear, it is not surprising if the senior members of the Federation Cabinet gained the impression that Singapore was willing to leave Malaysia.

¹⁶⁵ In late July 1965, Tan delivered a speech to the University of Singapore Economics Society in which he talked of the implementation of the common market and called for the right spirit on the market issue (T.R.P. Dawson, *Tan Siew Sin: the Man*

philosophy of despair'.¹⁶⁶ On his visit to Singapore on 29 July 1965, Tun Razak was still talking of the difficulties which would arise if there was competition between the Singapore and Central Governments over development schemes for the Singapore Malays.¹⁶⁷ Third, and more important, the threat of separation had been used before. Threats, of course, lose their credibility when they are repeatedly made and not implemented.

If, as it is argued, Lee Kuan Yew did not want separation, why did he repeatedly refer to partition and 'alternative arrangements'? Lee first talked of 'alternative arrangements' on 21 May 1965.¹⁶⁸ That this did not mean separation, however, he explicitly stated two days later.¹⁶⁹ 'Partition' and 'alternative arrangements' were probably used as a means of giving impetus and force to the PAP's proposals for greater autonomy for Singapore and as a threat to discourage any consideration by Kuala Lumpur of the use of unconstitutional and repressive measures against the PAP.¹⁷⁰

The Tunku is of the opinion that had the British Government been informed of the decision to break, Whitehall would not have gone along with it and could have been in a position to frustrate the separation.¹⁷¹ Why then did the PAP desist from informing Britain? Ironical as it may seem, part of the answer probably is that the PAP leaders did not have the time to do so. The evidence suggests that the Tunku's statement (or hints) to Lim Kim San were not taken seriously enough. According to Lee, up to the last moment he believed that he could talk the Tunku out of going through with separation. Four days after the break, Lee expressed his regret that he had been unable to keep his 'friends', Harold Wilson and Arthur Bottomley, fully informed. There was no time to tell them beforehand, he said.¹⁷² Second, and in the words of Lee Kuan Yew, if word of separation 'leaked

from Malacca, Singapore, Donald Moore, 1969, pp. 48-50). In an article under his name in *Foreign Affairs* entitled 'Malaysia: Key Area in Southeast Asia', the Tunku said: 'I am confident that whatever little differences exist at present between the Central Government and the State Government will work out satisfactorily' (*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. XLIII No. 4 (July 1965), p. 663).

¹⁶⁶ T.V. Malaysia Forum interview with Tan Siew Sin, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ *Straits Echo*, 29 July 1965. Three days after separation, Lee described Razak's visit as the 'final test of whether he [Razak] could get the support of the Malays...' (Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 396). It was in fact a final test of whether there was any possibility of putting an end to Singapore-Central Governments dissensions.

¹⁶⁸ *Straits Times*, 22 May 1965.

¹⁶⁹ *Straits Echo*, 24 May 1965.

¹⁷⁰ On 8 July 1965, Dr. Toh said: 'The Alliance must realize that Malaysia will break up if any repressive action is taken' (*Straits Times*, 9 July 1965).

¹⁷¹ Interview with Tunku Abdul Rahman.

¹⁷² Cited in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

out, I think there would have been riots in Singapore and Malaya'.¹⁷³ Third, it is possible that when the PAP's threat to leave Malaysia, their bluff, was called, the PAP leadership had to save face — and agree to separation.

The last two arguments partially explain the PAP decision to sign the separation agreement. The decision to sign must also be related to the Tunku's unyielding insistence that there were only two courses of action he could take: separate Singapore or take repressive action against the leaders of the PAP.¹⁷⁴ The PAP evidently knew that troops were already placed on alert in Johore. The arrest and deportation of selected PAP leaders would have had severe racial and constitutional consequences.

A major weakness of the breakaway theory is that it does not pose a convincing set of reasons why the PAP would want separation. Bellows forwards one reason. He argues that 'If the PAP could not share power in, or become the government of Malaysia it was preferable to be the government of a sovereign and independent Singapore.'¹⁷⁵ It is very doubtful if the PAP and its leadership, which had strained so hard to 'get at Malaya' and to 'break out of Singapore', could have been satisfied to be confined to an island, however sovereign, however independent. To believe so is to misunderstand the messianic fervour of a party inspired by the unshakeable belief that it held the answers to the problems of Malaya — which was regarded as part of its homeland. Nor is there any evidence that the PAP believed that it was making no headway towards eventual rule in Malaysia. In fact all the evidence points the other way.

The case against the breakaway theory does not rest upon the argument that the PAP appeared to have little to gain from separation. If the PAP was attempting to engineer a break, why did it adopt a tactic which stressed *not state rights* but the rights of non-Malays and the necessity of creating a 'Malaysian Malaysia', a tactic which (from the PAP's assumptions) would more likely have resulted in repression than in separation? Indeed, if we are to accept Bellows' assertion that by January 1965, 'a majority of the PAP's Central Executive Committee had concluded that control of UMNO had fallen into the hands of the ultras',¹⁷⁶ the most likely outcome of the

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ According to Rajaratnam, when he learned that it was separation or 'my deportation and Lee's arrest, I realized there was nothing else we could do' (Quoted in Warner, *op. cit.*).

¹⁷⁵ Bellows, *op. cit.*, p. 50. Many in Malaysia who seem to believe in the infallibility of Lee Kuan Yew argue that Lee wanted an independent sovereign Singapore from the beginning and wanted Malaysia in order to get the British out. Once this was achieved, the next step was a break from Malaysia.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

PAP's agitation would have been the arrest of Lee Kuan Yew, a demand vociferously made by the Malay extremists.¹⁷⁷

Second, it would be surprising indeed if men who had campaigned so hard for merger from 1954 and so very hard from 1959 could have abandoned merger after merely a year's experience.

Third, there are unequivocal statements by PAP leaders both before and after separation declaring their opposition to separation. Speaking in the debate on the King's Speech on 27 May 1965, Lee charged the 'ultras' with wanting Singapore to secede, and declared: 'we have not the slightest intention of seceding'.¹⁷⁸ A week later, he argued that 'we need Malaysia for each other's survival...'.¹⁷⁹ On the day of separation, Lee revealed on Singapore television:

...every time we look back on this moment when we signed this agreement which severed Singapore from Malaysia, it will be a moment of anguish. For me it is a moment of anguish because all my adult life... I have believed in the merger of these two territories. Its people connected by geography, economics and ties of kinship....¹⁸⁰

At this point in the interview, Lee broke down in tears.

It may be argued that statements explicitly made on an issue may sometimes be unreliable because the speaker may be deliberately attempting to create an effect or to put across a calculated line. It is to be noted that Singapore Ministers did make statements on issues other than separation, partition, and 'alternative arrangements', which indicated that the PAP was not at all thinking of secession and had no desire to secede. A few examples should suffice. On 1 May 1965, for example, in a Singapore State Day address, Lee Kuan Yew predicted 'a fair, and certainly not bleak future for the nation'.¹⁸¹ On 6 June 1965, he declared that 'Malaysia will be a nation that will survive for hundreds of years as a separate identity in Southeast Asia'.¹⁸² On 15 July, he stated that the initiative now rested with the Tunku 'to resolve this [PAP-Alliance political squabble] quietly and let us get on with economic development'.¹⁸³ On 25 July 1965, Lee declared that he was confident that the concept of a Malaysian Malaysia

¹⁷⁷The PAP was in fact very worried that action would be taken against its leaders.

¹⁷⁸Quoted in Lee Kuan Yew, *Battle For A Malaysian Malaysia*, *op. cit.*, p. 14. This formula was repeated on 6 June 1965 (Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 393).

¹⁷⁹*Malayan Times*, 5 June 1965.

¹⁸⁰Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

¹⁸¹*Sunday Times*, 2 May 1965.

¹⁸²Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 393.

¹⁸³*Straits Echo*, 16 July 1965. Italics mine.

would be popularly accepted by the people in ten years' time.¹⁸⁴ It is difficult to reconcile these statements with the image of men trying to engineer Singapore's separation from Malaysia.

Several specific non-verbal actions of the PAP also suggest the absence of any intention on its part to engineer a break. How else can one explain Lee Kuan Yew's initiative to defuse the political situation by requesting for the 29 June 1965 meeting with Tun Razak? What other explanation is there to Lee's despatch of an emissary in July 1965 to Kuala Lumpur? Was Lee's emotional breakdown on a live television broadcast on 9 August mere play-acting? How else can we explain the proposals designed to avert separation put forward by Lee at his 7 August meeting with the Tunku? If separation was the aim, why did Lee indulge in such bitter and angry remarks after the break? On 12 August he said: 'It is just six men, six wild men, ultras who caused this [separation]'.¹⁸⁵ A more extreme outburst came on 17 October 1965. Referring to Kuala Lumpur, Lee said:

They want to slow down our pace so that their society — a mediaeval feudal society — can survive. They envy us, yes, up to a point. But more important, they fear us: what an effective, efficient administration which is not clogged down and bogged down by corruption can do... Basically this was the reason they refused to cooperate even after merger, even after Malaysia, and that they said in the end, 'Get out!'¹⁸⁶

Enough has been said in the preceding pages to suggest that the break-away theory cannot be lightly dismissed out of hand. On the balance of evidence, however, it does appear that a very clear preponderance of arguments lies on the side of the expulsion theory. If so, why did the Central Government decide to expel Singapore?

MOTIVATIONS¹⁸⁷

From the Kuala Lumpur viewpoint, separation may mainly be viewed as a means of putting a stop to the political agitation of the PAP and its expected consequences and of confining the party to the island of Singapore. The PAP's activities were seen as a threat to inter-ethnic peace and harmony, to the political power of the Alliance and of some of its elements, and to certain core interests of UMNO and the Malays.

¹⁸⁴ *Straits Times*, 27 July 1965.

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in P. Boyce, *Malaysia and Singapore in International Diplomacy* (Sydney, the University Press, 1968), p. 34.

¹⁸⁷ In discussing motivations, we shall refer to the motives of the Cabinet 'seniors', to Tunku Abdul Rahman, his deputy, Tun Abdul Razak, Dato Dr. Ismail, Tan Siew Sin (President of the MCA) and Sambanthan (President of the Malayan Indian Congress), stressing, however, on the central figure, the Tunku.

The PAP threatened racial peace in two ways. The aggressiveness of what was perceived by the majority of the populace of all races as a Chinese party and of a Chinese leader generated, on the one hand, an assertiveness on the part of Malaya's non-Malays. On the other, it generated a defensive response from the Malays which often took an offensive form. What the Malays saw as Chinese extremism generated what the non-Malays saw as Malay extremism. At the rate the races were being drawn towards the extreme poles, violent conflict could not have been averted for very long.¹⁸⁸ There is little reason to suppose that the desire to avert a racial bloodbath was not one of the most important reasons, if not by far the most important incentive, for the expulsion decision. According to the Tunku, he felt by mid-1965 that 'unless I took action immediately, there would be pure murder'.¹⁸⁹

The PAP threatened the political power of the Alliance and of particular elements in the Alliance in a number of ways. Its campaign which was geared primarily to gaining the support of the urban non-Malays would in the long run severely erode the political support for the MCA. More immediately ominous was the fact that as a result of the appeals made by the PAP and of its general assertiveness, the party was already weakening the MCA by causing internal divisions within the Association; this was a trend that would be difficult, if not impossible, to reverse in the future — unless the PAP halted its campaign. By the end of 1964, MCA Youth branches had begun to pass resolutions calling for the recognition of Chinese as a national language of Malaysia. Five days before the irrevocable decision to break was made, on 1 August 1965, Tan Siew Sin was moved into condemning the 'mounting agitation by a number of Chinese organizations' on the Chinese language issue.¹⁹⁰ In addition, the PAP's inflammatory campaign and disagreements within UMNO and to the response to it, was factionalizing the Organization between the hard-liners who advocated the arrest of Lee Kuan Yew and even the suspension of Singapore's Constitution and those who urged calmness and moderation.

It has often been suggested that Tunku Abdul Rahman was under great pressure from the Malay 'ultras' and that the decision to separate was a

¹⁸⁸ There are many who believe that the seeds sown in 1964 and 1965 were reaped in the communal whirlwind of 13 May 1969.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Tunku Abdul Rahman.

¹⁹⁰ *Malayan Times*, 2 August 1965. The divisions within the MCA became all too evident before the end of August 1965 when it was found necessary to decide on a meeting between eight MCA and eight UMNO leaders to thrash out what was described as 'existing differences between the two organizations over the growing restlessness among younger Chinese elements on questions of Chinese language, education, Malay rights and land alienation'. To Tan Siew Sin's credit, he opposed the meeting and refused to lead the MCA delegation (*Straits Echo*, 28 August 1965).

consequence of such pressure.¹⁹¹ These suggestions appear to be substantiated by the Tunku's 7 August 1965 letter to Dr. Toh in which he said: 'If I were strong enough and able to exercise complete control of the situation I might perhaps have delayed action.'¹⁹² Yet, if the Tunku was a prisoner of his ultras, or had come under their influence, why did he deliberately rebuff them by rejecting their demand for repression? Why did he choose separation, a course of action over which the 'leader' of the 'ultras', Syed Jaafar Albar, disagreed sufficiently strongly for him to tender his resignation? The high-handed manner with which the Tunku pushed through Singapore's eviction and his constant reiterations that he alone was responsible for the break decision do not suggest that he felt particularly weak or threatened. On the contrary, they indicate supreme confidence.¹⁹³

As regards his personal interests, the Tunku's decision to evict Singapore appears not to have been related to his 'weakness' then but probably to two longer-term considerations. The Malay community was very clearly moving towards extremism. The Tunku might have feared that to maintain his personal power he would have had to move with his power base. Since he was averse to adopting an extremist stand, his position in the longer run may have been seriously undermined in the future — unless he could halt the drift towards extremism. It is also possible that the Tunku may have been apprehensive of the attempts of the 'ultras', whose power was bound to increase with the PAP's continued agitation, to make the government more responsive to the (dominant) party, UMNO.¹⁹⁴

Separation would not only secure the Tunku's position as *pater familias* of UMNO, the Alliance, the Central Government and Malaysia for the foreseeable future but also the position of the Alliance as the governing party for elections to come. The PAP's and the MSC's future potential as an alternative centre of power and government would be destroyed at a stroke. The strength of this motivation cannot be denied, but it may have been less

¹⁹¹ See Jean Grossholtz, 'An Exploration of Malaysian Meanings', in *Asian Survey*, Vol. 6 (April 1966), p. 240; and R. Catley, 'Malaysia: the Lost Battle for Merger', in *Australian Outlook*, Vol. 21, p. 44-60. Lee Kuan Yew has charged that separation was made necessary by UMNO's Malay extremists whom the Tunku could no longer control, a suggestion which Norman Parmer endorses (Parmer, *op. cit.*, p. 15).

¹⁹² *Straits Times*, 11 August 1965.

¹⁹³ It has been suggested by a Cabinet senior that the purpose of the Tunku's pretence of weakness (to the PAP leaders) was to ensure that Singapore signed the separation agreement (interview with one of the senior Cabinet Ministers). The writer's question as to whether the Tunku was weak or under challenge was greeted with a chuckle.

¹⁹⁴ At UMNO's eighteenth General Assembly in May 1965, Albar unsuccessfully mounted an attempt to increase UMNO's say in the affairs of the Central Government (*Straits Times*, 15 May 1965).

than is often supposed. The existing pain-in-the-neck probably had greater motivational force than considerations of the future.¹⁹⁵

In August 1965, separation was understandably seen not only as a method of terminating the threat to racial peace and the power of the Alliance and elements therein, but also (as far as UMNO leaders were concerned) as a means of ending the threat to several core interests of UMNO and the Malays such as Malay political predominance, Malay privileges¹⁹⁶ and the sultanate system.¹⁹⁷ Not surprising also was the UMNO belief – given their attitude towards Lee Kuan Yew – that the PAP posed a challenge to the status of Malay as the national language¹⁹⁸ and as the sole official language (in Malaya) after 1967.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Only two of the Ministers interviewed (in 1969-70) could remember the name of Lee's 'opposition group'.

¹⁹⁶ In spite of the PAP leadership's constantly-expressed support for Article 153 on Malay privileges, the PAP was regarded as a threat to the system of Malay privileges. This was not surprising. It was Lee's constant practice in 1965 to express his devotion to Article 153, and in the same breath, to ask how Malay privileges or the creation of a capitalist Malay class would uplift the Malay have-nots. It is to be noted that in asking this question, Lee was following in the well-trodden footsteps of Malayan and Singaporean socialists. As early as 1946, Malay socialists like Ahmad Boestamam and Dr. Burhanuddin (then of the Malay Nationalist Party) had strongly disagreed with the traditional leaders of UMNO like Dato Onn over the efficacy of measures which could only help a few. They favoured measures such as agrarian reform. Lee, unlike them, was accused of indulging in a racialist argument – primarily because he was a prominent Chinese leader. There is little doubt that Lee and his colleagues (like many Malay intellectuals) did *not* believe in the efficacy of Malay privileges.

¹⁹⁷ On the eve of his departure for the fateful 1965 Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference, for example, the Tunku referred to Lee's recent speech in which he talked of the disappearance of tribal chiefs in Africa and the collapse of the Maharajah system in India. The Tunku remarked: 'You see the implication here' (*Straits Times*, 12 June 1965).

¹⁹⁸ In Parliament (on 27 May 1965) Lee asked: 'How does our talking Malay here [in Parliament] or writing to the Ministers of the Federal Government... in Malay, increase the production of the Malay farmers. ... How does that raise his standard of living?' (Quoted in Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for a Malaysian Malaysia*, *op. cit.*, p. 37). UMNO answered that Malay was not adopted for economic reasons.

¹⁹⁹ Speaking in Parliament on 27 May 1965, Lee declared his support for the national language. Immediately after saying so, he added:

But I am worried that if the Ministers from the Central Government are forced to speak in the National Language, what would the situation be? I am afraid that they would find it difficult and cumbersome.... Suppose I write a letter in the National Language and send copies to the Central Government Ministers, would it not create difficulties? They would have to look for friends to translate the letter and after the letter has been translated, they would write and reply in English and get it translated into the National Language and in the process, misinterpretations would occur (Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 33-34).

The PAP was also seen by UMNO's leaders and the Malays as a threat to the identity of Malaysia. Many in the top leadership of UMNO appeared to have aspired towards a 'Malaysian Malaysia' which was culturally and linguistically homogeneous, built upon a foundation of Malay culture and Malay language — a basically Malay country. They saw the PAP's 'Malaysian Malaysia' concept as a proposal for a culturally and linguistically heterogeneous society (like Singapore) — a basically non-Malay country. Others in UMNO saw in the PAP's 'Malaysian Malaysia' a blueprint for a basically Chinese state. The 'Malaysian Malaysia' campaign re-opened once again the question of Malay privileges, Malay language, and Chinese language and education and had in fact created an atmosphere in which Chinese demands were once more coming to the fore.

Lastly, a core interest closely connected with racial peace, the Malay sense of security, was seen to be gravely threatened by the PAP and its activities.

There can be little doubt that the decision to separate was to a large extent also a result of pure anger with Lee Kuan Yew, the PAP and with the foreign press.²⁰⁰ The anger was founded on personal antipathy, the feeling that the PAP was utterly ungrateful, that Lee was prepared to countenance anything in pursuit of his ambitions. His hurtful criticisms and insults, his 'insincerity',²⁰¹ his 'stab(s) in the back' (indulged in when he was overseas or in the company of foreign journalists), and the general misery and lack of peace of mind which the PAP brought into the lives of the Alliance leaders reduced many of them to the point of utter exasperation.²⁰²

The deliberative and emotional incentives for separation were great. On the other hand there were no forceful perceived disadvantages to evicting Singapore, no forceful incentives for keeping her in Malaysia. Singapore had

With the best goodwill in the world (which was certainly not accorded to Lee) his arguments are those for the non-implementation of Malay as the sole official language in 1967. Moreover, Lee's remarks were insulting to Alliance Ministers. (Lee stated that he was not worried about the PAP ministers as they were sufficiently proficient in Malay.)

²⁰⁰ The Tunku's sensitiveness to the foreign press is attested by the fact that roughly one-seventh of his (9 August) forty-five minute speech introducing the Separation Bill was devoted to the sins of foreign correspondents.

²⁰¹ The Tunku stated: 'He [Lee] had other meetings. He called the solidarity front and other things to form an opposition party; I didn't really take very much notice of that. But what I did take notice was his insincerity and the way he was going back on his word, and his utterances...' (Interview with Tunku Abdul Rahman).

²⁰² According to Khir Johari, his daily routine was reduced to getting up in the morning, reading the statements of PAP leaders in the newspapers and spending the rest of the day thinking of a reply. He added, 'It was a change to have a good night's sleep' after Singapore separated (Interview with Khir Johari) There is evidence to indicate that Lee Kuan Yew was also feeling the strains of daily combat.

refused to increase her contribution to Federal revenue. There was also little prospect of Singapore agreeing to implement the loan of 150 million dollars to the Borneo States. The initial *raison d'être* for bringing Singapore into Malaysia had to a large extent been negated by mid-1965: the Barisan Sosialis had been plagued by internal squabbles and a leadership struggle and was likely to remain in disarray; on the other hand, the PAP appeared politically secure and likely to remain so. An independent Singapore now would be no serious security threat. Matters had come a full circle. To the decision-makers, the case for separation appeared overpowering.

We have thus far concentrated on the events which led to the Alliance's decision to evict Singapore. It is important to recognize that her expulsion was possible because the Central Government was not faced with a vetoist or uncompliant political environment. The politics of *fait accompli* removed the British from the scene as a potential veto power. And the political power of the Alliance in being able to persuade the only other potential vetoist, the Singapore Government, to agree to separation made the outcome certain. Their persuasive capacity rested to a significant extent upon their skilful presentation of alternatives to the PAP leaders. The choice as laid before Lee was between the Scylla of bloodshed and repression and the Charybdis of separation. All other alternatives were categorically rejected out of hand. To make the threat of arrest and repression more credible than it already was to the PAP leadership, troops were placed on alert in Johore.²⁰³ The impression was also given by the Tunku and evidently believed by Lee Kuan Yew that the Malaysian Prime Minister was losing control of the situation and that racial outbreaks were in the offing.²⁰⁴ The Tunku probably feigned political weakness and talked of his physical condition. According to Lee, the Tunku told him: 'I cannot live forever....' Lee continued: 'I would say myself that the Tunku, so long as he has the strength, would never allow racial conflict to happen. But if his health [gives] ... if he got another attack of shingles, for instance, and he was away for two months, then it could take place...'²⁰⁵

Any analysis of the Tunku's persuasion and the PAP's acceptance of separation cannot be complete if it is not recognized that the task of gaining Singapore's acquiescence was probably not that difficult. We have argued that the PAP did not plan and engineer a breakaway. This does not imply that there were none in the PAP who did not want separation before August 1965²⁰⁶ or that the party leadership as a whole was totally or intensely

²⁰³ Rumours of this had made the rounds in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

²⁰⁴ See Lee's 9 August television interview reproduced in Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 410.

²⁰⁵ Lee's interview with Fred Emery of *The Times* (London), reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 413.

²⁰⁶ The separation did not raise a whimper from the party's ranks and was greeted with fire crackers in Singapore's Chinatown.

opposed to separation. Lee apparently spent only half an hour in attempting to dissuade the Tunku on 7 August.²⁰⁷ The PAP did not leak word of separation to the British. Delay on some pretext or other could have been attempted — but were not. If the PAP had been intensely committed to Malaysia's integrity it would surely have done everything possible (including keeping quiet) to ensure that the separation threat made repeatedly by elements in UMNO from the beginning of 1965 would not be implemented. Faced with a brick wall and no room for manoeuvre, they simply capitulated.

The eviction of Singapore from Malaysia may be seen as an exercise in conflict resolution. Conflicts may be resolved in a variety of ways; for example, by depoliticizing contentious issues, through unilateral de-escalation, through accommodation and appeasement, by eradicating the root causes of dissension, by subjugation, and by removing the other party in the conflict, i.e. separation.

The Alliance-PAP two-year truce negotiated at the end of September 1964 was an attempt at depoliticizing contentious issues. The verbal ceasefire broke down because it sought to depoliticize only one contentious issue, the communal one, the only matter on which the top governmental leaderships of the Alliance and the PAP could reach agreement. Regrettably, both sides lacked the necessary resolve to maintain the truce. Unfortunately, UMNO was not as disciplined or regimented a party as was the PAP, and the top governmental leadership of UMNO did not or could not control its secondary leaders or *Utusan Melayu*. Unfortunate, too, were the different interpretations regarding the scope of the truce and the different conceptions of 'communalism'. The Alliance, a coalition party with a communal structure, believed (unlike the PAP) that too frequent an open discussion of the problem of communalism was itself 'communal', while the PAP, a party with a non-communal structure, believed that communal problems should be subjected to perpetual public scrutiny.²⁰⁸ The PAP regarded a system made up of communally-structured parties as itself 'communal'. The truce never really had a good chance of working for no progress was made in eliminating the root causes of conflict. In the absence of these root causes, the verbal ceasefire would have been unnecessary: in their presence the truce was, to a very large extent, unworkable.

By July 1965, political truce as a means of resolving the Alliance-PAP conflict had become discredited. When asked of it on 6 July 1965, the Tunku replied: 'What is the use of a political truce? That is no way of settling our troubles.'²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1965.

²⁰⁸ R.S. Milne describes this set of circumstances as paradoxical. It was also natural (R.S. Milne, *Government and Politics in Malaysia*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1967, p. 216).

²⁰⁹ *Straits Times*, 7 July 1965.

The path of unilateral de-escalation and disengagement had also been tried. Thus, after the September 1963 elections in Singapore, the PAP unilaterally ceased its attacks on the MCA. Following the Singapore riots, it has been suggested, there was an unusual silence on the part of Albar and certain other 'ultras'.²¹⁰ Before the Tunku left for London in June 1965, he apparently wrote a letter to UMNO leaders instructing them to refrain from attacking Lee Kuan Yew or making statements which might inflame communal passions during his absence.²¹¹ There is a Malay saying: *Tepok sabelah tangan tak akan berbunyi* (If you clap with one hand there will be no sound). It is true, in theory, that it takes two to make a fight. In practice, because men are not saints, it takes only one. Unilateral disengagement does not really work if it is not reciprocated. And unilateral disengagement could not work within the context of the aspirations and attitudes of Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP and of the ultras and UMNO. By July 1965, neither side was prepared to unilaterally de-escalate.

Accommodation and appeasement as a method of conflict resolution was rejected by the Alliance long before separation. Kuala Lumpur was unprepared to make the minimal concession which would have secured a halt to the verbal overkill: the replacement of the MCA in the Alliance, and later, the inclusion of the PAP in the Central Government. Whatever prospect there was for such accommodation evaporated after the PAP's participation in the 1964 elections and the consequent illwill.

Attempts were made by the Alliance leadership to undermine some of the root causes of the PAP-Alliance conflict but they were too set, too immovable, too many. The attitudes on both sides on many issues were diametrically opposed, the clashes of interests impossible to eradicate, the antipathies too strong, the will to change and to cause change too weak. A great deal of time would in any case have been needed. By mid-1965, it fast ran out.

By July 1965, the alternatives considered were reduced to two: subjugation, or the removal of what was seen to be the source of conflict. Just as Lee called on the Central Government to smack down on the ultras, the ultras had demanded the subjugation of the PAP and the arrest of its leader. Repressive measures were rejected because they were repugnant and regarded as counter-productive. Lee Kuan Yew had in the end succeeded in creating a strong foreign sympathy. The leaders who replaced those martyred would have been forced into becoming as intransigent, probably even more so. The PAP would have gained more support; the headlong rush towards a racial holocaust would have been accelerated. In the end there was only the path of separation.

²¹⁰ Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

From the beginning of the Malaysia enterprise, the Tunku had attempted to persuade the PAP into accepting a voluntary political quarantine by imploring the party to limit its political activities to Singapore and its political energies to making Singapore 'the New York of Malaysia'. Had the PAP agreed, there would have been political compartmentalization superimposed upon governmental and administrative unity. On 9 August, the Alliance Government attempted to achieve the non-voluntary political compartmentalization of Singapore by breaking its governmental and administrative links with Malaysia. On that day a new state was cast out onto the troubled waters of South-East Asia.

VIII

DETERMINANTS OF POLITICAL UNIFICATION IN THE MALAYSIA REGION 1945-65

The aim of this chapter is to suggest the major determinants of political unification in the Malaysia region in the twenty years after the Second World War on the basis of the cases we have presented.

POLICY AND POLITICAL UNIFICATION IN THE REGION, 1945-65

Intention and Strength of Commitment as Determinants of Political Unification

In Chapter I, it was suggested that policy (or conscious effort) was one of the three crucial variables determining political unification in the region. This view is confirmed by the fact that no unified system was formed, prevented from forming, maintained or destroyed in the absence of a formation, anti-formation, maintenance or destruction policy. Success was never the result of unintended accident but of will and effort — sometimes against the current of so-called 'natural' forces and 'inevitable' tendencies. The dictionary is possibly the only place where achievement comes before commitment. The post-war experience of the region also confirms — if confirmation was at all necessary — that at least moderate commitment to a policy was essential for success.

Analysis of forty-nine formation, anti-formation, destruction and maintenance policies also indicates that the stronger the commitment, the greater were the chances of success. Roughly five-sixths of policies to which there was strong commitment bore fruit while there was not one instance in which anything less than strong commitment resulted in success.¹

In the region, three factors appeared almost invariably to have been influential in determining a proponent's intensity of commitment (and, therefore, the chances of success):

- (i) the perceived value of the policy;
- (ii) the public support it was seen to receive; and
- (iii) its perceived probability of successful implementation.

There was not one case in which there was strong commitment without the proponent believing that his policy had great subjective value.

The fact that there were several cases where there were perceptions of

¹ All figures cited in this chapter should be regarded as rough approximations as the data on which they are based are rough estimates.

great value but only moderate commitment² and one instance of great subjective value but weak commitment (the case of the AMCJA commitment to the destruction of the Federation of Malaya after 1 February 1948) suggests that there was at least one factor which must have worked in the direction of dampening the influence of perceptions of great value. The most important of these appeared to have been beliefs regarding the policy's probability of successful implementation. Thus, there was no instance of strong commitment in the face of the realization that a policy had little chance of success and eight out of nine cases of weak commitment were accompanied by such realizations.³

Beliefs regarding the level of public support seemed to have had a more uniformly two-directional effect. The perception of great public support tended to strengthen or reinforce commitment while the perception of little or no public support tended to weaken or undermine it. The importance of this factor lay in the post-decision period, however, not in the pre-decision phase.

In as far as all three factors helped to determine the strength of commitment, they indirectly influenced outcome. The fact that about a fifth of the policies to which strong commitment appeared to have been given were unsuccessful indicates that such commitment was insufficient in itself for success.

Types of Proponents and Political Unification in the Malaysia Region

Karl Deutsch *et alia* found in their study of historical cases in the north Atlantic area that leadership in the early stages of amalgamation movements was furnished typically by cross-class coalitions drawn usually from previously established elites. They also found that the intellectual classes were of considerable importance for the success of movements aiming at union or separation.⁴ Neofunctionalists stress the importance of leadership

² These were the cases of the SLF commitment to the formation of a United Malaya in the period 1954-9, the first Penang secessionists' commitment to secession, and probably the British commitment to the maintenance of Malaysia at the time of Singapore's separation.

³ This factor appeared to have played an extremely important role in minimizing commitment on the part of the SLP, IMP and PMLP to the formation of a United Malaya in the period 1950-4; in the instances of the AMCJA and PUTERA commitment to the dismantling of the Federation immediately after 1 February 1948; in all the four secession movements we examined; and in the case of British commitment to maintaining Malaysia inclusive of Singapore in August 1965. In nine out of these ten cases, the proponents probably believed that their policies had moderate or great value. In the experience of the region, there was a close connection between beliefs regarding the probability of success and success itself. Over and over again, they conquered who believed that they could, they did not who believed that they could not.

⁴ Deutsch, *et al.*, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 91.

from system technocrats or bureaucrats. It is to be noted that in the Malaysia region, cross-class coalitions from previously established elites, intellectuals, technocrats and system bureaucrats played practically no leadership role whatever.

Most theoreticians minimize the role of the masses as initiators of the processes of formation or destruction. This seems well justified. In the Malaysia region, it is true that the masses did often play important roles in legitimizing a policy, in reinforcing or undermining the strength of commitment and in strengthening the power of initiating elites or in giving the impression that they were a force to be reckoned with. But policy initiatives never emanated from the populace, and proponents did not generally act in response to the 'call of the people'.

TABLE I: TYPE OF PROPONENT AND THE CHANCES OF SUCCESS

Type of Actor	Number of Occasions it Acted as a Proponent of Policy	Number and Percentage of Occasions it Succeeded	
Governments sovereign and non-sovereign	21	16	76%
The mainland government	11	11	100%
External governments	4	0	0%
UMNO	9	8	89%
Political parties other than UMNO or those associated with UMNO	16	0	0%
Malayan government and UMNO	7	7	100%
The sultans as a group	3	1	33%
Individuals	4	1	25%
Economic organizations	2	0	0%
Social organizations	2	0	0%

Table 1 sets out, in concise form and with reference to the post-war experience of the region, the major types of proponent, the number of occasions they were important advocates of a policy relevant to political unification, the number of times their policies were successfully implemented and the equivalent of this in terms of percentages.⁵

⁵ After 1955, UMNO was the dominant force in the government of the Federation of

The record shows the impotence of social and economic organizations and very interestingly, of political parties other than UMNO as proponents of the formation, non-formation, maintenance and destruction of politically-unified systems in the region. Prominent individuals played an important role only once. The Old Malayans in England were able to see their commitment to the destruction of the Malayan Union bear fruit, however, only because they were acting in concert with more powerful protagonists: UMNO, the Sultans, and eventually the British Government. Even though the Sultans possessed legal sovereignty except for a short period after the MacMichael treaties, they did not on the whole play a major active role in the region after 1948. In the experience of the region, governments played the most instrumentally decisive roles. It is important to note, however, that the government of Singapore was ineffective in the face of opposition from Kuala Lumpur, and that external governments, i.e. governments which did not rule in any part of the territories directly concerned, were also never successful in their policies. Even Whitehall was incapable of exerting its previously decisive power in the case of Singapore's separation once it ceased to rule in any part of Malaysia — despite the fact that a threatened Malaysia was militarily dependent on her force of arms for its survival. While it ruled the region, however, it could among other things, impose the Malayan Union and successfully insist on the formation of a highly centralized Federation of Malaya.

Throughout the post-war period in fact, the government of Malaya was the most decisive factor in determining the formation, non-formation, maintenance and destruction of politically-unified systems in the Malaysia region. The fact that all unified systems have been set up, maintained, destroyed, or prevented from being formed, in the presence of her at least moderate commitment, and there was no instance of successful formation, maintenance, destruction, or opposition to formation in the absence of such commitment, suggests that in the region in the post-war period, the moderate or stronger commitment of the government in Kuala Lumpur was an essential condition for success. In almost every case of failure, had the Malayan government been moderately or strongly committed to the policies that failed, the outcome would probably not have been failure but success. This, plus the fact that the government was never unsuccessful, suggests that her moderate or greater commitment to the necessary policies was sufficient for a successful outcome. He who ruled in Kuala Lumpur in fact determined to a very large extent the course of political unification in the Malaysia region.

The decisive role of the government in Kuala Lumpur hinged upon its

Malaya. Where the government acted to propose or oppose policies and it was backed by UMNO, we have classified that action as one undertaken by the government and UMNO.

political and instrumental power. As regards the former, it was consistently able to defeat its opponent and their policies. Its capacity to actually implement its policies rested on the fact that it alone possessed the necessary resources and assets. One of the most important of these was its legal authority. The advocates of formation and destruction in the Malaysia region have, without exception, recognized the 'system transformation' authority of the established government of mainland Malaya and have consistently accepted that such changes had to be effected legally, through the use of Kuala Lumpur's legal authority. This was one important reason why the campaigns of the region's proponents of change invariably revolved around winning the mainland government over to their cause. This was also why they never tried to unilaterally implement their policies in the face of Kuala Lumpur's opposition.

UMNO has played a role in political unification almost as important as that of the Malayan government. After the formation of the Malayan Union (which represented a failure on its part), the party succeeded in every case. Its commitment became essential for the formation and destruction of unified systems in the region. Its commitment was probably sufficient to prevent the formation of a United Malaya after 1954, and for the maintenance of the Federation of Malaya in the face of all four secession movements. UMNO's strength rested throughout on the support it had among the Malay masses. After the Malayan Union debacle, the British seemed to have decided that fundamental political changes regarding Malaya required the consent or acquiescence, and preferably the support, of the Malays. The communist insurrection substantially bolstered this commitment to the Anglo-Malay alliance. Because of the Federation government's unwillingness to go against its strongly-expressed wishes, UMNO had indirect veto power. From 1955, of course, UMNO had the power to veto directly for it became the dominant partner in the Malayan government.

Lindberg and Scheingold have stressed the importance of coalitions as proponents of formation and maintenance.⁶ In the Malaysia region, a coalition between the Malayan Government and UMNO proved unstoppable. The fact that there was policy success in the absence of such a coalition meant that it was not an essential condition for a successful outcome.⁷ The fact that where the coalition existed there was invariably success suggests that a Malayan Government-UMNO coalition was sufficient for successful formation, prevention of formation, destruction and maintenance.

⁶ Leon Lindberg and S.A. Scheingold, *Europe's Would-be Polity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1970).

⁷ An example of this was the successful establishment of the Malayan Union.

The Search for Essential and Sufficient Motivations

Since policy is an extremely important determinant of political unification in all parts of the world, it is not surprising that much of the theorizing on the subject has been and is concerned with motivations. Many theorists have, however, gone to the extent of suggesting that certain motivations are essential for the formation and maintenance of unified systems. As regards formation, William Riker has posited (i) a desire to expand one's territorial control and (ii) a desire for protection against some external military-diplomatic threat or to participate in potential aggression, as essential (and possibly) sufficient motivations.⁸ K.C. Wheare suggests that (i) a desire for common military defence, (ii) a desire to be independent of foreign powers and a realization that only through union could independence be secured, and, (iii) a hope of economic advantages from union, are 'likely essential prerequisites of the desire for union'.⁹

The fact that two unified systems, the Malayan Union and the Federation of Malaya, were both successfully formed in the absence of the desire for territorial expansion on the part of their advocates (or for that matter, anyone) indicates that this was not an essential condition for formation.¹⁰ The apparent irrelevance of military defence considerations from some external threat in the British decision to form the Federation of Malaya demonstrates that this condition was also not essential. It should be noted further that in no instance was there a desire to form a unified system in order to participate in external aggression.

As regards the suggestion that 'a desire to be independent of foreign powers' is a probable essential condition for union, it should be noted that such a desire was completely irrelevant to the British commitment to forming the Malayan Union and their and the Federation's decision to form Malaysia. The Federation wanted independence not for itself but for the Borneo territories.

If no single motivation was essential for successful formation in the Malaysia region, this may also be said for successful attempts at preventing

⁸ William Riker, *Federalism* (Boston, 1967), p. 13.

⁹ K.C. Wheare, *Federal Government* (Oxford, the University Press, 1967), pp. 38-39.

¹⁰ The desire for territorial expansion appears to have affected only two policies of formation or unification, the Tunku's very mild commitment to the formation of Malaysia in the period 1955 to 1960 and his strong commitment to Malaysia's formation in 1961-3. His early commitment, of course, failed. His serious advocacy after mid-1961 succeeded. But in this instance, the desire for territorial expansion probably had marginal motivational force; and most important, its absence would in all probability not have made a jot of difference either to the Tunku's commitment or its intensity.

formation and destroying unified systems.¹¹ What of successful maintenance? After an analysis of the East African Federation, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the West Indies and Malaysia, T.M. Franck argued that these unified systems were unsuccessfully maintained because there was no 'primary' ideological commitment to the governmental structure as *an end in itself*. He suggests that such a primary commitment is essential for successful maintenance.¹²

The experience of the region does tend to support Franck's hypothesis — on the surface at least. Thus, the Federation of Malaya (the only unified system in the region which was able to generate a substantial commitment to its maintenance as a value in itself, a primary commitment which was demonstrated on the four occasions on which the Federation was threatened by secessionist attempts) was the only system out of the three we studied which was able to survive intact for a long time. The dismantling of the Malayan Union can be explained partly by the absence of primary commitment to its maintenance on the part of the British Government. And in the time that Malaysia, inclusive of Singapore, was in existence, the system was never able to generate such a primary commitment.

There is reason for caution, however, as regards the necessity of primary commitment for successful maintenance. This is because it is very probable that had the British Government and/or UMNO in the period 1948-61 *not* been motivated by the desire to maintain the Federation as an end in itself, their other motivations would probably have sustained their strong commitment to the Federation's maintenance and the Federation would have been successfully maintained. What can be said, however, is that the chances of successful maintenance is greatly enhanced if a system is able to generate commitment to it as an end in itself. A system which is unable to do this has a lesser chance of success in the long run, and will not possess that measure of reserve which can be fallen back on at times when everyone seems to feel that it is disadvantageous to keep it going.

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT AND POLITICAL UNIFICATION IN THE MALAYSIA REGION

It is not uncommon in historical and political literature to find explanations of political achievement based upon analysis of the motivations of policy proponents exclusively. Riker's explanation of the formation of

¹¹ It is to be noted that no single motivation influenced all formation, non-formation and destruction policies.

¹² T.M. Franck (ed.), *Why Federations Fail* (New York, University Press, 1968), p. 173.

politically-unified systems in terms of the expansion and military conditions is an example of this approach. If the reactions of non-advocates (i.e. the political environment) are of no consequence or of little import, such a procedure may be justifiable. In fact, where such an important issue as political unification is concerned, it is difficult to find many cases (in this century at least) where the political environment was of no consequence at all. The importance of the political environment to the processes of formation, non-formation, maintenance and destruction is, however, determined by two important factors:

- (i) Who and what segment of society reacts? and
- (ii) what is the nature of the reaction?

Opposition and Political Unification

If there was no case of successful formation or maintenance in the region in the absence of policy, there was no case of failure in the absence of some form of opposition. If it is true that the greater the commitment to policy by a proponent, the greater the likelihood that it would succeed, there is little doubt that the greater was the commitment of opponents to opposition, the greater the likelihood that the policy opposed would fail. There seems little doubt also that the level of value attached to opposition, perceptions of the probability of successful opposition, and perceived public support for opposition were important determinants of proponent policy failure and opposition success.

Possibly more important than the existence and intensity of opposition as a determinant of policy success and failure, however, was the nature of the opponents. Who were the opponents in the Malaysia region, and how influential were the different types of opponents in determining outcome?

Types of Opponents and Political Unification

In the cases which Deutsch studied, the main sources of opposition to amalgamation movements were

... first of all peasants, farmers, or similar groups in the rural population; and in the second place, privileged groups, classes or regions whose members feared some loss or dilution of their privileges as a result of integration or amalgamation.¹³

In the Malaysia region, this was the pattern in only one case: the opposition to the Malayan Union.

The main opponents of formation, maintenance, non-formation and destruction policies in the region were generally of the type which were the main proponents, namely, governments, and political parties, and to a

¹³Deutsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-6.

much lesser extent, the Sultans, economic organizations, individuals and social organizations. Economic organizations opposed formation or maintenance policies on three occasions and non-formation on one occasion; social organizations opposed maintenance on two occasions, and political parties other than UMNO or those allied to UMNO opposed formation in four instances, maintenance in four cases, non-formation on six occasions. However, all three types of opponents were never successful in their opposition. Individuals as such were also relatively powerless in achieving success. Only the ex-Malayan Civil Service officers managed (in concert with UMNO, the Sultans and ultimately, the British Government itself) to cause the dismantling of the Malayan Union and its replacement by the Federation of Malaya. The Sultans as a group did succeed as opponents of the maintenance of the Union and as opponents of the AMCJA-PUTERA attempt to prevent the formation of the Federation of Malaya. After 1948, however, they ceased to become important opponents of policy.

Governments as a whole were much more important as opponents of policy. They succeeded by themselves, or in concert with others on roughly three-quarters of the occasions on which they were opponents. It should be noted, however, that no external government was ever successful in frustrating policy.

Extremely effective in frustrating policy was UMNO – even before it became the dominant partner in the Malayan government. It succeeded in four-fifths of the cases where it opposed formation or maintenance and in 100 per cent. of the cases where it opposed destruction or non-formation. After 1946, no policy was successfully implemented against UMNO's will.

The most crucial opponent in the experience of the region, however, was the government which ruled the Malayan mainland from Kuala Lumpur. It was successful in every case. The Malayan Government was, therefore, in as far as political unification was concerned, an unstoppable mover of policy and an insurmountable obstacle to proponents of policy. Of course, when the Malayan government was allied with UMNO, they formed a coalition which was impossible to surmount.

From the evidence, therefore, it does seem that there were two actors (the Malayan government and UMNO after 1946), and one coalition (the mainland government and UMNO in alliance) which could 'veto' policy, in the sense that policy implementation in the face of their unyielding opposition was either abandoned or objectively impossible.

One of the hypotheses of our conflict approach was that at least a moderately compliant political environment (as opposed to a non-compliant one) was essential for successful formation, non-formation, maintenance and destruction. In the Malaysia region after 1946, a non-compliant political environment was one in which the government in Kuala Lumpur or UMNO, or both were in active opposition. Their support, apathy, neutrality or acquiescence were necessary for successful formation, non-formation, maintenance and destruction of the political unit.

POWER AND POLITICAL UNIFICATION IN THE MALAYSIA REGION

The study of policy proposition and opposition is a study of wills. But the study of intentions alone can never adequately explain political outcomes; for achievement is as much a function of power as it is of human will, a fact explicitly recognized by Wheare, implicitly recognized by Deutsch, but largely ignored by Riker. In the Malaysia region, power was certainly a crucial determinant of success. Since this was so, a great deal can be learnt about the probability of success if the determinants of power can be ascertained.

The Determinants of Political Power

In this study we have distinguished between the actual ability to establish, to prevent the establishment, to maintain, and to destroy a functioning government (which was termed 'instrumental power'), and the actual capacity to decrease opposition to, and to generate support for, one's policies (which was termed 'political power').¹⁴ We shall deal with the determinants of political power first.

Political power in the Malaysia region was clearly a function of three broad factors: the commitment to engineering support and reducing opposition to one's policy, one's resources and assets, and the inherent difficulty of the task of engineering compliance. Their substance and determinants are outlined in Chart 1.

The Commitment to Engineering Support and Minimizing Opposition

In the political unification experience of the Malaysia region, an actor's commitment to generating support and minimizing opposition to its policy was, to a large extent, a determinant of its commitment to its policy (and the extent to which it wanted to succeed). This appears obvious. It was, however, not always true. There were cases where moderate or even strong commitment to a policy did *not* result in any active engineering of support or minimizing of opposition. Thus, even though the Federation was strongly committed (except in the last stages) to the formation of Malaysia inclusive of Brunei, Kuala Lumpur did not really bother to engineer public support for Malaysia in Brunei – because it lacked awareness of the neces-

¹⁴ This is an analytical distinction. In practice, instrumental power and political power normally go together. This need not always be so, however. Thus, the British possessed the instrumental power to establish the Malayan Union governmental structure and to gain sufficient public obedience to and cooperation with it to make it a functioning system. They could not, however, generate much support for the formation of the Union or its maintenance and they were ineffective in trying to reduce Malay opposition. UMNO, on the other hand had great political power but no instrumental power until 1955.

sity of engineering such support. The first Penang secessionists were apparently also unaware of the necessity of mobilizing public support behind their cause. Their refusal to try to win over the Malays point to a second determinant: beliefs regarding the chances of successfully overcoming opposition and mobilizing support. Another factor also influenced the commitment to engineering support and minimizing opposition, namely, the perception of progress being made. Thus, the Johore secessionists lost heart by their utter lack of progress. On the other hand, the anti-Malayan Union Malay associations were greatly encouraged to redouble their efforts by their initial success.

Resources and Assets

Five major resources and assets played important roles in determining the proponent's political power and, therefore, to a large extent, its success or failure. Of these, the most important was the effectiveness of its leadership. Several qualities were particularly important in determining the effectiveness of leadership in the Malaysia region. These included prestige, legal authority and powers, verbal and linguistic proficiency, persistence, single-mindedness, apparent self-confidence and evident confidence in the righteousness of its cause, cohesion, capacity for empathy, intelligence, tact, and very importantly, knowledge and skill.

The possession of prestige contributed very significantly to the political power of the Sultans, the ex-MCS officers, Dato Onn and the traditional Malay leadership over the Malay masses in 1946; of Tunku Abdul Rahman over the domestic population of Malaya in the case of the formation of Malaysia; of the British over the Penang secessionists of 1948-9. The lack of prestige severely limited the political power of PUTERA in whipping up Malay opposition to the Federation proposals and the Johore secessionists' capacity to generate public support for their policy.

Important also was the leadership's legal authority and powers. While laws do not necessarily alter private thought, they often do affect public behaviour. In the Malaysia region, the promulgation of a constitution did have a 'guillotine' effect (except in one case). The legal event often had four interrelated effects. To many, public behaviour became a matter of obeying the law — as every good citizen should. Second, and relatedly, a legitimate private and public excuse for opponents to change their behaviour became available. Furthermore, the promulgation of a constitution was sometimes taken as a signal and a sign of governmental determination and resolution. Lastly, the legal act often had a closure effect, being, to the less determined opponents, something akin to the chairman of a meeting's declaration that the meeting was over and the matter closed. The fact that opposition to the Malayan Union did not collapse was partly attributable to the fact that the Malays and other opponents felt that the British might still be prevailed upon to change their minds and that the matter was not closed.

Persuasion depends to a large extent upon communication. This is why verbal proficiency contributes to political power and the chances of success. In the region, only the PAP leadership and probably Onn, seemed to have derived significant power from unusual eloquence and oratory. A much more interesting issue in the multilingual region is the effect of multi-language leadership. The political unification experience of the region suggests most clearly that the ability to communicate to the Malays, Chinese, and Indians in their own language was a positive asset, and the inability to do so, a significant handicap.

Persistence was another important determinant of political power – because mass mobilization and stabilized opinion change usually require sustained effort even after initial success. Thus, the Malay associations and UMNO succeeded in generating Malay opposition to the Malayan Union and in sustaining it for a long time afterwards because they were persistent. Had Malay opposition collapsed after the British *volte face* on the Union in May 1946, it is by no means impossible that Whitehall might have decided to have another about turn and to continue maintaining the Malayan Union as a permanent governmental structure. Again, step by step, the ladder was ascended in Sabah and Sarawak in 1961. Had the Federation Government not persistently worked on the Borneo leaders, many who had swung from opposition to support might have reverted to their initial position.

Examples where single-mindedness of purpose contributed handsomely to political power include the Malay opposition to the Malayan Union and the Tunku's commitment to expelling Singapore from Malaysia. The campaign of the AMCJA, PUTERA and the Chinese Chambers for a United Malaya was dogged throughout by the fact that their interests were so numerous as to preclude any single-mindedness of effort and purpose. The failure of the Federation to gain the inclusion of Brunei in Malaysia can, to a large extent, be attributed to an unwillingness or inability to concentrate on the task of ensuring its entry.¹⁵

The experience of the region suggests also that the greater the leadership's apparent self-confidence and its apparent confidence in the righteousness of its cause (and the lesser its equivocation and uncertainty), the more effective its persuasion attempts tended to be and the more political power it tended to have. The political power of the Johore secession movement and that of the second Penang secession movement was adversely affected because most of their leaders tended to be uncertain of their cause; their opponents had great political power partly because they were seen to be supremely confident and completely convinced of the righteousness of their

¹⁵ This case suggests that while the strength of commitment to an end usually determines the extent to which an actor is single-minded, it need not always be an overpowering determinant of single-mindedness.

opposition. In mobilizing support in Singapore's 1962 referendum, the PAP had the Barisan, the Workers Party and the UPP at a great disadvantage on this score.

It has been said that great is the strength of feeble arms combined. On so many occasions, cohesion was without doubt as important as any other factor in determining political power and, therefore, success in the region. One of the reasons why the Malays have been so powerful in the politics of Malaya in general and the Chinese, the Indians and the non-Malays as a whole so relatively weak, is the fact that the former have been comparatively united as a community whereas the latter have been comparatively divided. In relation to political unification, the lack of cohesion among the principal opponents of the formation of the Federation of Malaya and the principal proponents of a United Malaya in the period 1946-8 adversely affected their political power. The solidarity of the PAP government during Singapore's referendum campaign was a real leadership asset; the lack of cohesion among the opponents of merger was a significant handicap to them.

Dollars and cents also determined political power to a very significant extent in several cases that we studied. Thus, the AMCJA and PUTERA agitation against the Federation of Malaya proposals was severely handicapped by extreme shortage of funds. The Singapore opponents of merger in the 1961-3 period were also adversely affected by insufficient funds.

The importance of several other leadership qualities appears too self-evident to require substantiation, namely, the leadership's empathy, intelligence, tact, sheer size¹⁶ and knowledge and skill.¹⁷

The effective engineering of compliance was not only a function of effective leadership but often also of the physical channels of communication an actor possessed or could utilize. The Malayan government in 1945-8 suffered in comparison with its successors from the fact that in that period it had the least control over the press.¹⁸ The AMCJA gained much as a result of its influence over the *Malaya Tribune*. The Penang secessionists were at the height of their political power when they were backed by the *Straits Echo*. The most spectacularly effective use of mass media in the experience of the Malaysia region was during the referendum battle in Singapore.

¹⁶ While most of the proponents and opponents did not suffer from lack of leaders, and some suffered from having too many, the three pre-independence secessionist movements we studied did suffer as a result of their inability to produce sufficient leaders.

¹⁷ What constituted political know-how and skill in the cases we studied will be dealt with in some detail later.

¹⁸ The greatest freedom and license the press had and exercised in Malayan post-war history was certainly during the period before the communist insurrection.

Modern communications theorists have argued quite convincingly that the effect of the use of mass media on the populace is a 'two-step function'. Mass media do not influence the masses directly as much as influence opinion leaders who then influence the populace by direct contact and through word of mouth. Opinion leaders may, of course, exist not on an *ad hoc* basis but as permanent middlemen propagating the policies and messages of a certain leadership. It is eminently arguable that in the Malaysia region the possession of such political manpower was generally a more important asset than control of the mass media. The relative impotence of the British Government in gaining Malay compliance over the Union proposals was to a very large extent attributable to the loss of the political middlemen it possessed before the War (the traditional and administrative Malay leadership, the *pengbulus* at *kampung* level.) With this loss, they found it nigh impossible to communicate with the Malay masses. The political power of UMNO throughout lay to a large extent in its possession of ready-made and continuously functioning opinion leaders.

Thus far we have concentrated largely on persuasion, one method of bringing about behaviour change. There are at least two other major methods. All three, as we conceptualize them here, are derived from our assumption (theoretically derived and found useful in our case studies), that human actors, collective or otherwise, adopt that behaviour which possesses the greatest subjective value, whether they are aware or not that this is so.¹⁹

If actors will adopt behaviour B if B possesses greatest subjective value, there are three main methods by which the engineers of compliance can make actors A adopt it. They can convince A that B does indeed have greatest subjective value for A. This is the way of persuasion. Second, they can educate A into valuing the values which B embodies, yields or is expected to yield. This is the method of value re-education.²⁰

Third, the power wielder can affect directly the value of behaviour B

¹⁹ This is not a value maximization model; and it is not a 'rational' one in the sense that actors are seen to be always consciously aware of goals, to always assess the value of their goals, to assess the various means, to calculate their advantages and disadvantages and to consciously choose the one which maximizes their values. It is a model encompassing the irrational as well as the rational and it subsumes all four main types of action classified by Max Weber: *zweckrational* (action resulting from conscious assessment of the costs of pursuing a certain goal and assessment of the value of the goal itself), *wertrational* (action which is regarded as an end in itself), *traditional* (doing what had been done in the past without considering alternatives), and *affectual* (conduct governed largely by the need to express some emotion e.g. anger, love, hate).

²⁰ The re-ordering of other people's or group's hierarchy of values is a long-term process involving socialization, including schooling, indoctrination and persistent propaganda.

by promising to bestow or by awarding values if A adopts it, or by threatening to deprive or by depriving values if A does not do so. This is the way of value-manipulation. Compliance is exchanged for values. Those rich in exchangeable (physical or non-physical) values will therefore tend to have greater political power than those poor in such assets. One of the reasons why the Federation government failed to gain the entry of Brunei was because it could not promise or bestow paramount rulership upon Sultan Omar. Its ability to manufacture and promise a whole series of values to Sabah and Sarawak and their politicians was, on the other hand, probably the most important determinant of the Federation's capacity to gain their support for Malaysia. The main reason why it was essential or very important for non-governmental proponents or opponents to mobilize mass opinion behind their cause was the fact that this was the main method by which they could accumulate values which could be used in relation to governments. Thus, because UMNO managed to generate intense mass Malay opposition to the Malayan Union, it could credibly threaten a breakdown in administration, peace and so on if the British did not give in to their demands. The AMCJA, PUTERA and the Chinese Chambers were not in a similar position in relation to the British in the Federation case because they did not succeed in mobilizing intense or really widespread opposition to the formation of the Federation of Malaya.

Task Difficulty

In most of the cases we have studied, a proponent's political power depended not only upon his strength of commitment to engineering support and minimizing opposition and upon his resources and assets, but also upon the inherent difficulty of the task (of generating support and minimizing opposition). There seemed to have been at least four determinants of task difficulty which were of great importance in the Malaysia region; the political environment's degree of persuasibility; its vulnerability to value manipulation; the strength and direction of social control in the political environment; and the effectiveness of the counter-mobilization of one's opponents.

The vulnerability to persuasion of the political environment appeared to have been a function, first, of the generally authoritarian psychological make-up of the region's elites and masses of all races.²¹ This explains to some extent why governments, the traditional Malay elite and the Sultans have been relatively powerful (and why prestigious leadership was an important contributor to political power). They were at an advantage for the same reason that those without authority and those on the lower rungs of the political and social scale were at a disadvantage.

²¹ Authoritarianism is that personality pattern associated with excessive respect for and obedience to authority and one's superiors.

The degree to which the influencee's mind was open was probably a more important factor. In many cases this appeared to have been affected by perceptions of irreversibility, or by the belief that the point of no return had passed. In the case of the Colonial Office's belief as late as May 1946 that British policy on the Malayan Union was irreversible it was to a large extent due to the fact that Parliament had already decided on the issue, the necessary bills had been passed, and the relevant documents had been 'signed, sealed and delivered'. In the case of the British commitment to the formation of the Federation of Malaya by the end of 1946, perceived irreversibility was more the result of the promises made earlier and the undertakings already given (to UMNO and the Sultans). In both the above instances (and in several other cases) the perception of irreversibility was affected by the aversion to going back to square one. In the former, the British did not want to start all over again to negotiate treaties with the Rulers and to work out a constitutional alternative to the Union; in the latter, they did not want to throw months of meticulous negotiations with UMNO and the Sultans down the drain.

Susceptibility to persuasion was often also a function of the desire not to appear weak. The British (Gent and MacDonald) were intransigent on the Federation of Malaya after the about-turn on the Malayan Union largely because of a desire to appear resolute.

Another important factor affecting the influencee's vulnerability to persuasion efforts on a particular matter was whether he already had an opinion on the issue. It was always easier to fill a vacuum and to reinforce an opinion than to change it. Thus, the British task of persuading the Malays on the Union issue was a difficult one because the Malay community already had beliefs on the subject. In comparison, the Federation had a much easier task in winning over Sabah and Sarawak support for Malaysia because it was operating in more virgin territory. The PAP had in 1961-3 a much easier task of reinforcing the generally sympathetic opinions Singaporeans had on the merger issue than did the opponents of merger who had to cause opinion change.

The 'anchorage' of the influencee's opinions and behaviour also determined his persuasibility. In the Malaysia region, the degree to which these were anchored (and therefore difficulty to shift) was determined, among other things, by habit (e.g. as in the traditional hostility of the MCP and the Malayan communists to the British, and the Malay hostility towards communists); by their motivational base; and by public commitment and ego-involvement. The more long-standing a habit and the more rewarding it had been in the past, the more difficult it tended to be to effect behaviour change. Thus, one important reason why the British failed to generate active non-Malay support in connection with the Malayan Union scheme, and why the AMCJA and the Chinese Chambers of Commerce failed to sufficiently knock the non-Malays out of their political apathy in the case of the Federation of Malaya proposals was the fact that apathy had

been a rewarding habit of long standing. These two failures, of course, doomed the Malayan Union and made its displacement by the Federation of Malaya virtually certain.

The cases we have studied also suggest that behaviour based upon core values was harder to alter than that based on more peripheral values. Thus the British were able to win over a large percentage of the opponents of the Federation proposals, who wanted representation in the legislature, democracy, merger and citizenship, but not the Malay opponents of the Malayan Union plan who were determined to secure such core values as Malay privileges, the restoration of the Sultan's position, and the identity of the Malay States. Again, the more a policy was identified with a particular individual and the more he perceived it as his 'baby', the more strongly anchored it tended to be and the harder it became to bring about change. Thus, Ponnudurai and MacKay, the public spokesmen of the first Penang secessionists were never won over even when practically all the other prominent leaders had abandoned secession; Gent and MacDonald were determined to resist any attempt to change British policy on the Federation of Malaya to a large extent because they recognized that they had helped to father the Federation scheme.

If receptiveness to persuasion often determined task difficulty and, therefore, political power, so too did receptiveness and vulnerability to value-manipulation. The Penang secessionists of 1948-9 and 1953-7, and the Chinese Chambers of 1947-8 could be won over so easily because they were so vulnerable to value-manipulation. Most of the leaders of Sabah and Sarawak in 1961-3 were also similarly vulnerable; that was why they were won over. SUPP was not so vulnerable; that was why it was not.

The difficulty of the task of generating support and reducing opposition was often determined by the direction and force of social control. The importance of social control in the region was great not only because it tended to operate along ethnic lines,²² not only because much of the Malaysian elite consisted of marginal men (e.g. Tan Cheng Lock, Dato Onn) who did not want to increase their marginality, but also because behaviour was excessively 'other-directed'.²³ Instances where social control helped greatly to make persuasion attempts ineffective include the later intransigence of the

²² Ethnic groups were all-encompassing groups since (unlike sports clubs, social clubs, political parties, etc.) deviation often affected a person's personal, social, cultural, political, and even economic relationships.

²³ 'Other-directedness' is the value system characterized by 'externalization of the superego', emphasis on adaptation to the group (getting along with other people); it devalues personal goals, opinions and standards and independent opinions (characteristics of 'inner-directedness'). There seems little reason to doubt that the other-directedness which Scott found in the administrative elite of Malaysia was, and is, a universal phenomenon (*Political Ideology in Malaysia*, Yale University Press, 1968).

Sultans to British efforts to gain their support for the Union scheme and the resistance of the Malays to the efforts of the MNP and PUTERA in 1947-8. It is to be noted in the case of the first Penang secession movement that while there were some Malays who believed in secession, not a single one dared to publicly support the secessionists. The chances of its success would probably have been enhanced had Malay social control been inoperative.

Closely related to social control and the influence of the social *milieu* was the factor of the prevailing norms and taboos of political behaviour. Two conflicting mores of compliance are of particular interest — because they operated in diametrically opposite directions. To the radical communist and non-*bourgeois* socialist, sympathy towards British imperialists was taboo. They had an in-built resistance. British actions were always suspect, and the British were seldom able to win their support. Many others in the region, however, including a very substantial segment of the elite, seemed to have had a positive attitude (dare one call it affection?) towards the British. They had an in-built vulnerability to British efforts.²⁴ This was partly a political legacy of colonial rule, but it harmonized well with authoritarianism and other factors.

Generally more important than the above factor in determining the inherent difficulty of engineering support for and minimizing opposition to one's policy was the political effectiveness of one's opponents. PUTERA could not match the pull of UMNO in 1947-8, nor the Barisan the effectiveness of the PAP in 1961. On the other hand, much of the strength of the Federation Government in Sabah and Sarawak and at home in the early 'sixties lay in the weakness of the opponents of Malaysia. The factors which determined the effectiveness of an influencer's opponents were similar to those which determined his own political power.

THE DETERMINANTS OF INSTRUMENTAL POWER

Thus far we have dealt with political power. By definition, instrumental power, the capacity to actually implement a policy of establishing, maintaining and destroying a functioning central government over a particular territory is essential for the successful formation, maintenance, and destruction of politically-unified systems. Since government cannot function if it receives no obedience and public cooperation (no government labour, taxes, or information) proponents must be able to gain the requisite obedience and cooperation. Instrumental power from the viewpoint of formation and maintenance proponents consists therefore of (i) the ability to establish and to maintain a central government machinery capable of functioning, and

²⁴ An extreme example of this was the affection the Straits Chinese had for Britain — and the resultant vulnerability. The Malay masses too probably had some real affection for the British.

(ii) the ability to generate sufficient public cooperation with and obedience to the central government to allow it to function. To shorten the analysis, and as an aid to comparison, a chart (Chart 1) setting out many of the major determinants of political power and instrumental power is presented.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILL AND EFFECTIVE TACTICS

The experience of the Malaysia region suggests most strongly that the ability to engineer compliance and support for the system and its statement of authority, both political and instrumental power, were determined to a large extent by the proponent's knowledge and skill. But what constituted knowledge and skill in the period 1945 to 1965? What tactics were productive of intended outcome?

Effective Tactics for Generating Obedience to and Cooperation with the Central Government and Support for the Unified System

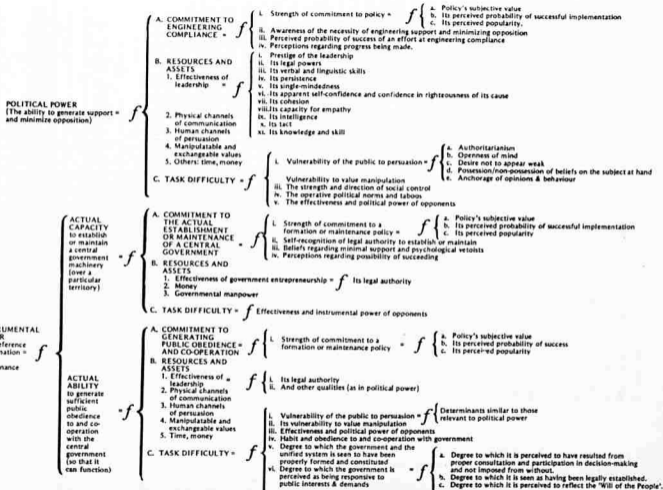
From the cases we studied, it may be induced that creating an attractive 'foundation myth' or 'foundation saga' (preferably a true one) was an effective strategy for generating stabilized obedience, cooperation and support. Thus, the great Malay commitment to the Federation of Malaya after 1948 was based to a large extent upon the 'foundation saga' of a heroic Malay struggle to safeguard their birthright. The Union's foundation story was an unattractive one to all Malaysians; and one of the factors which did not contribute to generating commitment to Malaysia was the fact that its foundation myth was not a particularly attractive one.

The experience of the region also suggests that one of the most effective tactics for generating support for a politically-unified system and its central government was to create the impression that the system, once inaugurated, was there to stay, i.e. to create perceptions of permanence. This was because the members of the system would almost invariably adjust to the new 'reality', and act in such a way as to create permanence in fact. The proponents of the Malayan Union could never create the idea that the Union was permanent with the result that opposition to it did not subside. The proponents of the Federation of Malaya could — with the result that opposition collapsed and obedience and cooperation followed.

Effective Tactics for Generating Support and Minimizing Opposition to Policies

Many theorists (including Haas, Deutsch and Etzioni) suggest that an important tactic for generating support is to put forward one scheme and to abolish alternative plans. Experience elsewhere, especially in Europe, have shown that abolishing competing concepts was often most productive.²⁵

²⁵The proponents of the Northern Customs Union for Scandinavia, for example.



In the Malaysia region, too, presenting one scheme and abolishing alternatives was often an effective tactic – but only for *proponents and would-be proponents* and for generating *support*. This was because such a tactic tended to increase cohesion within and between proponent groups.²⁶ Supporters had to at least know what they were supporting.

On the other hand, from the point of view of minimizing opposition, there were cases where presenting many alternatives and competing concepts was a productive tactic. It created confusion amongst the mobilizers of opposition and circumscribed their efforts to some extent. Thus, the attempt to minimize opposition to Malaysia was substantially aided by the fact that for many months after May 1961, the Barisan Sosialis and the opposition parties in Malaya did not know exactly what they were campaigning against, and could not concentrate upon specifics.²⁷ It usually resulted in a slow build-up in the activities of opponent groups, in their taking up positions from which they later had to retreat, and in their being outmanoeuvred on a number of issues. It appears, therefore, that the best tactic to employ, where fellow and potential proponents were concerned, was to abolish competing plans, where opponents and their political power were concerned, to present a series of vague (preferably confusing) sets of competing concepts – at least until proponents have sufficiently organized themselves and have moved in the direction of a *fait accompli*.

One of the most effective long-run tactics for gaining compliance in the Malaysia region was, of course, to create the impression of a *fait accompli*. Few were ever willing to argue with the inevitable. Unless opposition was deep-seated, as it was in the case of opposition to the Malayan Union, such a perception tended to result in acquiescence and readjustment. Thus, by the end of 1961, several Malayan political parties which were unsympathetic but not strongly opposed to the formation of Malaysia, having accepted its formation as inevitable, initiated moves to set up party branches in British Borneo. Such moves naturally gave them some stake in the successful formation of Malaysia. When it was clear after October 1947 that the Federation of Malaya was a *fait accompli*, opposition from the Chinese Chambers and the moderates collapsed. Presentation of *fait accomplis* also

were handicapped by their inability to abolish the alternative of EFTA. The proponents of a united Germany were handicapped at the beginning by the existence of the *Grossdeutsch* alternative.

²⁶ The first Penang secession movement was adversely affected by the fact that some of the secessionists preferred the inclusion of Singapore in the Federation to Penang leaving the Federation and reconstituting the Straits Settlements. Some preferred Penang to stand on its own rather than these two alternatives.

²⁷ Both the Alliance and the PAP embarked on this policy deliberately. Up to almost the end of 1961, many opponents were unsure as to whether Malaysia would be a federation, a confederation, or merely a loose association of states.

resulted very often in splits between die-hards and 'die-easies' within opposition groups (e.g. in PUTERA, in the AMCJA, and among the Chinese Chambers of Commerce in 1947-8, in the PMIP and the Socialist Front in the case of Malaysia).

Effective Tactics for Generating Obedience to and Cooperation with the Central Government and Support for the Unified System and for Generating Support and Minimizing of Opposition to Policies

The engineer of compliance and the generator of support for the unified system and obedience to and cooperation with its central government in the Malaysia region had to rely, for the most part, on persuasion and value manipulation. The experience of the region indicates that the more concrete the appeal, the greater was the probability of successful persuasion. Thus, one of the reasons why the PAP was so effective in generating support for merger in 1961-3 was the fact that it made concrete and down-to-earth appeals. In contrast, the AMCJA campaign of 1947 suffered from their leaders' preoccupation with abstract principles. The conglomeration was too much a Council of Joint Oratory.

Second, appeals and value-manipulation tactics were most productive when they furthered or fulfilled values which were *salient* to the target public. One very important reason why the British failed so miserably to gain the support of the non-Malays in the case of the Malayan Union was because they sought to bestow citizenship, and they promised democracy and ultimate self-government, values which mattered little to the vast majority of the non-Malays at the time. Near-perfect matching was achieved by the Federation government in their value-manipulation of Sabah's and Sarawak's political elite and by the British in relation to the first Penang secessionists.

The experience of the region also suggests that a most productive tactic for generating support for a policy and the unified system was to create the impression that there was very great probability or certainty of success. In the context of the EEC, Miriam Camps has noted that

the line between what is actually happening today and what will be happening tomorrow is frequently obscured by those people who have been most closely involved in the 'making of Europe'; partly it may have been due to enthusiasm, but in part a deliberate tactic designed to generate the support that success, or complete confidence in success, attracts.²⁸

Opponents will be discouraged; the tactic enhances the band-wagon effect; the commitment to engineering compliance and obedience on the part of proponents will tend to be enhanced because they will tend to be more

²⁸ M. Camps, *What Kind of Europe?* (London, 1965), p. vii.

strongly committed to their formation or maintenance policy. This was the pattern in the Malaysia region. (It is possible, however, but atypical, that perceptions of certainty of success may lull proponents into complacency. This probably occurred on the question of Brunei's entry into Malaysia.)

An effective tactic for the engineer of compliance and support lay also in creating the impression of great public support. This tended to result in strengthening the proponent group's commitment to policy and its belief in the righteousness of its cause. On opponents, it tended to arouse self-doubt, an important factor in an other-directed political culture where social control was of great import. The perception of great acclaim and public support enhanced conformist tendencies and also helped to legitimize a policy or a unified system and its central government. One of the best methods for creating perception of great public support is to win elections and referenda. The Singapore referendum and the elections in the Malaysia territories on the issues of Malaysia and merger served not only to indicate the level of public support; they also helped to generate greater public support and obedience to the central government.

In many of the cases we have studied, the proponent's capacity to generate support, obedience, and cooperation was to a significant extent a function of the power of one's opponents. Several tactics proved effective in neutralizing and minimizing the power of opponents. One of the most important of these was to convince opponents that they could not succeed or that their chances of success were very bleak indeed. Thus, the Malayan opponents of Malaysia were loath to try very hard to whip up opposition in 1961-3, and the opponents of the Federation of Malaya to invest much effort in attempting to engineer disobedience and non-cooperation to the Federation government in the first few months of its existence.

A set of tactics aimed at affecting not the commitment of opponents but their resources and assets also proved productive. These included throwing contempt on the opponent's leadership. The PAP's relatively successful campaign of painting the Barisan's leaders as hypocrites, self-seekers, incompetents and dishonest men limited their political power to a significant extent. Keeping them in the dark about the exact terms of merger limited their knowledge and caused much confusion. *Divide et impera* worked in lessening the cohesion of the opponents of the Federation of Malaya. Mass detentions in Brunei after the revolt crippled the Brunei Party Rakyat's capacity to generate more opposition. The detention of Barisan leaders in 1963 also drastically affected the party's capacity to generate opposition.

Several tactics proved effective in certain cases in enhancing the difficulty of the task facing opponents. The success of the Federation and Singapore governments in generating real fear of a common external threat, Indonesia (and the linking of the opponents of Malaysia with Indonesia) increased resistance to the efforts of the Barisan, the Socialist Front and others. UMNO was able to make the Malay community resist the efforts of

PUTERA by stressing the common Chinese threat. It was also able to do so by activating one of the strongest political taboos in as far as the Malays were concerned: cooperation with 'the communists'. In fact, activating this taboo appeared to be one of the most common and effective tactics in the Malaysia region insofar as not only the Malays, but also the English educated and a great bulk of the non-Malays were concerned. Another generally effective tactic for enhancing resistance to the activities of opponents was to associate them and their case with 'outsiders'. This was most effective in the case of Malaysia. The influence of the PMIP, the Socialist Front and the Barisan Sosialis was markedly weakened because they could not sufficiently overcome the charge that they were collaborating with Indonesia.

Few psychological traits of human beings are so universal as that of suspicion and hostility towards outsiders and their 'interference'. In the Malay Peninsula, the Union scheme suffered considerably from the fact that it was viewed as a foreign importation, an idea which was exclusively conceived outside the country, and which was to be imposed from the outside. A great deal of Barisan and Malayan opposition to the Malaysia plan and to Malaysia was based on the belief that it was a 'plot' hatched in Whitehall. A tactic productive of compliance, obedience, cooperation and support therefore lay in stressing that a plan or a system was one that was internally generated. One extremely important way of doing this was to secure local participation.

The participation hypothesis in its strongest form has been formulated thus: 'Significant changes in human behaviour can be brought about rapidly only if the persons who are expected to change participate in deciding what the change shall be and how it shall be made.'²⁹ Whatever criticisms may be made of it, there is little doubt that in the Malaysia region, allowing for consultation and participation was one of the most successful tactics for maximizing compliance, obedience, cooperation and support and was even more effective in minimizing opposition. Very often, opposition arose simply because opponents felt that they should have been consulted and allowed to participate in decision-making. Sometimes the fact of non-participation functioned as a crucial rationalization and motivation for disobedience and secession attempts. Often, opposition was less intense simply because opponents had been consulted and kept informed. And when intensive and extensive consultations had been held, it was more difficult for opponents to make the charge of outside interference stick.

An important element in knowledge and skill also lay in timing. The Greeks had a word, *kairos*, for that fleeting moment in human affairs

²⁹ H.A. Simon, 'Recent Advances in Organizational Theory', *Research Frontiers in Politics and Government* (Washington, D.C., 1957).

when opportunity knocks. The experience of the Malaysia region suggests that one of the most opportune periods for generating obedience, co-operation and support for the unified system and its central government was when there existed a dramatic and common external threat. The best time for proponents to exert political power on opponents and *vice versa* was before either had passed their point of no return. In the Malaysia region this was before the parties had invested so much time and effort that they were reluctant to abandon their investment, before they had entered into agreements and given promises from which they could not extricate themselves without great cost and considerable difficulty, and before they had taken firm public positions, retreat from which entailed great loss in prestige and 'face'.

The policy-political environment-power approach developed in this study is an explanatory system which it is hoped has been of some utility in explaining the development of political unification in the Malaysia region after the Second World War. It does appear to have general heuristic and perhaps predictive utility.

THE HEURISTIC VALUE OF THE CONFLICT APPROACH

Scores of variables have been posited in the literature on political integration as conducive to, essential for, or relevant to 'political unification', 'amalgamation', 'integration', 'the federalizing process', 'federalisms' and so on. These include

- economic homogeneity,
- economic heterogeneity,
- similarity in per capita income,
- ethnic homogeneity,
- linguistic homogeneity,
- cultural homogeneity,
- religious homogeneity,
- similarity in political structure,
- the timing of unification efforts (in the post-nationalist or pre-nationalist phase),
- cross-cutting and cross-unit cleavages,
- geographical contiguity,
- the existence of common external threats,
- the existence of past historical association,
- sense of social community,
- the desire for political independence,
- the desire for administrative efficiency,
- mutual compatibility of the main values relevant for political behaviour,
- broadening of the political elite within at least some participating units,
- relatively high geographic and social mobility of persons,

multiplicity of the scope and flow of mutual communications and transactions,
 overall compensation of rewards among the units to be integrated,
 significant frequency of some interchange of group roles,
 considerable mutual predictability of behaviour.

A factor may be categorized as relevant, or irrelevant, essential or unnecessary, conducive or unconducive; if conducive it may be always conducive, generally conducive, or only sometimes conducive. The conflict approach facilitates theoretical categorization by suggesting clear criteria for classification. It certainly allows us to evaluate the relevance of variables. If it is accepted that formation or maintenance are functions of policy, political environment, and power, then factors are relevant if and only if they actually affect the development of policy, political environment and power. A factor is relevant if it affects policy, or its political environment, or the balance of power; irrelevant if it does not. By this criterion, few of the variables listed above, if any at all, are always relevant.

Are any of them essential for successful formation or maintenance? Since three conditions are necessary for the successful formation and maintenance of politically-unified systems: at least moderate commitment to a formation or maintenance policy, proponent instrumental power, and a compliant political environment (one in which there are no vetoists), a condition can only be considered essential if these prerequisites cannot exist in its absence. Because these three conditions can exist in the absence of every one of the variables enumerated above, it cannot be argued that any of them is essential for successful formation and maintenance.

A factor may be unnecessary and yet conducive. It may be classified as conducive to successful formation or maintenance if it operates in the direction of producing or enhancing commitment to a formation or maintenance policy, proponent political and instrumental power, or environmental compliance. It may be categorized as 'always conducive' if it always has this effect, and 'generally conducive' if it is so more often than not.

While it is not our intention here to evaluate and categorize variables, the heuristic value of our approach can be demonstrated by examining two factors on which some measure of consensus exists. Let us first examine the question of a common external threat. Utilizing the conflict approach, it is clear that the factor is not essential. It is also possible to argue that the mere existence of a common external threat is not always conducive to successful formation or maintenance for the following reasons.

- (i) It may not even be a relevant factor because proponents may not perceive its existence.
- (ii) Even if perceived, it may not be salient enough as to cause significant reaction.
- (iii) Even if they react, actors may believe that the correct response lies not in adopting or increasing commitment to a formation or main-

- tenance policy, but to other policies.³⁰
- (iv) Proponents may in fact shift their focus of interest and activity away from on-going attempts at formation and maintenance, abandoning their formation or maintenance policies or moderating their commitment to them.³¹
 - (v) Actors may indeed believe that the correct response is opposition to a formation or maintenance policy – especially if they believe that the external threat may be lessened by doing so.
 - (vi) Proponents may in fact become disenchanted and therefore lessen their commitment to a formation or maintenance policy if it is seen to be a cause of the external threat.³²
 - (vii) If the political environment also has a similar perception, it may become more uncompliant.
 - (viii) External threats may operate to lessen the real or perceived probability of successful formation or maintenance, and/or increase the probability of successful opposition to formation or maintenance,³³ thus lessening the proponent's commitment to policy, and enhancing the opponent's commitment to their opposition. It may, therefore, sometimes be an uncondusive factor.
 - (ix) It may also be an uncondusive condition if proponents disagree about the response to a common external threat (e.g. to appease, or stand firm) and their disagreements may lessen their cohesion and therefore, their power.

Since the existence of a common external threat may not even be a relevant variable, it cannot be considered as a consistently conducive factor. As we have shown, it may in certain circumstances even be a positively uncondusive condition for successful formation and maintenance. It is however arguable that the existence of a common external threat is probably a generally conducive condition. *It would seem to be most conducive if it: is perceived and identically perceived; salient and identically salient; shifts the focus of interests and activity to and not away from the issue of formation or maintenance; creates the universal impression that the best response is commitment or increased commitment to a formation or maintenance policy; if it enhances the value of such a policy, the probability of*

³⁰These may be building up one's armed forces, strengthening ties with the enemies of the external enemy, etc.

³¹Actors may in fact wish to get rid of burdensome parts of their state in order to enhance the state's power potential.

³²This happened to some extent as regards the policy of forming Malaysia in the first few months of Indonesian confrontation.

³³This can happen if an external enemy is perceived to be opposed or actively opposed to formation or maintenance.

policy success, and public support; and if it results in proponent agreement as regards the responses to it.

Though recent research has begun to question the conventional wisdom regarding the eufunctionality of common external threats, the widely-accepted view that a sense of social community is conducive to successful formation and maintenance has remained unchallenged. Because it does not always operate, and because it does not always act to cause or enhance commitment to a formation or maintenance policy, environmental compliance or proponent power, it cannot be classified as an always conducive factor. One can go further and argue that when it is operative, it may even be an uncondusive factor. To understand why this may be so, it is important to realize that men and groups not only have multiple loyalties but also *multiple senses of social community*. Thus, a Kelantanese may feel that all Kelantanese are one people, that the people of Kedah, Perlis and Trengganu are 'one of us', that the southern Thai provinces and the Malay States of the peninsula constitute one social community, that the Malays of Malaya and Indonesia are one people — all at the same time. *Where a dominant sense of social community³⁴ does not coincide with the boundaries of a planned unified system (in the context of formation) or an already formed unified system (in the context of maintenance) it may very well be uncondusive to successful formation or maintenance.* Thus, the dominant sense of social community for the AMCJA in the period 1947-8 was a pan-Malayan one and there is little doubt that this was uncondusive to the formation of the Federation of Malaya. A sense of social community appears to be most conducive to successful formation or maintenance when it is dominant, and when it coincides *exactly* with the boundaries of the system to be formed or maintained.

Examination of these two variables demonstrates, it is hoped, the usefulness of the policy-political environment-power approach in evaluating and ordering factors, and in generating hypotheses. It has heuristic value also because it explains *why* a factor is relevant, essential, conducive, or uncondusive. This is an important function since a great many of the factors suggested as essential, etc., are derived largely or only from correlation. Thus, 'superior economic growth' may be conducive not because of some unexplained reason, but because it may result, in certain circumstances, in proponent commitment, or in enhancing it, environmental compliance and proponent power. It is only conducive when it is eufunctional with reference to these three variables.

³⁴What is dominant cannot be specified without reference to actor and time.

THE PREDICTIVE VALUE OF THE CONFLICT APPROACH

Since at least moderate commitment to a formation, or maintenance or destruction policy, proponent instrumental power and a compliant environment are each necessary for successful formation or maintenance or destruction, it is safe to predict that where these conditions are not met, there can be no successful formation or maintenance or destruction. Since the concurrent existence of all three conditions are sufficient, we can predict success when such a situation arises.

The probability of failure can be predicted on the same basis. Let us attempt to apply the approach in one relevant case, on the question of re-merger, the formation of a politically-unified system consisting of Malaysia and Singapore, within the next decade or so.³⁵ To predict, three questions should be posed:

- (i) Will a policy of re-merger be adopted and will there be sufficient commitment to it?
- (ii) If adopted, will the proponent(s) of formation possess instrumental power?
- (iii) Will the political environment be a compliant one?

The chances of any major actor seriously adopting, in the near future, a policy of re-merger appears remote, because apart from commitment to re-merger as an end in itself, it is difficult to see, in the present circumstances (*and if there is no drastic change in these circumstances*), what values are derivable from such a policy.

Even if a policy of re-merger is adopted, the proponent of that policy in all probability will not possess instrumental power. This is because probably the Malaysian government and possibly the Singapore government are the only actors which will possess instrumental power; and there are many reasons why they are not likely to propose re-merger in the foreseeable future.

Only a few of these reasons will be mentioned because they are likely to remain uncondusive factors for some time to come. First, the ethnic distribution of population in the Malaysia region and the relevant political attitudes about it are likely to remain unchanged. The addition of Singapore to Malaysia will be seen for many years ahead by the Malays, no matter how its Chinese population is constitutionally 'contained', as a threat to their political hegemony and ultimately, security and survival. The May 13th (1969) riots have demonstrated to Malay and other politicians that they have to be very responsive to Malay demands and susceptibilities. After that event, the probability of any Malaysian force dependent

³⁵ Many politicians still regard this as 'inevitable' in the long run.

on or sensitive to Malay sentiments adopting a re-merger policy will be remote indeed. Insofar as the Malaysian government will remain sensitive to Malay sentiments, and there is every indication that this will be the case, the probability is very high that it will not propose re-merger.

Several background conditions which will in all likelihood not disappear overnight militate against the probability of the Singapore government advocating re-merger. First, Singapore has a distaste for 'feudal Malay rule'. The disrespect which often amounted to contempt for this 'feudal Malay rule' was sometimes not exclusively a non-Malay Singapore phenomenon. It appears to be a deep-rooted sentiment of long standing. And it was an important obstacle to maintenance when Singapore was in Malaysia. Singapore's experience while she was in Malaysia and the belief that Malaysia is a Malay state are likely to also work against a Singaporean commitment to re-merger.

These 'permanent' factors will in all probability cause opposition on the part of the Malaysian and Singapore governments to any policy of re-merger (unless more salient factors operate in the other direction). Since each of them will probably be in a position to veto policy, the environment of a re-merger policy will probably, therefore, be uncompliant.

While we cannot be certain,³⁶ it does appear that barring drastic changes the 'inevitable' re-merger of Singapore with the rest of Malaysia in the near future is not only not inevitable, but most unlikely. It should be noted, however, that many drastic changes have taken place (in the short period covered by this book) to transform the Malaysia region from a group of so many pocket territories to a system of three states. And the student of South-East Asian politics must surely know that the post-war history of the area is littered with a whole series of 'unlikely' events and shattered predictions. Finality is seldom the language of politics: of the area it may truly be said that the one permanent thing is change.

³⁶ Silcock, a perceptive student of Malaysia region affairs, in an article written in 1960, saw little possibility of 'merger [in] the near future'.

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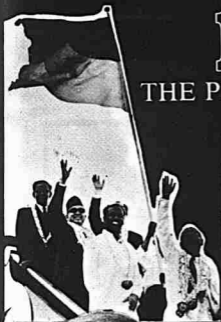
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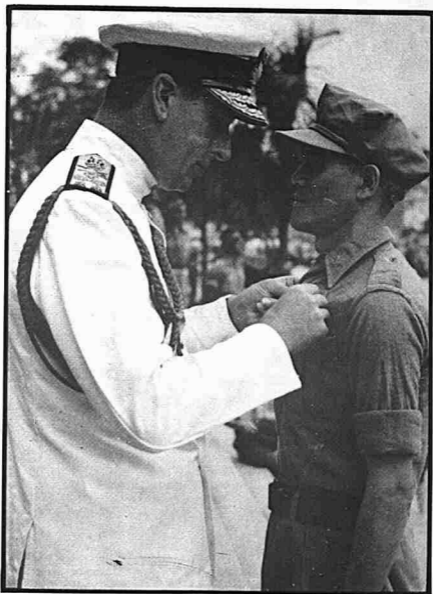
THE PERIOD IN PICTURES




*Photographs from Arkib Negara; Ministry of Information, Malaysia;
Straits Times and Private Collections.*

After three years
of Japanese rule,
the British return ...

and decorate the communists



Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten awards
British campaign medals, 6 January 1946.

The MPAJA 
demonstrate their strength



MPAJA parade in Johore Bharu.

By mid-1946
they are
disarmed... *partially*
at least



Chinese guerrillas
surrender arms
in Taiping, Perak.

On April Fool's day 1946...

Gent is
installed,



The first and last Governor of the Union.

the Malayan
Union
inaugurated

Sir Edward Gent takes the salute in Kuala Lumpur.



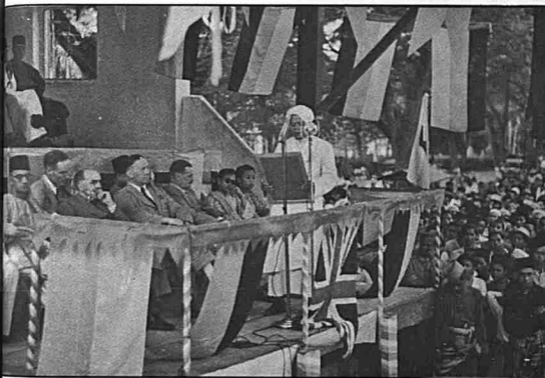
★ The Malays demonstrate
against the Union



A

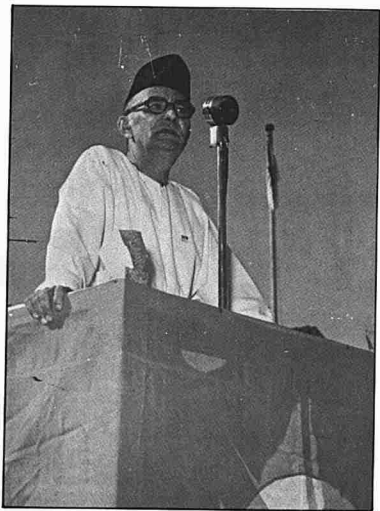
At the Malay Rulers' Conference
in Kuala Kangsar (May 1946),
Malays condemn the Union on a platform
fronted by Union Jack.

9



On the platform, Captain Gammans and Rees-Williams, with Datuk Onn.

17
9
Datuk Onn goes to the forefront.



11

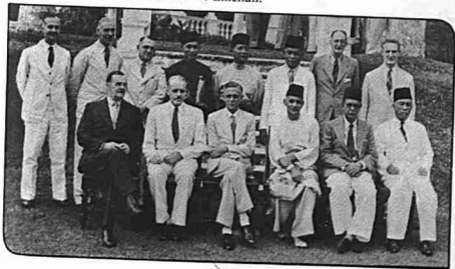
Malcolm
MacDonald ✦
keeps his eyes on
the *left*. . . .

And the British
give in.

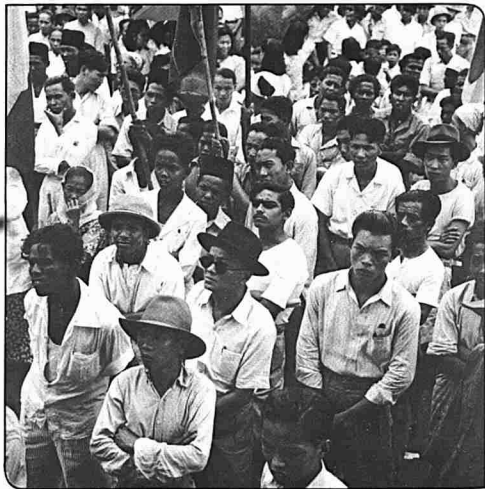


The Governor-General designate
on arrival in Malaysia.

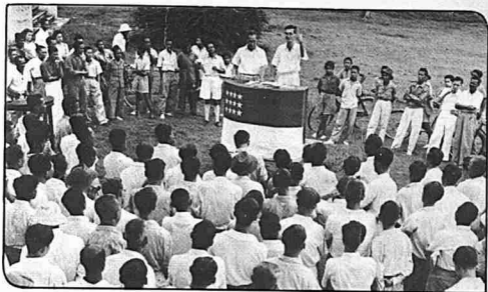
Members of the working committee set up to draft a federation constitution (seated from left to right): Sir Theodore Adams (adviser to the sultans), R.O. Connor, A.T. Newbould, Datuk Onn bin Jaafar, Haji Muhammad Sheriff bin Osman, Raja Kamaralzaman bin Raja Mansur. (standing): C. Watherston, Sir Ralph Hone, W.D. Godsall, Datuk Nik Ahmad Kamil, Datuk Hamzah bin Abdullah, Datuk Abdul Rahman bin Muhammad Yasin, Datuk Roland Braddell, Dr. W. Linehan.



☆ Now, meetings and demonstrations
against the Federation proposals



Mass AMCJA meeting in Farrer Park, Singapore, September 1947.



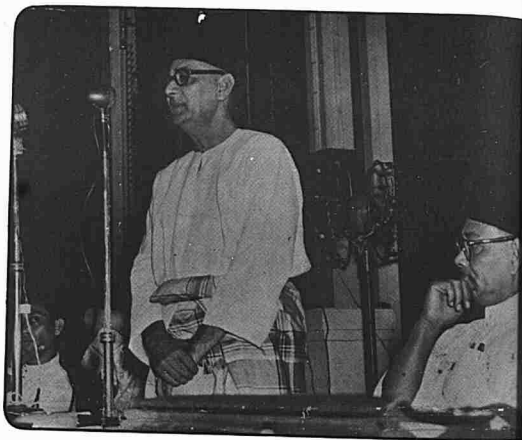
Gerald de Cruz and Philip Hoalim on the rostrum

As They are unheeded and
the Federation of Malaya
is established.



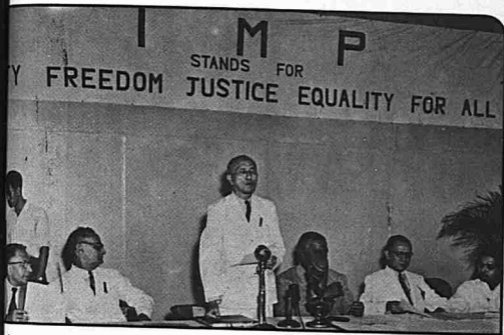
At conclusion of the signing of the Federation Agreement, Gent calls for cooperation and racial tolerance.

August 1951: Datuk Onn hands over
leadership of UMNO to
Tunku Abdul Rahman



At crucial UMNO general assembly. On Onn's left Tunku Abdul Rahman,
on his right Sardon Jubir.

~~*~~ Datuk Onn launches the Independence of Malaya Party

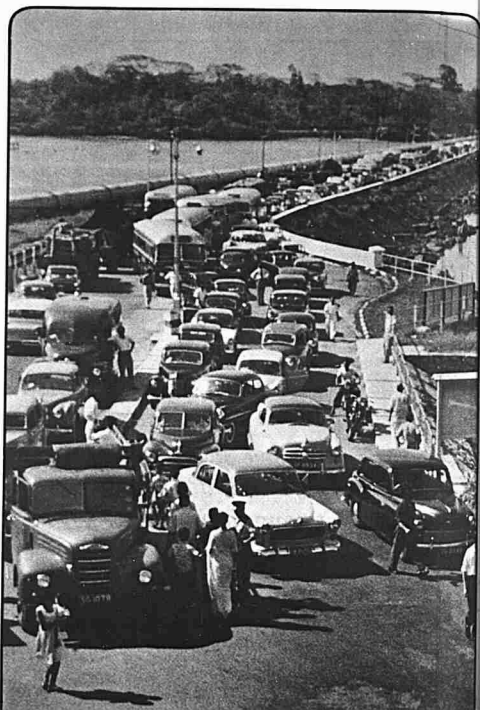


Inaugural meeting (left to right): R. Ramani, Datuk Onn, Datuk Tan Cheng Lock, Datuk C.E. Thuraisingam, G. Shelley, P.P. Narayanan.

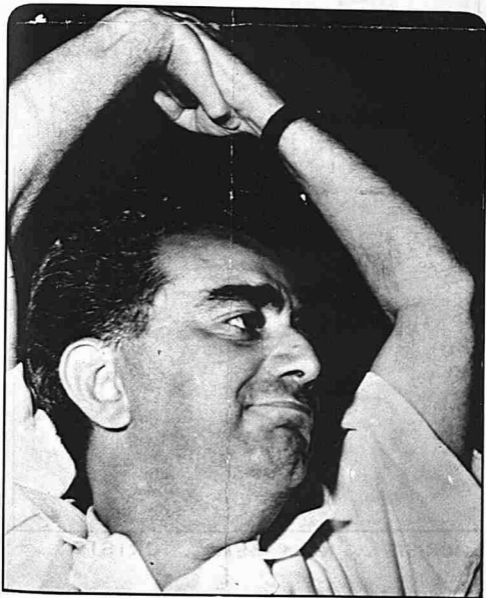
*IMP may have stood for unity,
freedom, justice and equality
but was it committed to merger?*

7

The Straits of Johore which separates Singapore from Malaya and the Causeway which joins them



On the island, David Marshall
leads the Labour Front to
victory in Singapore's 1955 elections



The moment of triumph...

...And the subsequent disillusionment



CRISIS ... NO CRISIS ... CRISIS ...

← ASSEMBLY HOUSE

F2RG

Super-Colossal!

**LABOUR'S
LOST LOVE**

**NEVER AGAIN
POSSIBLY**

**PROBABLY THE
LAST PERFORMANCE**

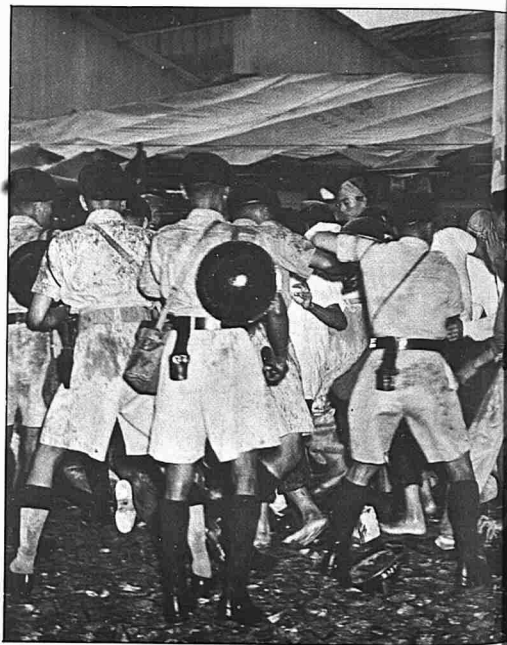
**THE LAST SHOW
MAY BE**

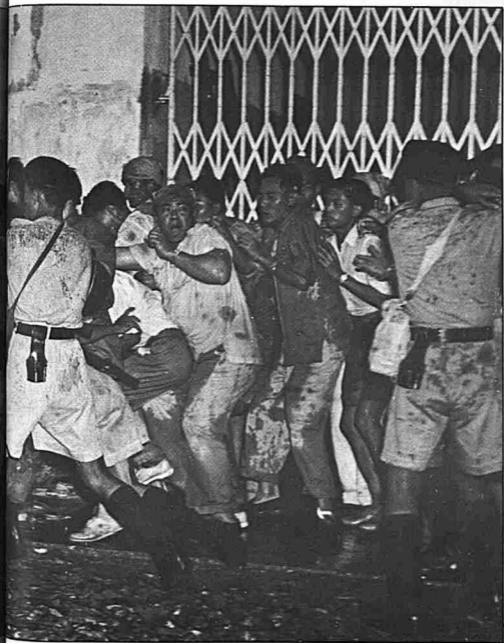
**POSITIVELY
THE LAST PERFORMANCE**

**NOT RETAINED BY
POPULAR DEMAND**



The 1956 Singapore riots





*Cars outside the Ministry of
Labour & Welfare ...*



... and bayonets in the street.

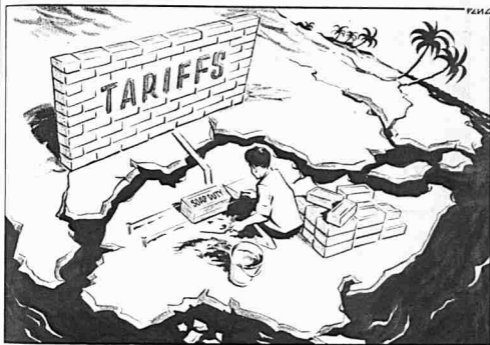


Singapore at the crossroads: Merger or Chaos?



MOMENT OF DECISION

The Federation erects tariffs
which threaten to drive Singapore
against the wall



THE FIRST BRICK

Marshall courts
the Tunku on Merger



CHAP GOM MEN

So does Lim Yew Hock,

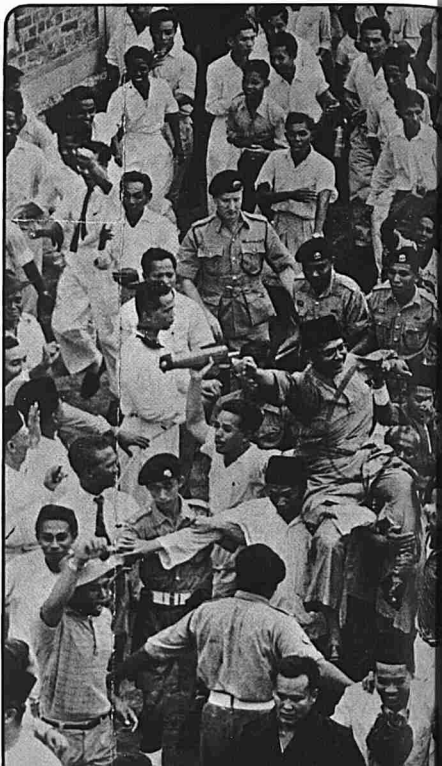


and Lee Kuan Yew



Lee Kuan Yew & David Marshall see the Tunku off on his way to London. He was to return with the slogan, 'Merdeka by August 31 1957...if possible.'

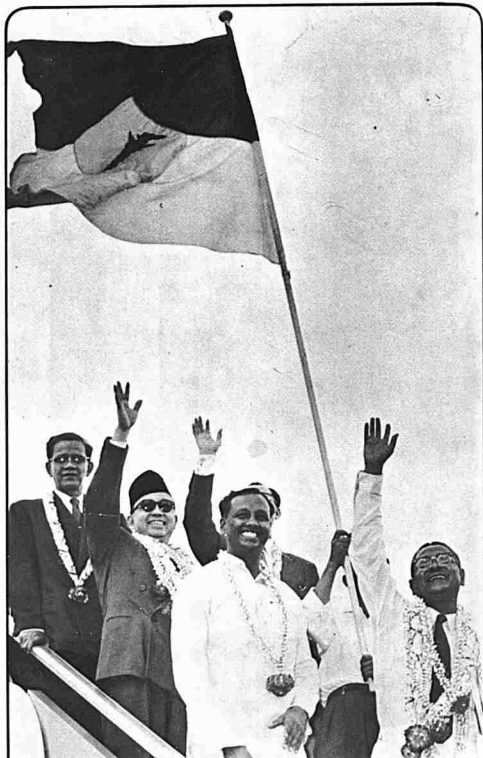
✶ The first departure for the London talk





UMNO supporters in Singapore
seeing the Tunku off
at the East Wharf,
January 1956.

...and the last



Some are not happy about independence:
the Penang Secessionists



N. Ponnudurai

D.A.
Mackay



Heah Joo Seang



Koh Sin Hock

Ungku Abdullah bin Omar, royalist, Johore nationalist, fringe politician...



making
a point



being invested
with the Family
Order of Johore
by wife of the
Regent, Johore, 1954.

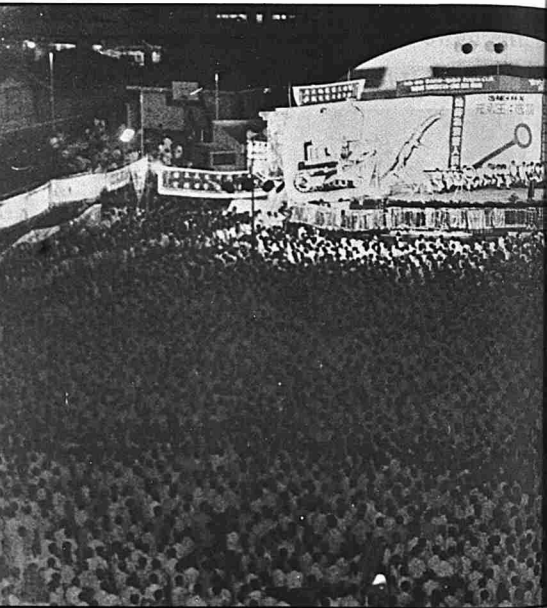
The rise of Singapore
as a security threat and
the move towards Malaysia...

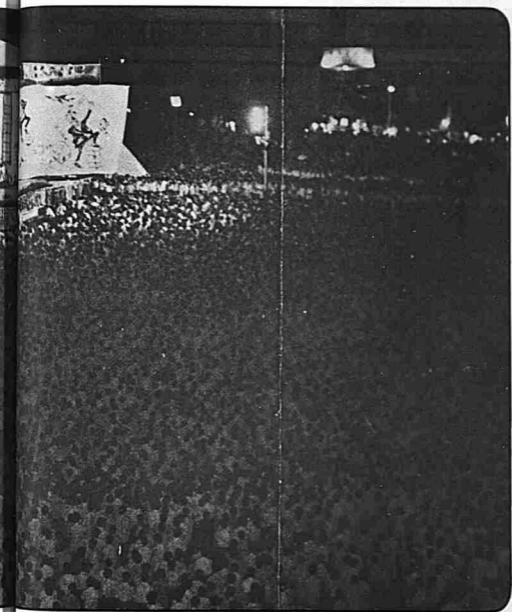
The Hong Lim by-election, March 1961.



Lee Kuan Yew speaks at PAP rally in Upper Nankin Street.

The Ong Eng Guan challenge.





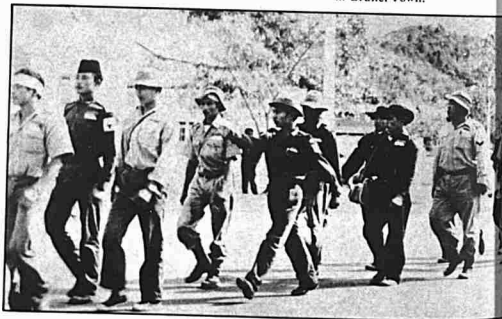
The 1962 Brunei Revolt...



the disorganized rebels

and prisoners.

the better organized,
in Brunei Town.



The Brunei Negotiations...



Neil Lawson, Q.C. Legal Adviser to the Brunei position.

*with little
to suggest
failure*



Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak send off the Sultan of Brunei after last round of talks in Malaya. March 1963. Everyone politely smiled.

On the Eve of Malaysia's formation,

Lee Kuan Yew
influences
Sabah and
Sarawak
politicians.

Lee talking to Sarawak
politicians on his way to
Sabah, August 1963.
On Mr. Lee's right,
Mr. Stephen Kalong
Ningkan, Chief Minister
Designate of Sarawak.



After Formation, Singapore-Kuala Lumpur
relations deteriorate. . .

*But in 1964,
there is still time to share a joke*

The Tunku with Lee Kuan Yew, Dr. Goh Keng Swee and Lim Kim San, August 1964.



It is not to last for long ...



Albar,
one of those
Lee called
'Ultra'

Smiles despite a tense situation



Picket at UMNO General Assembly, May 1965, protesting against Lee Kuan Yew.

The Tunku leaves for the fateful London Conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers



The Tunku's press conference before leaving Kuala Lumpur, 11 June 1965.

Lee Kuan Yew sees the Tunku off at Singapore airport on the same day.



The return after seven weeks...



Singapore's Lim Kim San greets the Tunku.



*No signs of
impending
separation.*

arrival in
Kuala Lumpur,
5 August 1965.
Tunku Abdul Rahman
appears his usual
jovial self.

The day of Separation.

87



The Tunku
leaving
Parliament
House
after announcing
Separation.

The Tunku's
hastily written
letter to
Toh Chin Chye

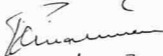
My dear Chin Chye

I am writing to tell you that I have given the matter of our break with S'pore my utmost consideration and I find that in the interest of our friendship and the security and peace of Malaya as a whole there is absolutely no other way out.

If I were strong enough and able to exercise complete control of the situation I might perhaps have delayed action, but I am not, and so while I am able to counsel patience and patience I think the amicable settlement of our differences in this way is the only possible way out.

I request you most earnestly to agree.

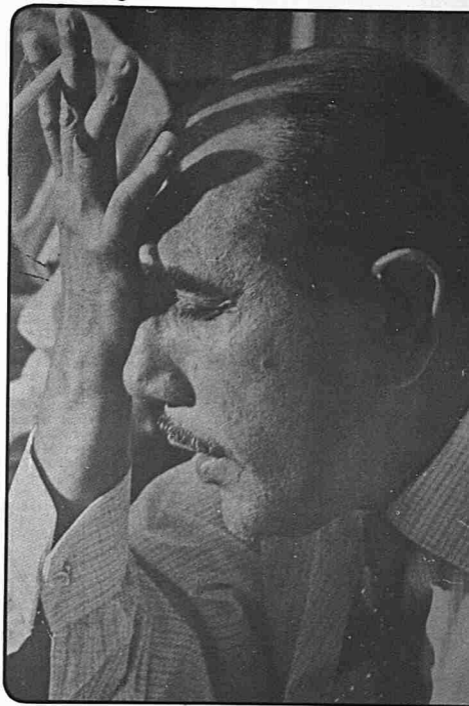
Kind regards

Yours sincerely


Lee explains to Singapore



Albar disagrees with Separation and resigns



Albar at press conference on 10 August 1965,
after announcing his resignation as Secretary-General of UMNO.

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