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The British Legacy and the Development of Politics in Malaya

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Abstract- This article examines the British political legacy on the development of politics in Malaya. It argues that British legacy had shaped political development in Malaya especially after Second World War. The British viewed security threats from sources such as rivalries between states in Malaya, the Japanese occupation and later on the Communist insurgencies as reasons to justify the policy of intervention and colonial rule in Malaya. The British colonial influence was profound because it established the institutions and policies on which the later ruling regime was based. This is important to understand the earlier political development in Malaya (now known as Malaysia). The post colonial Malaya inherited the colonial legacy in terms of a multi-ethnic society, the federal type of political system, and the government. All these are important factors that have shaped Malaya. Accordingly, this article will explore the British existence in Malaya and the reaction of early local political movements toward the British administration. This is followed by an assessment of the society, in which the British implemented a political party system and reinforced the principle of political accommodation between ethnic groups. This article utilized primary data from documents in British National Archive and secondary data such as books, journals and newspaper.

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The British Legacy and the Development of Politics in Malaya

Rizal Yaakop

Abstract- This article examines the British political legacy on the development of politics in Malaya. It argues that British legacy had shaped political development in Malaya especially after Second World War. The British viewed security threats from sources such as rivalries between states in Malaya, the Japanese occupation and later on the Communist insurgencies as reasons to justify the policy of intervention and colonial rule in Malaya. The British colonial influence was profound because it established the institutions and policies on which the later ruling regime was based. This is important to understand the earlier political development in Malaya (now known as Malaysia). The post colonial Malaya inherited the colonial legacy in terms of a multi-ethnic society, the federal type of political system, and the government. All these are important factors that have shaped Malaya. Accordingly, this article will explore the British existence in Malaya and the reaction of early local political movements toward the British administration. This is followed by an assessment of the society, in which the British implemented a political party system and reinforced the principle of political accommodation between ethnic groups. This article utilized primary data from documents in British National Archive and secondary data such as books, journals and newspaper.

I. INTRODUCTION

From the late eighteenth century, the British began to expand their influence over the Malayan peninsula and Singapore, both situated in Southeast Asia through trade. Indirect rule in Malaya started when the British East India Company (BEIC), in its effort to foster and protect its lucrative trade route between India and China, obtained Penang from Sultan Abdullah of Kedah in 1786 and Singapore in 1819. Sultan Abdullah offered to lease Penang to the BEIC and Francis Light, on behalf of BEIC, took formal possession of the island. This made BEIC a territorial power with an obvious stake in the security of the area.¹ In the case of Singapore, Stamford Raffles of the same Company made an agreement to trade the land with Sultan Hussein Shah of Johore. Raffles found Singapore's geographical position was suitable as a port. It would be much nearer to the main trading areas in the archipelago than Penang in the north of the Peninsula, being much nearer to Java and the eastern

part of the Malay Archipelago. It could be a centre of free trade to attract traders from a wide area.² This would not only allow the British to break the Dutch monopoly on trade but also to control the security of the area in between Penang and Singapore. The Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 gave the British control over the Straits of Malacca and created the contemporary boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia.³

The Anglo-Dutch Treaty separated British and Dutch colonial areas, giving the British unrivalled scope to intervene in the affairs of the Malay states in the peninsula and ultimately to colonise them. The three outposts of Penang, Singapore and Malacca then became the Straits Settlements in 1826 and in 1832 Singapore became the centre of Government for the three areas. In 1867 the Settlements were transferred to the Colonial Office as a Crown Colony.⁴ The early British policy, with regard to the security of Malaya and Straits Settlements, was non intervention and the British government was 'not disposed to adopt the duty, directly or indirectly, of taking steps for the security of life and property in countries where that security could not be maintained by the lawful rulers'.⁵

However, the failure to intervene seriously weakened British influence in Malaya for many years, even though an agreement engineered by the British led to a Siamese withdrawal from some parts of the Malay states, which had been attacked.⁶ Although the British maintained the policy of non intervention, later they saw that their presence was needed as a deterrent to potentially external and internal security threats in the Malay states. Between 1765 and 1800, a series of treaties between the British and the Sultan of Kedah guaranteed the latter an annual income in exchange for British occupation of Penang Island and a strip of land on the coast opposite. One of the original conditions

² Ibid. p.115

³ Allen, R., *Malaysia: Prospect and Retrospect: The impact and aftermath of colonial rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.30; Tarling, N., *Anglo-Dutch Rivalry in the Malay World, 1780-1824* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962) ch.5

⁴ Turnbull, C. M., *The Straits Settlements, 1826-67: Indian Presidency to Crown Colony* (London, The Athlone Press, 1972, chs.9 and 10; Tarling, N., *British Policy in the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, 1824-1871*, (Kuala Lumpur, 1969).

⁵ Tarling, N., *Imperialism in Southeast Asia 'A fleeting, passing phase'* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.48-49.

⁶ Jackson, R., *The Malayan Emergency*, (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 3-4.

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¹M Andaya, B. W. and Andaya.. L.Y., *A History of Malaysia*, (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), p.111

was that Britain would provide military aid for the Sultan if Kedah should be invaded by her powerful neighbour, Siam. Harry Ord, the first governor of the Straits Settlement reported that 'it would be greatly to the advantage of the Settlements if our influence could be extended over the Peninsular'.⁷ The British perception on security issues in the region led them to intervene in local affairs, which started a long lasting rule in Malaya and Singapore. The British strategy of intervention was due to two main factors. First, the chaotic situation in the region led the British to provide security measures in order to protect their economic interests. Secondly, British military protection was needed by the local people.

It is important to note here that the British justified their intervention based on the argument that the whole economy of Malaya was threatened by inter-state division and rivalry among the Malay rulers. In some states, anarchy prevailed. In addition to being threatened by domestic rivalries, the British also claimed that their trade, especially with China, was threatened by sea pirates and state rivalries in the region.⁸ A policy of protecting trade and commerce at the cost of direct political and military intervention was practised. This officially marked a change of policy from non intervention to intervention, which was also stressed by Lord Kimberly, the Colonial Secretary who commented that due to insecurity, the British viewed some sort of action in Malaya was necessary.⁹ According to MacIntyre, the interests of the British Settlements required that the British should exert their influence to put an end to the state anarchy and disorder which prevailed in several states.¹⁰ Robert Heussler has argued that the Governor of the Straits Settlements was directed to implement the policy of intervention but he was not to let matters go so far that the home government might be called on to sanction political moves that would involve military expenses and trouble with other European powers or native authorities nearby.¹¹ Furthermore, the intervention policy was formalized with the signing of the Pangkor Treaty in 1874.

In addition, a British security role was welcomed by some of the Malay rulers and the Chinese business

community. They considered that only the British were capable of defending their interests. The political instability and the need for a security umbrella further compelled the British and Chinese merchants to implore the British Government to intervene.¹² Furthermore, the discovery of veins of tin deposits eventually led to conflict over control of the tin revenues. The Malay rulers sought help from the Chinese secret society clansmen and the British. Eventually, the British intervened in all the Malay States to 'keep law and order',¹³ or to prevent other colonial powers such as the Germans from peddling their influence. The Dutch circulated a rumour that the Sultan of Johore was about to lease Tioman Island to the North German Federation as a naval station.¹⁴

II. CHANGE IN DEMOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL POWER

British intervention in Malaya transformed the demography and political geography of Malaya. The earliest occupant of Malaya was the Malays. Perhaps the most important aspect of the colonial legacy was on the way the Malay power was consolidated. 'Malay' identity was becoming more synchronised after the Second World War and especially in the aftermath of the 'Malayan Union' proposal of 1946.¹⁵ Political expediency arising from the aforementioned developments further reinforced a sense of identity when the term 'Malay' was constitutionally defined. The 1957 constitution defined a Malay as one 'who professes the Muslim religion; habitually speaks the Malay language, [and] conforms to Malay custom'.¹⁶ The official definition of Malay identity was inherited from colonialism: 'The modern Malaysian constitution's definition of Malay is derived from a 1913 colonial enactment in which 'a Malay was a person belonging to any Malay race who habitually speaks the Malay language . . . and professes the Muslim religion'.¹⁷ This statement made the Malays believe that 'Malaya' is a Malay country and that it should be ruled by Malays.

The British brought in the immigrant Chinese and Indians to provide labour for the burgeoning tin and

⁷ CO 273/18, Ord to Buckingham. 8. iv. 1868. Cited in MacIntyre, David 'Britain's Intervention in Malaya. The Origin of Lord Kimberly's Instructions to Sir Andrew Clarke in 1873', *Journal of South East Asian History*, Vol.II, No.3, 1961, pp.47-69.

⁸ Purcell, V., *The Chinese in Malaya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp.104-110

⁹ CO 273/67. Kimberly to Clarke. 20. p. ix. 1873. Cited in MacIntyre, David "Britain's Intervention in Malaya. The Origin of Lord Kimberly's Instructions to Sir Andrew Clarke in 1873", *Journal of South East Asian History*, Vol.II, No.3, 1961, pp.47-69.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.50

¹¹ Heussler, R., *British Rule in Malaya: The Malayan Civil Service and Its Predecessors, 1867-1942*, (Oxford: Ohio Press, 1982), p.6

¹² Emerson, R., *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1964), pp. 112-118.

¹³ Chowdhury, A., 'Malaysia in Transition'. In: Walid, A. (ed.) *The ASEAN Region in Transition*, (Singapore: Ashgate 1997), p. 44.

¹⁴ CO 273/42. Minute by Kimberly 21, p. vii.

¹⁵ A.J. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics during the Malayan Union Experiment, 1942-1948*, Monograph 8 (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1979).

¹⁶ *Malayan Constitutional Documents* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1962), p. 124.

¹⁷ Sheridan, L.A. *Federation of Malaya Constitution* (Singapore: Univ. of Malaya Law Review, 1961); Ong, A., 'State versus Islam: Malay Families, Women's Bodies, and the Body Politic in Malaysia,' *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 2 (1990): p.259; Rogers, M.L., 'Politicization and Political Development in a Rural Malay Community,' *Asian Survey*, 9/12 (1969), p.931.

rubber industries in Malaya.¹⁸ Koon argues that although the Chinese traders first came to the Malay Peninsula as early as the seventeenth century, the Chinese exodus to Malaya occurred during the British colonial rule. However, the British were unable to exercise extensive control over the immigration and employment of Chinese male labour.¹⁹ Many aspects of this early stage of the mining industry were controlled by Chinese secret societies, with well-developed financial and labour organizational networks.²⁰ On the other hand, the immigration of Indian labour was more systematic and efficient as it was directly managed by the British Colonial Office, both in India and in Malaya.²¹

As a result of uncontrolled immigration, Malaya then became a Malay state in name only, since the Indians and Chinese, taken together, made up more than half of the total population of the country.²² This worried the Malays who feared that the Chinese might control them.²³ In this case, had the Chinese majority in Singapore been joined to Malaya, the Chinese would have had an overall majority. Although at the time very few Chinese had citizenship rights, being regarded as temporary residents from China, this would have been unacceptable to the Malays and their rulers. This was an important reason why Singapore later was isolated from the rest of Malaya. However, this idea had led to social and political problems, between the Chinese and the Malays. The first problem related to ethnic conflicts as a result of a large number of Chinese in Malaya. The second was due to the link between the Chinese and the MCP. Both threatened a political security in Malaya.

The other important point is that the impact of colonial rule diminished the political power of the Malay rulers. As early as 1903, a memorandum from the British Resident-General acknowledged that whilst the relationship between the Malay rulers and residents was based on the idea that the Malay rulers administered with the advice of the Resident, it was in fact the Resident who administered, seeking the sultan's advice

only when he considered it necessary.²⁴ Although the Malay rulers still had their special status, the introduction of the new political system meant the rulers had no absolute power to govern the state. This caused the Malays to feel insecure because of the diminishing of their traditional political system, as well as threatened by the existence of a large number of immigrants.

III. CHANGE IN POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

British rule also reshaped the political geography of Malaya. Deeper colonial impact dated from 1874, when the British signed the Pangkor Agreement with Perak, giving them power to advise state authorities. A similar agreement was signed with Selangor and Sungei Ujong, followed in 1888 by Pahang. A British Resident was appointed to each state, and under his influence considerable progress was made in establishing law and order and introducing more modern ways to the states. In 1895 these four states were amalgamated under the First Federation, with central government in Kuala Lumpur. In 1910 Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu and Perlis also signed treaties with Britain, followed by Johore.²⁵

By the First World War, the British had created three separate entities: the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Malacca and Penang; the Federated Malay States (FMS) of Pahang, Selangor, Perak and Negeri Sembilan; and the Unfederated Malay States (UMS) of Trengganu, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Johore. While the Settlements were a Crown Colony, the other states accepted British administrators but retained their sovereignty. In this new form of political geography, the earlier Malay states were divided into federated and unfederated states while Singapore remained isolated from the others.²⁶

In the FMS, the religious, cultural and traditional matters were governed by their own Malay rulers or sultans. They were assisted in the administration of the states by the Resident or the Malayan Civil Service, the senior posts of which were held by British personnel. In the UMS, the situation was the same, except the British officer was just known as the Advisor. Singapore, Malacca and Penang were directly governed by Britain, separately from the Malay states. The Governor of these states was also the High Commissioner of the Federated and Unfederated Malay States.²⁷

¹⁸ CAB 98/41, CMB (44)3 'Future constitutional policy for British colonial territories in South-East Asia': memorandum by Mr Stanly for War Cabinet Committee on Malaya and Borneo, 14 Jan 1944.

¹⁹ Koon, H. P., *Chinese Politics in Malaysia: A History of the Malaysian Chinese Association* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 15.

²⁰ CAB 129/28, CP(48)171 'The Situation in Malaya': Cabinet memorandum by Mr Creech Jones. See also Vaughan, J. D. *The Mannerisms and Customs of the Straits Chinese* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1879); Fong, M.L., *The Sociology of Secret Societies: A Study of Chinese Secret Societies in Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1981)

²¹ Stenson, Michael, *Class, Race and Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), p.18

²² CAB 129/28, CP(48)171 'The Situation in Malaya': Cabinet memorandum by Mr Creech Jones.

²³ CO 537/3746, no.9, a note by Linehan on the Malay dimension, 2 March 1948.

²⁴ Andaya, B. W. and Andaya.. L.Y., *A History of Malaysia*, (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), p. 248.

²⁵ Lopez, C. 'The British Presence in the Malay World: A Meeting of Civilizational Traditions'. Online article. (Available Online) www.penerbit.ukm.my/jsari19-01.pdf. (Accesses 24/10/2005)

²⁶ CO 825/354, no.52, 'A post-war settlement in the Far East: need for a definite policy': joint CO-FO memorandum, August 1942. Cited in Stockwell, A.J. (ed.), *Malaya: Part 1, The Malayan Union Experiment, 1942-1948* (London: HMSO, 1995), p.23

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.23

The federation was progressively extended to all peninsular states (collectively known as Malaya) by 1915. In the 1920s and 1930s argument about Malaya's future, and the way in which economic and political power would be allocated, took on an added sharpness because of the 'decentralization' issue. In 1925, High Commissioner Sir Laurence Guillemard, with Colonial Office approval, announced his decentralization plan. As a consequence, an agreement was signed with all four FMS sultans in 1927 by which they could be represented at Federal Council meetings by the Residents. As a result, they effectively relegated almost total powers over legislation to the British. Although this policy was in favour of economic efficiency and administrative rationalization, it relegated the Malay sultan and his State Council to 'traditional' Malay affairs, interpreted by the British as matters dealing with Islam and Malay ceremonial, while the British managed the state and the political realm.²⁸

IV. EARLY POLITICAL MOVEMENTS IN MALAYA

The marginal political role of Malay rulers, due to the changes in government and states as well as the dislocation of society, led to a greater political awareness in society. This contributed to the development of social and political movements, which resisted the colonial power. There were a few important movements of this type. First, the Kesatuan Melayu Malaya (KMM) or Young Malays Association started in 1937, which represented the Malay interest and was more influenced by Indonesia. Second, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) started in 1930, which was mainly dominated by the Chinese and more influenced by China. Although these movements had different social and cultural interests, they were anti-colonialist and aimed at gaining independence from the colonial power.

Towards the end of the Japanese Occupation in 1945, Dr Burhanuddin Helmi (Malay Officer-in-charge of Islam and Malay Customs under the Japanese Military Administration) and Mustapha Hussain (Vice President of KMM) planned to gain Malaya's independence. Mustapha secretly drew up a Malaya Merdeka Constitution to be discussed at KRIS Conference in Kuala Lumpur in mid-August 1945. Malaya would then be declared independent on 17 August 1945. Unfortunately, Malaya could not be declared independent because the Japanese surrendered just two days before the proclamation date.²⁹

²⁸ Andaya, B.W. and Andaya L.Y., *A History of Malaysia* (Hampshire: PALGRAVE, 2001), pp.248-251

²⁹ Mustapha, I.S. (translator) and Jomo, K.S., *Malay Nationalism before UMNO: The Memoirs of Mustapha Hussain* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publication, 2005). (Available Online) <http://www.malaysia-today.net/books/2005/07/introduction.htm> Accessed 27/10/2005)

The early political mobilization evident among the Malays was more oriented towards Indonesia. Funston argues that the influence of Indonesia was important as many Indonesian literary and political works were circulated in the Malayan school library. Some students were also in contact with refugees from the Indonesian Communist Party after their abortive uprising in 1926, and others joined Sukarno's Partai Nasional Indonesia after its formation in 1927.³⁰ The formation of the KMS in 1926 marked the beginning of a modern Malay political movement in Singapore, which inspired the formation of similar politically-oriented bodies during the following decade and especially from 1937 onwards, when the various Malay unions in the Peninsula fostered political mobilization.³¹ At the same time the more influential Malay movement, KMM was formed under the leadership of Ibrahim Yaacob in 1937. The movement was known as the Malay 'left' mainly because of its anti-feudalism, anti-British and pro-Indonesian stand. The British detained about 150 members of the movement, notably Ibrahim Yaacob, Ishak Haji Mohamed and Ahmad Boestamam. All of them were arrested for their anti-British activities and on charges of collaborating with the Japanese.³² During the Japanese government, they were released and were given a specific role to assist the Japanese cause. The Japanese appointed Ibrahim Yaacob Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese-sponsored Pembela Tanah Ayer (PETA) or also known as the Malai Giu Gun, a paramilitary organization of Malays set up by the Japanese; Ishak b. Haji Mohamed was involved in newspaper work, while Ahmad Boestamam later worked in the Japanese publicity department in Ipoh, Perak.³³

However, the Malay radicals actually adopted this cause to achieve independence by cooperating with Indonesia and by making contact with the underground. They planned to seize power as soon as the Japanese grip was relaxed. Ibrahim Yaacob then worked with the outlawed KMM to wrest independence for Malaya from the Japanese, within the framework of an independent Greater Indonesia. This plan for independence was agreed between a visiting Indonesian delegation and leaders of KMM in July 1945, and the agreement was ratified in August by Sukarno and Ibrahim at Taiping in the state of Perak in Malaya. KMM was then renamed Kesatuan Ra'yat Indonesia Semenanjung (KRIS) or Union of Peninsula Indonesians. After Indonesia proclaimed her independence on 17 August 1945,

³⁰ Funston, N.J., *Malay Politics in Malaysia: A Study of UMNO and PAS* (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd, 1980), p. 32

³¹ Ongkili, J.P., *Nation-building in Malaysia 1946-1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.28

³² Cheah, B.K., *The Masked Comrades: A Study of the Communist United Front in Malaya, 1945-48* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1979), p.6

³³ Abdullah, F., *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origin and Early Development* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publication, 1985), p.67

Malaya was left out. KRIS was then disbanded and the unfinished task was passed on to its successor, The Malay Nationalist Party (MNP). To the KMM, the Japanese occupation seemed to be an opportunity to strengthen their weak pre-war position. As the only anti-British Malay nationalist group, they hoped that the Japanese would treat their movement well. Indeed, through tactical collaboration with the Japanese, the KMM leaders intended to strengthen the Malays to the point where they could demand the independence of Malaya within Indonesia. Ibrahim Yaacob had promised KMM's cooperation to the Japanese. Many other KMM leaders such as Ahmad Boestamam, Pak Sako, Idris Hakim and M.N. Othman did not know about a secret pact between Ibrahim Yaacob and the Japanese.³⁴

However, the KMM attempts failed due to a few main reasons. In the first place, the KMM did not have inherent support among the elite Malays. Most of the supporters were non-aristocrats and peasant background. Secondly, the Japanese policies toward the KMM greatly hampered its cause and at the same time, they were distrusted by the MCP. Finally, the KMM did not have enough military force for Malay nationalists to achieve their aims. They were weak and lacked a strong power base. Most of the intelligence activities were done by untrained amateurs. They even relied on information from prostitutes in certain cabarets in the major towns, especially Kuala Lumpur. These led to the KMM's failure to extend its organizational roots further in the Malay community and to upgrade its actual strength as a nationalist force during the war period. Ibrahim Yaacob failed to establish a strong nationalist force before the Japanese regime collapsed. The movement failed and Ibrahim Yaacob fled to Indonesia.³⁵

However, the inability of Malay leaders to amass support and to confront both the British and the Japanese would be significant for the post-war course of Malay politics. Stockwell notes that 'The war time dislocation of society contributed, on the one hand, to a general consciousness amongst Malays of their precarious economic and political position in relation to the non-Malay world, and, on the other hand, to a greater instability within their own community, with the result that, at the end of Japanese rule, tension was released not in the triumph of a pan-peninsular movement but also in sporadic communalism'.³⁶

The other local political movement was MCP. It was created due to an early Communist movement in Malaya as a reaction to the emergence of the ideology and its movement in Indonesia. Mintz noted that

Marxism was formally first introduced into Indonesia where the Indies Social Democratic Association (ISDV) was founded in 1914.³⁷ The Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence (MBPI) reported that between 1921 and 1922 Dutch and Indonesian Communist agents Sneevliet and Darsono travelled to Malaya and ran a secret office in Singapore. These reports were noted by Ruth McVey, who gave accounts of Darsono and Sneevliet visiting Singapore in May 1921 en route to Shanghai. Sneevliet was again in Singapore in May 1922 on his way to Holland.³⁸ Communist activities in Malaya became increasingly evident around 1922, when Bolshevik propaganda coming in from China was intercepted by the British police.³⁹ Due to intensive anti-Communist campaigns by the British, the early Communist movement was not popular with the masses. It was also less successful than its rival, Sun Yat-sen's Kuomintang (China Nationalist Party), in forming a Malayan branch.⁴⁰

However, in early 1925, an Indonesian and Moscow-based Communist International (Comintern) representative for Southeast Asia, Tan Malaka, persuaded Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders in Canton to undertake the infiltration of left-wing groups in Singapore. A CCP representative, reportedly named Fu Ta-Ching, was among the agents sent to Malaya to contact left-wing Chinese and Javanese. As a matter of strategy, CCP members joined the Malayan Kuomintang branch and formed the nucleus of a Communist group known as the Malayan Revolutionary Committee.⁴¹ These immigrant members of a left-wing faction of the Kuomintang then spread Communism into Malaya in the 1920s.⁴²

After the expulsion of the Communists from the Chinese mainland in 1927 and the ineffectiveness of the attempt by the Comintern's Far Eastern Bureau in Shanghai to establish the Nanyang (South Seas) Communist Party, the MCP was formed in Singapore in early 1930. In place of the general South Seas

³⁷ Mintz, J.S., 'Marxism in Indonesia'. In: Trager, F.N. (ed.) *Marxism in Southeast Asia*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1959), pp.171-239; See also Benda, H.J. and McVey, R.T. (eds.), *The communist uprisings of 1926-1927 in Indonesia : key documents* (Ithaca (N.Y.) : Cornell University , 1960)

³⁸ McVey, R.T., *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965), p.129; Kim, K.K., *The Beginnings of Political Extremism in Malaya, 1915-1935* (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Malaya, 1973), pp.117-18;

³⁹ Kheng, C.B., *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation of Malaya 1945-1946* (Singapore University Press, Singapore, 1983)

⁴⁰ Hanrahan, G.Z., *Communist Struggle in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1971), p.30.

⁴¹ Chihiro, T., *Nampo gunsei-ron* or Treaties on Military Administration in the Southern Regions (Tokyo: Nohon Hoso 1944), p.335.

⁴² Kheng, C.B., *The Masked Comrades: A Study of the Communist United Front in Malaya, 1945-48*, (Singapore: Times Books International, 1979); Kheng, C.B., *Red Star Over Malaya*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983).

³⁴Boestamam, A., *Memoir. Ahmad Boestamam Merdeka dengan Darah dalam Api.* (Bangsi: UKM Publisher, 2004)

³⁵ Abdullah, F., *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origin and Early Development* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1985), pp. 66-68

³⁶ Stockwell, A.J. *British Policy and Malay Politics during the Malayan Union Experiment, 1942-1948*, Monograph 8 (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1979)

organization, the MCP and a Malayan General Labour Union were established under the direct control of the Pan Pacific Trade Union Secretariat in Shanghai, which was itself the control organ of the Comintern's Far Eastern Bureau. However, most of the members of the MCP were Chinese and, as noted by Anthony Short, 'the party was more related to the cause of Chinese nationalism'.⁴³ There are no available and reliable data as how many of them were born in Malaya and in China.⁴⁴ However, majority of the MCP leaders in Malaya were born in China. The movement was not attractive to the local Malays because of several factors such as lack of funds, the difficulties of language, contempt for the Chinese and general apathy of local Malays for any movement led by foreigners.⁴⁵

None of the early local political movements were able to build a nationalist movement based on a Malayan cause. The Malay Movements were more inclined towards Indonesia, while the MCP was still influenced by the Chinese cause. Before the Second World War, neither the KMM nor the MCP had been able to create pan-peninsular organisations that reached the roots of Malayan society. The MCP cooperated with the British against the Japanese occupation and then they expected that their political struggles will be well accepted by the British.

V. THE BRITISH MILITARY ADMINISTRATION (BMA) AND MALAYAN POLITICS

From the end of the war to the establishment of civil government in Malaya, political activity among the Chinese community was dominated by the MCP and radical movements. The role of leadership in the Chinese community was taken over by a group of Chinese leaders who belonged to the resistance movement, such as the Malayan People Anti Japanese Army (MPAJA). This group was controlled by the MCP. The MPAJA and the MCP leaders decided to co-operate with the returning British and adopt a constitutional line of struggle.⁴⁶

However, the war had left a political vacuum in Malaya for a few weeks because the Southeast Asian Command (SEAC) was unable to send its troops into Malaya immediately after the unconditional surrender of Japan. During this time, the SEAC decided to increase the strength of Force 136 personnel in order to control

the resistance forces in Malaya. In September 1945, apart from Force 136, the Anti Japanese United Front (AJUF) was the sole force in control of the country.⁴⁷ At the same time, the MCP was legalized and attempted to fulfil its eight point programme by cooperating with the British.⁴⁸

In addition, the British faced difficulties in connection with the AJUF. Firstly, it consisted entirely of domiciled Chinese whose citizenship status was inferior to that of the Malays, and secondly, their organizations were officially illegal.⁴⁹ Despite this fact, SEAC decided to concede the recognition of the guerrilla forces on 4 September 1945. The MCP's prestige was enhanced by the Allied powers, which recognized them as part of Southeast Asian Command's troops. The BMA also recognized the Kuomintang and its youth wing the San Min Chu II Youth Corps. Although most of the members of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce were still associated with the Kuomintang and their orientation was still towards the motherland, their position did not threaten the British interest.⁵⁰

The immediate period of BMA was chaotic. On 15 August, 1945, Admiral Mounbatten declared a British Military Administration. He proclaimed that all courts and tribunals, other than military courts, were suspended.⁵¹ During this period, the restoration of the pre-war Constitution and administrative system would be undesirable in the interests of efficiency and security.⁵² According to a report, three-quarters of the BMA senior staff had no previous experience in the government. Occupying British and Indian soldiers were involved in local corruption, bribery and the black market - it was said by its critics that BMA meant Black Market Association.⁵³ Victor Purcell, the BMA's chief Chinese Affairs advisors reported the misbehaviour of the Indian troops, as well as the unpopularity of the armed forces

⁴⁷ Ching, O.H., *Chinese Politics in Malaya 1942-55: The Dynamics of British Policy* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2000), p. 85; Hashim, W., *Pejuang Gerila Force 136* (The Guerrillas of Force 136) (Kuala Lumpur: UMNO, 1984)

⁴⁸ WO 203/5642, Inward telegram no. 433 M.E. Dening to Foreign Office, 3 September 1945.; Ching, O.H., *Chinese Politics in Malaya 1942-55: The Dynamics of British Policy* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2000), p.86

⁴⁹ WO 203/5642 no. 12/16/45. Signal from C MacKenzie, 24 August, 1945

⁵⁰ WO 203/5642 no. 7/10/45, 'Directive to AJUF', signal from B.A.C. Sweet to Escott, a Chief of Staff to Force 136 and Acting Commander during the absence of Colonel Mackenzie. This directive was to prevent seizure of power in Malaya by AJUF.

⁵¹ WO 203/5642, no. 14/16/45, 'A proclamation to establish a military administrative issued by Admiral Mounbatten, 15 August, 1945

⁵² CAB 129/1, C (45) 133, 'Policy in regard to Malaya and Borneo': Cabinet memorandum by Mr. Hall, 29 August, 1945

⁵³ WO 203/5302, Report by Col. R.N. Broome on 'Situation in Malaya', 1 December, 1945; CO 537/3757. H.T Pagden to Oliver Morris, 27 October 1948; CO 537/3757. Report on 'Unrest in Malaya', September 1948

⁴³ Short, A., *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948-1960*. (London: Frederick Mueller, 1975), p.20;

⁴⁴ <http://phuakl.tripod.com/eTHOUGHT/MPAJA.html> (Accessed 25/10/2005)

⁴⁵ Cheah, B.K., *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation of Malaya 1945-1946*, (Singapore University Press, Singapore, 1983)

⁴⁶ WO 203/5642, Inward telegram no 434, from M. E. Dening to Foreign Office, 3 September, 1945

among the Chinese in Singapore.⁵⁴ According to Springhall, these problems existed due to lack of administration and confusion on the jurisdiction between the British military and civil administration. In handling problems, for instance, soldiers resorted to tough and coercive army-of-occupation measures such as shootings, arrests and detentions, while the BMA's civil staff endorsed diplomacy and negotiations.⁵⁵

In addition, the cooperation between MCP and BMA deteriorated when some extreme factions of MPAJA attempted to take over power in certain areas vacated by the Japanese forces. They carried out summary executions against policemen, detectives, Kempetai informers, and others whom they considered traitors or collaborators with the Japanese Military Administration. As the Malays were not particularly hostile to the Japanese and some Malays were involved in the Japanese police force, the MPAJA's actions caused racial riots in many parts of the Malay Peninsula. These acts of violence and terrorism only brought the MPAJA into disrepute and a costly mistake to the MCP in general, which cost the organization the trust of the people, especially the Malays. The MCP found itself rejected by the Malays and identified by them as a Chinese organization.⁵⁶ This was also a starting point for a long lasting communal problem between the Chinese and the Malays. As noted by Cheah Boon Kheng, stories of the lack of respect by some Chinese, mostly MCP, towards Malay custom and religion increases hostilities towards the Chinese. When Malays saw these actions they failed to distinguish between Chinese Communist and non Communist.⁵⁷

VI. THE BRITISH AND THE IDEA OF MALAYAN UNION

The British proposed a Malayan Union in which all eleven states on the peninsula were to be unified under a central government administered by the British. Included with the proposed plan was the granting of citizenship to all who were born in Malaya or who had lived there for at least ten years.⁵⁸ The unification of the

Malayan States under a Malayan Union scheme was seen as a first step towards the independence of the nation as a whole.⁵⁹ As a result, the sovereignty of the Malay Rulers, the autonomy of the Malay states and the privileged position of the Malay community were demolished. As a replacement, Malaya would be a unitary state and a common citizenship for all races would be adopted. The argument for a new Malayan policy was two edged: firstly, the administration had to be rationalized in the interests of efficiency, and, secondly, the way had to be prepared for a future self-governing state. In short it can be said that the Malayan Union was a scheme devised in the Eastern Department of the Colonial Office in response to four sets of circumstances: firstly, the perennial problems of Malaya; secondly, the British and Malayan needs for post-war rehabilitation; thirdly, the mood of World War II when the tempo was quickened in the gradual realization of long-held principles of colonial policy; and fourthly, the wider international implications of the Pacific War.⁶⁰

For the MCP, the Malayan Union scheme in general was compatible with the aims and aspirations of the MCP and MPAJA. Furthermore, under this plan they would be recognized as legal or lawful associations, unless the Governor of the proposed Malayan Union declared them illegal. Above all, the MCP was committed to the British policy of the 'Long Term Policy Directives: Chinese Policy' which was later incorporated into the proposed Malayan Union Scheme. The British used this directive to induce the Communists to continue to co-operate with them during and after the war. As a consequence of the liberal British policy towards the Chinese, the pattern of Chinese politics changed. The most noticeable features of the Chinese political scene during this period were the almost complete absence of the Straits Chinese as a political body, the decline of the Kuomintang, and the emergence of the MCP as the major force in the Chinese community.⁶¹ Although most of the moderate Chinese who followed lines compatible with Malay interest joined KMT, the BMA was not in favour of this party because it was based in China. The British policy was to encourage local-born, English-speaking and locally settled Chinese to become leaders in local Chinese society.⁶² During the BMA, the Straits Chinese were weak and isolated. The former leaders gained their

⁵⁴ WO 203/5302, Victor Purcell to Wood, 28 December, 1945; WO 203/5302, 'Malaya's political climate', IV for 10-30 Nov: report by Purcell from Singapore, 3 December, 1945.

⁵⁵ Springhall, J., 'Mountbatten versus the Generals: British Military Rule of Singapore, 1945-46', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 36(4) (2001). p.642

⁵⁶ Kheng, C.B., *Red star over Malaya : resistance and social conflict during and after the Japanese occupation of Malaya, 1941-1946* (Singapore : Singapore University Press , 1983); Kheng, C.B., 'Sino-Malay conflicts in Malaya, 1945-1946 : communist vendetta and Islamic resistance' in *Journal of Southeast Asian studies*, v.12, (1981), pp. 108-117

⁵⁷ Kheng, C.B., *The masked comrades : a study of the communist united front in Malaya, 1945-48* (Singapore : Times Books International, 1979), p.19

⁵⁸ Lau, A., 'Malayan Union Citizenship: Constitutional Change and Controversy in Malaya 1942-48,' *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 20, no. 2 (1989): pp. 216-243; Sopiee, M.N., *From Malayan Union to*

Singapore Separation (Kuala Lumpur: University Malaya Press, 1974; Simandjuntak, B., *Malayan Federalism, 1945-1963* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969)

⁵⁹ Cmd 6724, Cf Great Britain. Malayan Union and Singapore: Statement of Policy on Future Constitution. (London, 1946)

⁶⁰ CO 537/2145 Malayan Union: Reactions to Constitutional Proposals (1947).

⁶¹ Ching, O.H., *Chinese Politics in Malaya 1942-55: The Dynamics of British Policy* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2000), p.88

⁶² CO 537/3758, Malaya: Chinese Affairs. no 19. Letter from Sir H. Gurney to Sir T Lloyd, 8 October, 1948.

political power only after the establishment of civilian government.⁶³

At this stage, the radical attitude of some of the MCP members has not yet materialized. According to Jackson there were two main factors that diverted the attention of the BMA from the growing Communist threat. One was the dissatisfaction of large sections of the working population with conditions in general and continual food shortages in particular; the other was the confused state of Malayan politics in the immediate post-war years, which helped to divert the attention of the authorities from the growing Communist threat.⁶⁴

The MCP was optimistic that it could win a constitutional battle against the British in the immediate post-war period. As part of its strategy, it made concerted efforts to assist the formation of Malay as well as non-communal political organizations which it hoped to dominate. After the collapse of KMM, Mokhtaruddin Lasso, Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Ishak Haji Muhammad and Ahmad Boestamam established the Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM) or the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) in October 17, 1945 in response to a British attempt to re-colonize Malaya after the war ended. Mokhtaruddin Lasso himself was a communist and a leader of the MPAJA. Boestamam accepted his participation in the IMP after being assured that he would not interfere with the editorial policy of *Suara Rakyat* (IMP's official newspaper).⁶⁵ MNP was anti-imperialism, anti-Federation and struggled for full independence within Indonesia. The main agenda of the party was to unite Malaya with Indonesia.⁶⁶ Toward this goal, they affiliated various pro-Indonesian political groups to the MNP as satellite organizations. They organized youths and religious groups into three major political wings – the Angkatan Pemuda Insaf or API (Generation of Awakened Youth), the Angkatan Wanita Sedar or AWAS (Generation of Awakened Woman) and the Majlis Agama Tertinggi or MATA (Supreme Islamic Council). MNP also sought the cooperation of various non-Malay political groups and left-wing Malay groupings within Pusat Tenaga Rakyat or PUTERA (Centre of People's Power) in early 1947. In mid 1947, API was banned and with the onset of the Emergency in 1948 many PUTERA member organizations met the same fate.⁶⁷

Hence the MCP supported the formation of the MNP and attended the meeting of committees of the

Malayan Democratic Union (MDU) as well as playing an important role in the formation of the Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action. Communist representatives, in the persons of Rashid Mydin, Musa Ahmad and Gerald de Cruz, were also present during the founding of Hizbul Muslimin, an early Muslim political movement and associated to PAS, in Gunung Semanggol. However, despite MCP's efforts to attract the Malays, the cleavage between the Malays and the Chinese was simply too wide to bridge.⁶⁸

The Malayan Union scheme had divided the Chinese and the Malays. The Malayan Union scheme was first announced on October 10, 1945 in a brief statement in London. Most of the Chinese and the MCP members accepted the idea but not majority of the Malays.⁶⁹

As a reaction toward the Malayan Union, the Malays formed a political body, the United Malay Nationalist Organization (UMNO) UMNO was formed in 1946 after a Pan-Malayan Congress that brought together all the major Malay-Muslim political groupings of the country. The Congress included representatives of the conservative, leftist, nationalist and Islamist camps, but the leftists soon left the movement altogether. UMNO remains the most dominant party in Malaysia today. It was formed as a conglomeration of Malay nationalist organisations. UMNO's ideological stand remains right of centre, with strong neofeudal and conservative-traditionalist elements in the party's culture. UMNO has also been at the head of the ruling alliance which has been in power in the country since independence was granted in 1957. At first the Alliance (Perikatan) was made up of UMNO, the Malaysian Chinese Assembly (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). In 1974 the Alliance was disbanded and replaced with the National Front (Barisan Nasional) coalition that included UMNO, MCA, MIC and others parties such as Gerakan, PPP, SUPP, Berjasa, and even the Islamic party PAS (which joined the coalition between 1973 to 1978).⁷⁰

As a result, the Malayan Union was never fully implemented on account of country-wide opposition from the Malays.⁷¹ The Malays opposed Malayan Union mainly because of the citizenship proposals. They worried that the plan might 'open the door to a Chinese and to a lesser extent Indian predominance in the

⁶³ Ching, O.H., *Chinese Politics in Malaya 1942-55: The Dynamics of British Policy* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2000), p.89

⁶⁴ Jackson, R., *The Malayan Emergency: The Commonwealth's Wars, 1948-1960* (London: Routledge, 1991), P.11

⁶⁵ Abdullah, F., *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origin and Early Development* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publication, 1985), p.77

⁶⁶ SG. 96/1946. 'The IMP Constitution'. UMNO file available at Malaysian National Archives.

⁶⁷ Funston, N.J., *Malay Politics in Malaysia: A Study of UMNO and PAS* (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd, 1980), p. 40

⁶⁸ Ongkili, J.P., *Nation-building in Malaysia 1946-1974* (Oxford and others: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.7

⁶⁹ Stockwell, A.J., *British Policy and Malaya Politics during the Malayan Union Experiment, 1942-1948* (Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society Monograph No. 8, 1979); Sopiee, M.N., *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malayan Region, 1946-1965* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1974).

⁷⁰ Rahmat, M., *Barisan Nasional: Balancing Communal Rights* (Kuala Lumpur, Dasar Cetak Sdn. Bhd, 1998)

⁷¹ CO 537/1581, HQ Malaya Command weekly intelligence review, no.17, 23 February, 1946

political field'.⁷² As a result, the Malay rulers in Malaya had requested that Federation might be substituted for Union. UMNO led by Dato Onn had been active and had exercised a powerful influence over the Malay rulers.⁷³

It is important to note that although MNP and UMNO were both against the Malayan Union scheme, the UMNO's opposition to the scheme received accommodative and consultative treatment in the sense that the British agreed to open dialogue with UMNO and the Sultans to discuss alternative arrangements. The Colonial Office then held discussions with the Malay rulers and the UMNO through a special body called the Working Committee, with the aim of working out a proposal for a new Federation of Malaya. At the end of 1946 the proposals for a Federation of Malaya were referred to the Chinese, Indian and other non-Malay sections of the community for their reaction and comment. Although the plan was generally well received, the MNP did not accept it because the proposal would still make Malaya 'a cleverly camouflaged British colony and breeding ground of imperialism'. The proposal was also rejected by the MCP because of its bias in favour of the Malays.⁷⁴ However, the MNP and MCP opposition towards the Federation scheme failed when the Federation of Malaya was inaugurated on February 1, 1948. The failure of the anti-Federation movements such as MNP was also followed by the failure of the MCP's struggle by constitutional means. As a consequence, the MCP dropped its moderate line and resorted to armed revolt against British rule in Malaya. The MCP also dismantled the AMCJA-PUTERA, as it had lost faith in the constitutional struggle. As a result, the anti-Federation movements disintegrated after the inauguration of the Federation of Malaya. Under the Emergency Regulations, the British proscribed the MCP and other anti-British political organizations. The MNP was formally banned in May, 1950.⁷⁵ With the MNP's dissolution, the prime ideal of the pro-Indonesian Malay nationalists, namely independence of Malaya within Indonesia eventually died. Consequently, in the wake of the Communist armed revolt, the UMNO's constitutional struggle became the only possible path toward the independence of Malaya.

VII. THE POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM AND MALAY HEGEMONY

It is evident from the colonial experience and especially after the war period that political power in

Malaya would be communally based, in the hands of the dominant Malay community.⁷⁶ The challenge for politicians in this period lay thus in the task of inventing and implementing a political system and social order that would prevent communal clashes and enhance stability. The ruling regime required more than military security to substantiate its claim to legitimacy.

The security threats from MCP gave the British colonial power the opportunity to deflect the forces of revolt by establishing a political party system. In 1949, the communist threats indirectly responsible for the creation of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA). Its formation was encouraged by the British in the hope that it would represent the Chinese and as an alternative to MCP. The British High Commissioner to Malaya, Henry Gurney, proposed this political solution and argued that MCA would cooperate with the Malay party as well as reducing the Communist influences.⁷⁷ With this in mind, the tripartite 'Alliance Formula' was devised to accommodate several political parties, each representing a particular ethnic group. The upper stratum of the non-Malay communities were appointed to legal and advisory bodies of the Alliance.

Apart from political parties, Malcolm MacDonald also created the Communities Liaison Committee (CLC) which was aimed to solve inter-racial conflict in the face of the MCP insurrection. The CLC was promoted as a multi-racial alternative to the Communist Party and became a starting point for establishment of a Malayan government. The members of the CLC were prominent leaders of the UMNO, MCA and others. The CLC was an unofficial body but in fact it was a policy making avenue for the colonial government in Malaya. Ideas, originating from the government, were put forward by the British administration for a discussion by the CLC. Later, it adopted them as its own and forwarded them back to the government. The government then took steps to make a further study on the CLC's proposals and adopted them as government policy. Gordon P Means argued that it was from this communal bargaining within the CLC that the basis for the Alliance emerged.⁷⁸

In 1951 the British Government introduced the 'Member system' (akin to the Ministerial system) to train unofficial members of the Legislative Council⁷⁹ in various responsibilities. In the same year, the Malayan Federal Legislative Council had 75 members, of whom 14 were officials, 9 were the Presidents of the Councils of State of each of the nine Malay States, 2 were representatives

⁷² CAB 129/7, CP (46)81, 'Malayan policy': Cabinet memorandum by Mr Hall, 26 February, 1946

⁷³ CO 537/1528, 'Minutes by H T Bourdillon, J. J. Paskin and Sir G Gater', 25-26 April, 1946

⁷⁴ Abdullah, F., *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origin and Early Development* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publicationa, 1985), p.88

⁷⁵ Ibid. pp.96-103

⁷⁶ CO 537/3746, no.19 'Future political and economic developments in Malaya': note by CO Eastern Department, Sept, 1948.

⁷⁷ CO537/4242, no. 1 'inward telegram no 1636 from H Gurney to Mr Creech Jones' 19 December, 1948

⁷⁸ Means, G.P., *Malaysian Politics* (London: University of London Press, 1970), p. 124.

⁷⁹ CAB 129/48, C(51) 59 'Malaya': Cabinet memorandum by Mr Lyttelton. Appendix III, 21 Dec 1951

of the Settlement Councils of Penang and Malacca and 50 were unofficials. The unofficial members were all nominated. There were selected to represent different interests. The racial composition of the Council was: 34 Malays, 17 British, 16 Chinese, 5 Indians, 2 Ceylonese and 1 Eurasian. They also became spokesmen of the High Commissioner's administration. Selected unofficial members were appointed as Member for Home affairs; Member for Agriculture and Forestry; Member for Health; Member for Education; Member for Lands, Mines, and Communication; and Member for Works and Housing. These special members sat in the Federal Executive Council. Three were Malays, one was a Chinese, one was from Ceylon, and one a European. Independence Malaya Party (IMP) and UMNO leaders were appointed to these posts. Although Onn had stepped down as UMNO's president, he was appointed Member for Home Affairs, while Dato' Thuraisingham was appointed Member for Education, but the Tunku, the then first Prime Minister of Malaya, was not in the list. It is believed that Dato Onn hoped through his role as Member for Home Affairs that he could build up a public following to undermine UMNO and Tunku's leadership. However, the UMNO-MCA Alliance proved that the formation of an inter-racial partnership had more potential than Onn's single non-communal party, the IMP, which attempted to represent members of all communities.⁸⁰

The Alliance Party has its roots in a local electoral pact between the branches of the UMNO and MCA in 1952. The UMNO-MCA alliance won nine of the twelve seats in the Kuala Lumpur municipal election on 16 February 1952. Two weeks after this election, the Tunku held talks with Tan Cheng Lock on extending the UMNO-MCA cooperation to the other municipal and town council elections scheduled for later that year and in 1953.⁸¹ The original UMNO-MCA Alliance formed in 1952 had two main roots. First, there was a local government alliance which grew out of a joint tin-mining venture in Selangor between a few enterprising UMNO Malays and a group of MCA business men led by Colonel H. S. Lee. There was, of course, nothing remarkable about this kind of cooperation between Malays and Chinese. It had been a feature of Malayan history long before the British entered the Malay States. Secondly, there was the resentment felt by both UMNO and MCA leaders in 1952 at the denial by the Secretary of State for the Colonies of Malaya's right to self-government while it remained communally divided. The UMNO and MCA leaders therefore determined to prove to the British that they were capable of achieving

sufficient unity to secure independence. In the meantime it was mutually agreed to defer a settlement of the basic disagreements on citizenship, education, language, immigration and economic matters which had been obstacles to Malayan political advance from 1945 to 1952.⁸²

In 1954, the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) was accepted as a third partner of the Alliance. There was substantial overrepresentation of minority Chinese candidates. According to Von Vorys, elections demonstrated that "an inter-communal coalition of organizationally distinct ethnic parties offering a common slate of candidates, and fully endorsed by UMNO leadership, could be electorally successful through the mobilization of Malay ethnic loyalties and votes for non-Malay candidates".⁸³ The primary decision-making body of the Alliance, the National Executive Committee, had powers to select candidates, initiate policies, recommend disciplinary measures, and select the chief party administrators. It consisted of six representatives each from UMNO and the MCA and three from the MIC. Its members were elected from within the 30-member National Council, in which UMNO had a slight majority. Below the national level, coordination between the partners was less tight. Each state had a liaison committee and several divisional committees to coordinate activities. There was no Alliance organization at the branch level.⁸⁴

Conflicts were settled within the party through an ad-hoc top-level Alliance Action Committee.⁸⁵ Within the Alliance, there was relative proportional power-sharing as reflected in the relative symmetry of party representation in the Alliance councils, in the distribution of electoral seats and Cabinet positions, patronage appointments and 'in the general perception that despite UMNO dominance, the MCA and MIC leaders were efficacious representatives of non-Malay interests because of the moral linkages between the senior Alliance leaders'.⁸⁶

In understanding the Alliance party, Von Vorys has argued that the coalition was based on the co-operation of discrete communal groups and the mode of politics in this system was based on the hierarchy and

⁸² Chee, S., 'Consociational political leadership and conflict regulation in Malaysia'. In: Chee, S. (ed.) *Leadership and security in south east Asia: Institutional aspect* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991), pp. 53-86.

⁸³ Vorys, K.V., *Democracy without consensus: Communalism and political stability in Malaysia* (Princeton: Princeton university press, 1975)

⁸⁴ Milne, R.S., *Politics and Government in Malaysia* (Singapore: Federal publications, 1978), pp.130-131.

⁸⁵ Ibid. pp.130-131.

⁸⁶ Chee, S., 'Consociational political leadership and conflict regulation in Malaysia'. In: Chee, S. (ed.) *Leadership and security in south east Asia: Institutional aspects* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991), pp. 53-83.

⁸⁰ CAB 129/48, c(51)59, 'Malaya': Cabinet memorandum by Mr Lyttelton., 21 Dec 1951

⁸¹ Fernando, J.M., *The Making of the Malayan Constitution* (Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysia Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 2002), p. 29

secrecy.⁸⁷ He further agreed with the idea that Alliance was a formula for winning elections. Different from the segmental mobilization of segmental parties, where elections are about bringing out the faithful to rally behind their own party, the 'vertical mobilization' of the Alliance partners meant that supporters were asked to vote for whichever Alliance candidate was nominated for that district, irrespective of the ethnic background of the candidate. The success of this practice of intra-Alliance inter-ethnic vote exchange is demonstrated in the remarkable absence of significant correlation between the communal composition of the constituency and the votes cast for the Alliance.⁸⁸

The development in the Alliance led to political bargaining on the issue of constitution and citizenship. The political bargaining includes: (i) the constitution of Malay "special rights", (ii) Malay as the sole national language, (iii) Islam as the official religion, (iv) the Malay Sultans as the heads of state, and (v) a qualified form of citizenship for the majority of the non-Malays.⁸⁹ However, the leftist Chinese-educated subgroup pursued a decidedly confrontational strategy. Their uncompromising attitude was in part due to their strong attachment to the politics of class conflicts and struggles. Indeed, their aim was to defeat the British imperialists, Malay feudalists and Chinese capitalist alliance and establish a socialist society where the State would control the entire economic life of the society.⁹⁰ The position of the leftist Chinese led to a reaction by some conservative groups who advocated denying the Chinese citizenship or at least granting the Chinese only a limited citizenship status, as well as making it harder for them to acquire citizenship.⁹¹

With the establishment of the Alliance and their success in the first elections 1955, the cooperation between ethnic leaders began which has influenced the Malaysian political system to this day. However, this cooperation was mainly based on the UMNO definition of state. Shamsul Amri Baharudin explains:

When UMNO, together with elite-controlled MCA and MIC formed the Alliance, a coalition political party, and won its first national election in 1955 and continued to be successful until the formation of Malaysia, the Malayan federation concept, which legally recognized Malay dominance, remained the concept of nation which Malaysia upholds. ... It is UMNO's concept of bangsa (nation) and kebangsaan Melayu (Malay

nationalism) which informed the construction of Malaysia's national character.⁹²

The success in the formation of the Alliance also assisted in speeding up independence, which was initially planned to take place only after the end of the Emergency. Independence, therefore, was based on the ability of the local elite to promote political stability as it had been articulated in the Alliance. From a security point of view, Malaya was still threatened with the Communist insurgency and no one was expecting the transfer of power before 1960. In this sense, Independence was granted on the basis that Malaya would still be protected by the British forces. British assistance was still needed especially for its security forces after the transfer of power.⁹³ British protection was considered necessary because, as mentioned by H.S. Lee, the United Kingdom government could not afford to see Malaya overrun by the Communists.⁹⁴ This fact had been noted in 1950 by the Colonial Office and the Cabinet Malaya Committee, which emphasized the 'substantial grounds for regarding the Malayan outbreak as stimulated by Moscow and the existence of a Communist plot to overthrow by armed force the Malay Government.'⁹⁵

In the granting of independence and, later, the formation of Malaysia, the Communist threat had played an important and critical role. Further, the solution to the threat was not simply achieved in a military field but mostly by political means. Templer said, 'The answer lies not in pouring more soldiers into the jungle, but in the heart and minds of the Malayan people'.⁹⁶ The strategy for success was also stressed by Robert Thompson, who recommended that the government must give priority to defeating political subversion, not the guerrillas.⁹⁷ Thompson was right in stressing the issue of political subversion because the MCP main agenda was to topple the Malayan government and to establish a Socialist Republic.

In short, the overwhelming electoral victory of the Alliance destroyed all Communist claims to represent the popular will. By winning the 'heart and minds' of the Malayan people and by adopting a constitutional means to achieve independence, the Alliance was able to protect Malaya's political security.

⁸⁷ Vorys, K.V., *Democracy Without Consensus*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 14-15

⁸⁸ Vorys, K.V., . p.151

⁸⁹ Loh, F.K.W., *The Politics of Chinese Unity in Malaysia* (Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1982), p.7

⁹⁰ Vasil, R.K., *Politics in a Plural Society*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970) p.142.

⁹¹ Ratnam, K.J., *Communalism and the Political Process in the Federation of Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979)

⁹² Baharudin, S.A., 'The Construction and Transformation of a Social Identity: Malayness and Bumiputraness Re-examined'. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 52, (1996), pp. 15-33.

⁹³ Cmd. 9714, Report by the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Conference, February 1956, p.10.

⁹⁴ CO/1030/72, Memorandum by Col. H.S. Lee, a member of the Malayan delegation to secretary of state for Colonial, 31 Jan 1956.

⁹⁵ PREM 8/1406/2, MAL C (50) 12. Report on Malaysia

⁹⁶ Tregonning, K., 'Malaya: 1955', *Australian Quarterly*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, (June 1956), p.25

⁹⁷ Thompson, R., *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (Praeger: New York, 1966), pp. 50-57.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This article has explored the British political legacy in Malaya. First, as a response to colonization, early social and political movements (notably MCP and KMM) developed. However, these movements were not nationalistic enough in a sense that they were struggled for an Indonesian or Chinese cause and not for Malaya itself. Second, colonial rule transformed the demography and political geography of Malaya. Third, after the war, British rule also nearly paved the way for the MCP to establish their form of government. In this respect, Malayan politics was threatened by the MCP, which failed in its constitutional struggle and launched a strategy of terror. As a response, the British administration implemented a strict security policy to face the Communist insurgency. Fourth, this strategy was also complemented by the establishment of political parties such as MCA to wean the Chinese away from Communism. As a reaction to this, a few political parties representing each ethnic group cooperated to form the Alliance, which then became one of the prerequisites to Independence. The establishment of the Alliance also meant that Malayan politics could be managed through political accommodation and the political party system. The ruling party then formed the Government and institutions, which were inherited from the colonial regime.

