

The British Legacy on the Development of Politics in Malaya

Mohd Rizal bin Mohd 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 as reasons to justify the policy of intervention and colonial rule in this area. Later, the idea to create political stability and security led the British to initiate political structures and processes in Malaya. The British colonial influence was profound because it established institutions and policies on which the later Malayan ruling regime was based on. 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, the political parties 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.*

KEY WORDS: *British legacy, Malaya, multi-ethnic society, the federal type of political system, the political parties and the government.*

INTRODUCTION

From the late eighteenth century, the British began to expand their influence over the Malayan peninsula situated in Southeast Asia through trade. Indirect rule in Malaya started by the British East India Company (BEIC), in its effort to foster and protect its lucrative trade route between India and China. The Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 gave the British control over the Straits of Malacca and created the contemporary boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia (Tarling, 1962:5; and Allen, 1968:30).

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The 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 (Tarling, 1969; and Turnbull, 1972:9 and 10). 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” (Tarling, 2001:48-49).

It is important to note that 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. However, the British existence changed the demographic and political structure in Malaya.

CHANGE IN DEMOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL POWER IN MALAYA

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 (1939-1945) and especially in the aftermath of the “Malayan Union” proposal of 1946 (Stockwell, 1979). Political expediency arising from the aforementioned developments further reinforced a sense of identity of the “Malay” as one “who professes the Muslim religion, habitually speaks the Malay language, [and] conforms to Malay custom” (*Malayan Constitutional Documents*, 1962:124). The official definition of Malay identity was inherited from 1913 British enactment in which “a Malay was a person belonging to any Malay race who habitually speaks the Malay language [...] and professes the Muslim religion” (Sheridan, 1961:146; Rogers, 1969:931; and Ong, 1990:259). 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 rubber industries in Malaya.¹ H.P. Koon argues that although the Chinese traders first came to the Malay

¹See CAB 98/41, CMB(44) 3, “Future Constitutional Policy for British Colonial Territories in South-East Asia” in *Memorandum* by Mr Stanly for War Cabinet Committee on Malaya and Borneo, 14 January 1944.

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 (Koon, 1988:15). Many aspects of this early stage of the mining industry were controlled by Chinese secret societies with well-developed financial and labour organizational networks.² 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 (Stenson, 1980:18).

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.³ This worried the Malays who feared that the Chinese might control them.⁴ 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 (Malayan Communist Party). 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 (Andaya & Andaya, 2001:248). 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.

²CAB 129/28, CP(48) 171, "The Situation in Malaya" in *Cabinet Memorandum* by Mr Creech Jones. See also J.D. Vaughan (1879); and M.L. Fong (1981).

³CAB 129/28, CP(48)171, "The Situation in Malaya" in *Cabinet Memorandum* by Mr Creech Jones.

⁴CO 537/3746 No.9, "A Note" by Linehan on *the Malay Dimension*, 2 March 1948.

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 (Lopez, 2005; and www.penerbit.ukm.my/jsari19-01.pdf, 24/10/2005).

By the First World War (1914-1918), 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.⁵

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 (Stockwell ed., 1995:23).

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

⁵See CO 825/354 No.52, "A Post-War Settlement in the Far East: Need for a Definite Policy" in *Joint CO-FO Memorandum*, August 1942; and A.J. Stockwell ed. (1995:23).

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 (Andaya & Andaya, 2001:248-251).

THE BRITISH AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS IN MALAYA

The marginal political role of Malay rulers as a result of the British administration had led to two important political movements. *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.

KMM was formed under the leadership of Ibrahim Yaacob. The movement was known as the Malay “left”, mainly because of its anti-feudalism, anti-British and pro-Indonesian stand. 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. However, the KMM attempts failed and led to its 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 and he fled to Indonesia (Abdullah, 1985:66-68).

On the other hand, MCP was created due to an early Communist movement in Malaya as a reaction to the emergence of the ideology and its movement in Indonesia. J.S. Mintz noted that Marxism was formally first introduced into Indonesia where the Indies Social Democratic Association (ISDV, *Indische Social Democraat Vereneening*) was founded in 1914 (Mintz, 1959:171-239; and Benda & McVey eds., 1960). 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. MCP was then formed in Singapore in

early 1930. 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 (Kheng, 1983).

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 (1939-1945), 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. The inability of radical 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. A.J. 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 (Stockwell, 1979).

THE BRITISH MILITARY ADMINISTRATION 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.⁶

However, the war had left a political vacuum in Malaya for a few weeks because the South East Asian Command (SEAC) was unable to send its troops into Malaya immediately after the unconditional surrender of Japan.

⁶See WO 203/5642, "Inward Telegram No.434 from M.E. Denning to Foreign Office", 3 September 1945.

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 (Hashim, 1984; and Ching, 2000:85). At the same time, the MCP was legalized and attempted to fulfil its eight point programme by cooperating with the British.⁷

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.⁸ 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 (British Military Administration) 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.⁹

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.¹⁰ During this period, the restoration of the pre-war Constitution and administrative system would be undesirable in the interests of efficiency and security.¹¹ 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.¹² Victor Purcell, the BMA's chief Chinese Affairs advisors reported the misbehaviour of the Indian troops, as well as the unpopularity of the

⁷See WO 203/5642, "Inward Telegram No.433 from M.E. Denning to Foreign Office", 3 September 1945; and O.H. Ching (2000:86).

⁸See WO 203/5642 No.12/16/45, "Signal from C. MacKenzie", 24 August 1945.

⁹See 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.

¹⁰WO 203/5642 No.14/16/45, "A Proclamation to Establish a Military Administrative Issued" by Admiral Mounbatten, 15 August 1945.

¹¹CAB 129/1, C(45) 133, "Policy in Regard to Malaya and Borneo" in *Cabinet Memorandum* by Mr. Hall, 29 August 1945.

¹²See 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; and CO 537/3757, "Report on Unrest in Malaya", September 1948.

armed forces among the Chinese in Singapore.¹³ According to J. 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 (Springhall, 2001:642).

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 (Kheng, 1981:108-117; and Kheng, 1983). 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 (Kheng, 1979:19).

During BMA, the British administration was not effective and efficient enough to guarantee political stability in Malaya. Ethnic relation was low and chaos were uncontrolled. From administrative point of view, the British started to think about a plan to centralized political power and administration. At the same time, the British also expected the sole political power and administration should come from them. This could be argued as a result of British learnt a lesson from previous war with the Japanese and a struggle with the MPAJA. Therefore, the British proposed the idea of Malayan Union.

¹³See also WO 203/5302, "Victor Purcell to Wood", 28 December 1945; and WO 203/5302, "Malaya's Political Climate", IV for 10-30 Nov 1945: *Report* by Purcell from Singapore, 3 December 1945.

THE BRITISH AND MALAYAN UNION

Malayan Union scheme was first announced on October 10, 1945 in a brief statement in London. However, the scheme had divided the Chinese and the Malays. Most of the Chinese and the MCP members accepted the idea but not majority of the Malays (Sopiee, 1974; and Stockwell, 1979).

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 (Simandjuntak, 1969; Sopiee, 1974; and Lau, 1989:216-243). 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 (CMD, 9714; and Great Britain, 1946). 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.¹⁴

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

¹⁴See CO 537/2145, "Malayan Union: Reactions to Constitutional Proposals" (1947).

(Ching, 2000:88). 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.¹⁵ During the BMA, the Straits Chinese were weak and isolated. The former leaders gained their political power only after the establishment of civilian government (Ching, 2000:89). At this stage, the radical attitude of some of the MCP members has not yet materialized. 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.

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 neo-feudal 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 (Rahmat, 1998).

As a result, the Malayan Union was never fully implemented on account of country-wide opposition from the Malays.¹⁶ 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 political field".¹⁷ As a result, the Malay rulers in Malaya

¹⁵See CO 537/3758, "Malaya: Chinese Affairs", No.19. *Letter* from Sir H. Gurney to Sir T. Lloyd, 8 October 1948.

¹⁶See CO 537/1581, "HQ Malaya Command Weekly Intelligence Review", No.17, 23 February 1946.

¹⁷See CAB 129/7, CP(46) 81, "Malayan Policy" in *Cabinet Memorandum* by Mr. Hall, 26 February 1946.

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.¹⁸

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 makes 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 (Abdullah, 1985:88).

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 (Abdullah, 1985:96-103). 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.

THE POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM AND MALAYAN GOVERNMENT

It is evident from the colonial experience and especially after the war period that political power in Malaya would be communally based, in the

¹⁸See CO 537/1528, "Minutes by H.T. Bourdillon, J.J. Paskin, and Sir G. Gater", 25-26 April 1946.

hands of the dominant Malay community.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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 (Means, 1970:124).

In 1951, the British Government introduced the "Member system" (akin to the Ministerial system) to train unofficial members of the Legislative Council²¹ in various responsibilities. In the same year, the Malayan Federal

¹⁹See CO 537/3746 No.19, "Future Political and Economic Developments in Malaya" in *Note* by CO Eastern Department, September 1948.

²⁰See CO 537/4242 No.1, "Inward Telegram No.1636 from H. Gurney to Mr. Creech Jones", 19 December 1948.

²¹See CAB 129/48, C(51) 59, "Malaya" in *Cabinet Memorandum* by Mr. Lyttelton, Appendix III, 21 December 1951.

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 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 Dato' 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 Abdul Rahman Putra, 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 Dato' Onn's single non-communal party, the IMP, which attempted to represent members of all communities.²²

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 Abdul Rahman Putra 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 (Fernando, 2002:29).

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

²²See CAB 129/48, C(51) 59, "Malaya" in *Cabinet Memorandum* by Mr. Lyttelton, 21 December 1951.

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 (Chee, 1991:53-86).

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 K. Von Vorys (1975), 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". 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 (Milne, 1978:130-131).

Conflicts were settled within the party through an ad-hoc top level Alliance Action Committee (Milne, 1978:131). 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" (Chee, 1991:53-83).

In understanding the Alliance party, K. 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 secrecy (Vorys, 1975:14-15). 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 (Vorys, 1975:151).

The development in the Alliance led to political bargaining on the issue of constitution and citizenship. The political bargaining includes: (1) the constitution of Malay “special rights”; (2) Malay as the sole national language; (3) Islam as the official religion; (4) the Malay Sultans as the heads of state; and (5) a qualified form of citizenship for the majority of the non-Malays (Loh, 1982:7). 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 (Vasil, 1970:142). 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 (Ratnam, 1979).

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 as follows:

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 (Baharudin, 1996:15-33).

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.²³

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.²⁴ 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”.²⁵ In the granting of independence, Communist threat was critical role and the solution was mostly through political means. By adopting a constitutional means, the Alliance was able to protect Malaya’s political security.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored the British political legacy in Malaya. *First*, as a response to colonization, early social and political movements 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.

²³See CMD 9714, “Report by the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Conference”, February 1956, p.10.

²⁴See CO/1030/72, “Memorandum by Col. H.S. Lee, a Member of the Malayan Delegation to Secretary of State for Colonial”, 31 January 1956.

²⁵See PREM 8/1406/2, MAL C(50) 12, “Report on Malaysia”.

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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.