

# JOURNAL OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

Volume XII, No. 1

March 1981

Published twice a year



SINGAPORE UNIVERSITY PRESS



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# Sino-Malay Conflicts in Malaya, 1945–1946: Communist Vendetta and Islamic Resistance

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The Japanese occupation (1941–45) in Malaya enabled the predominantly Chinese Malayan Communist Party (MCP) to increase its political influence during and after the war. As it was the only effective political organization actively engaged in anti-Japanese insurgency, it attracted widespread support among the Chinese who suffered greatly from the hostility of the Japanese. The MCP succeeded, therefore, in establishing a strong politico-military resistance movement led by the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), in the midst of the Chinese community. There was, however, considerably less support for the MCP from the Malay and Indian communities because their cooperation with the Japanese was clearly better and greater than that of the Chinese. None the less, because of its sizeable guerrilla forces operating during the Japanese occupation, the MCP thus became a major political force in post-war Malaya.

The Japanese occupation helped bring about certain changes in the structure of Chinese society in Malaya. Traditional Chinese leaders had either fled the country or were forced to cooperate with the Japanese if they remained. Consequently, the pre-war Chinese elites were discredited and frequently despised. Their places in the Chinese community tended to be replaced by Chinese communists who were mostly of a younger generation. On the whole, the Japanese occupation and the war experience strengthened Chinese nationalism and their sense of ethnic identity.

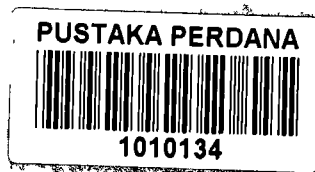
The greatest overall change produced by the Japanese administration was in the area of race relations. Although the Japanese did not deliberately foster racial conflict between Malays and Chinese, their policies had this effect. Repressive measures against the Chinese led to the formation of a Chinese-dominated resistance movement; the "pro-Malay" policy of the Japanese created an undercurrent of resentment and distrust among Chinese towards Malays. Malay cooperation made the Malays appear a chosen instrument of the Japanese. The largely Malay units of the Heiho, Giyu Gun, and Giyu Tai<sup>1</sup> were, in fact, as racially divisive as the Chinese MPAJA, and since they were deployed by the Japanese in operations against the predominantly Chinese resistance movement, this further contributed to a widening of the racial cleavage in Malaya. As Willard Ellsbree observed, had there been equal proportions of Chinese and Malays in the resistance as well as in collaboration, "the bitterness which came in the wake of the occupation would not have had such a pronounced racial tinge".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For information on these units, see Joyce C. Lebra, *Japanese-Trained Armies in Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur, 1977), pp. 116–19.

<sup>2</sup> Willard H. Ellsbree, *Japan's Role in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements, 1940 to 1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 149.



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In the Chinese-Malay clashes which first began in the period March-August 1945 in the southwestern districts of Johor state and later spread to other parts of the peninsular, the local charismatic *imam* (religious head) provided the leadership and Islam the force behind the anti-MPAJA and anti-Chinese struggle of the Malays. The local Malays turned to the charismatic *imam* who allegedly possessed supernatural powers to make them invincible in battle. The emergence of fighting Red Bands of the Sabilillah (Holy War) Army and their leader, Kiyai Salleh,<sup>3</sup> was a spontaneous grass-roots movement which did not seem to be in any way inspired by the Japanese. The Sabilillah Movement was purely anti-Chinese and anti-MPAJA in its objective. It was a Malay struggle to: (1) protect and safeguard the Islamic religion whose sacred principles allegedly had been violated by the Chinese and the MPAJA; and (2) to avenge the many Malays who had been humiliated, abducted, tortured, and killed as suspected Japanese collaborators. Kiyai Salleh's fighting prowess and supernatural powers grew into a legend among the Malays, and he inspired them further to unite and fight the Chinese/MPAJA. Under his leadership the Malays successfully repulsed the MPAJA and broke down Chinese resistance.

The MPAJA was clearly identified as a Chinese organization when they went to the defence of Chinese settlers under attack by the Sabilillah Army. This alienation of Malay support demolished their claim to represent multi-racial unity as indicated by their three-star symbol (each star representing Chinese, Malays, and Indians). The bloodbath which the Chinese suffered during these clashes showed their inability to counter and deflect the Malay challenge successfully. The Malay attacks further demonstrated that the religious/mystical nature of the Sabilillah Movement was a peculiarly unique and successful Malay way to counter the Chinese. The Malays appear to have discovered their strength and ability to withstand the MPAJA/Chinese challenge and to inflict serious casualties on the Chinese.

#### *The Conflicts, September 1945-March 1946*

The Chinese-Malay clashes continued in intensity during the post-surrender interregnum, but ended temporarily before the arrival of British forces. This was largely due to a truce arranged through the mediation of Datuk Onn Jaafar, the District Officer of Batu Pahat.<sup>4</sup> However, Chinese-Malay ill-will and tension lay dormant not only in Johor and Perak states but also throughout the country. The MCP was aware of the existence of racial tension from September to December, as indicated by reported attempts of Chinese communists in various areas to foster goodwill between Chinese and Malays in order to get Malay support to fight British colonial-

<sup>3</sup> The best account on Kiyai Salleh and the Sufi orders is Syed Naguib al-Attas, *Some Aspects of Sufism, as Understood and Practised among the Malays* (Singapore, 1963), pp. 33-34. An excellent case study of Kiyai Salleh and his Simpang Kiri area can be found in Halinah Bamadhaj, "The Impact of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya on Malay Society and Politics, 1941-1945 (M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> Datuk Onn, scion of the royal household of Johor, was appointed DO in Aug. 1945 by the Japanese, with the consent of Sultan Ibrahim of Johor. His appointment was to replace Ismail bin Dato Abdullah who was killed in June of that year by the MPAJA.

ism.<sup>5</sup> However, these attempts were uncoordinated and unsustainable. In any case, British military intelligence observed that the Malays rebuffed such communist overtures because they doubted communist intentions and feared they would only be used as tools of the communists. Soon after this the MCP shifted its interests and paid maximum attention to the British Military Administration (BMA) and to its interim goals, such as the organization of labour, the formation of United Front bodies, and the presentation of specific demands on human rights, the improvement of wages, and the raising of living standards. The effects, both in the long and short term, of racial ill-will between the Chinese and Malays appear to have been ignored by the MCP.

The prolonged racial ill-will and conflict can be traced to the high-handed bearing of the MPAJA guerrillas and their relentless pursuit of Malay collaborators in particular. Before 15 August collaboration with the Japanese was of primary political importance, but after the Japanese surrender its importance had receded and become secondary. So long as the communist vendettas lasted, no meaningful Malay cooperation would be obtained by the MCP. The situation was somewhat aggravated by British policies, especially the BMA's extension of preferential treatment to the Chinese and to the MCP/MPAJA to the detriment of Malay interests.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the Malays found their role, status, and institutions in decline, if not suppressed by the BMA. In contrast, the Chinese seemed to be in the ascendancy and to have everything their way. The latest threat to Malay rights was represented by the British Government's announcement of the Malayan Union policy on 10 October which aimed at taking away their Sultans' sovereignty and granting equal citizenship rights to the Chinese.<sup>7</sup> The disclosure of the Malayan Union plan and the beginning of the British government's plenipotentiary Sir Harold MacMichael's mission to deprive the Malay rulers of their sovereignty were to promote further Malay hatred of the Chinese who were believed to benefit from these measures. Malay resentment against the British was thus built up. But first the Malays resorted to further violence against the Chinese. The struggle again took the form of the Sabilillah based on the teachings of the Malay *imam* which combined Islamic religious fervour and the Malay martial arts.

Racial tension and minor clashes were reported in Malacca, Johor, Pahang, Kedah, and Kelantan in September and October. A Force 136 field intelligence report of 11 September disclosed that the situation in the vicinity of Batu Pahat was difficult.<sup>8</sup> The Malays were still active. An eyewitness reported thirty Chinese killed

<sup>5</sup> See Malaya Command intelligence telegram, 29 Nov. 1945, "Subject: MCP activity: Klang. Village headman ordered by Chinese to enrol all Malays into Chinese fighting force." See also Intelligence Summary (ISUM) No. 28, Hqs. Malaya Command to SACSEA, 3 Dec. 1945: "Ipoh meeting. MCP representatives made speeches urging Malays to unite with Chinese." Enclosures in *BMA PSD/29*.

<sup>6</sup> The Chinese in Malaya were granted various freedoms by the BMA in 1945 which had been denied them before the war. Chinese associations, trade unions, and secret societies could be freely organized and Chinese newspapers published without controls. The British also proposed to grant them citizenship under the Malayan Union plan. Chinese would possess the same rights and privileges as other sections of the population. See "Chinese policy: Long-term Directive", 31 Oct. 1945, *WO 172/1789*.

<sup>7</sup> The best account on the Malayan Union policy is James V. Allen, *The Malayan Union* (New Haven, Conn., 1967).

<sup>8</sup> See Force 136 field intelligence report, 11 Sept. 1945, in *BMA PSD/39*. Force 136 was a component of Admiral Louis Mountbatten's South-East Asia Command. Mountbatten was the British Supreme Allied Commander for Southeast Asia (SACSEA).

and their houses burnt at Simpang Lima, and the Chinese population in Batu Pahat panicked. However, the first report received by telephone at the Headquarters of the Fifth Indian Division said 500 Chinese had been killed. An investigation showed that the figure was exaggerated, but confirmed there had been trouble. A column of British troops was despatched to Batu Pahat to restore order. Meanwhile, other Force 136 reports indicated that the Malay population in several areas was terrified of the MPAJA. One unconfirmed report said that the Malay District Officer (DO) at Mersing was executed by Chinese on 2 September. Another quoted a senior Malay police officer at Kluang as saying that the area's DO and Police Chief had been arrested by the MPAJA and were believed killed. The Malay officer appealed for protection for the remaining police at Kluang as he feared disturbances.<sup>9</sup>

On 19 September, Malays in Kota Bharu (Kelantan) petitioned the Sultan to prevent an outbreak of violence against the Malay population. The Malayan Kuomintang (KMT — Chinese Nationalist Party) guerrillas who controlled the town were said to be massing for an attack, and there was a reported plot, apparently by the KMT, to kill the deputy *Mentri Besar* (Chief Minister) of Kelantan, Datuk Nik Ahmad Kamil. Two Gurkha support groups were immediately despatched to Kota Bharu. At Kuala Krai, in spite of the promises made to the Force 136 officer attached to the Malay resistance unit, the MPAJA tried eleven Malays and sentenced three to death. The MPAJA leader, Wong Lit, was warned that while the BMA had no objection to his apprehending suspects, he was on no account to try or execute them.<sup>10</sup>

On 26 September, Chinese-Malay clashes occurred in Alor Gajah (Malacca), in which one Malay was killed and two Chinese seriously injured. The following day, armed Malays were reported attacking Chinese in Senggarang (Johor), one of the areas of racial violence during May to August 1945. Two Chinese were reported killed, but the trouble was quickly localized. After this incident, Force 136 considered that it would be better for the Army to use regular British troops rather than the MPAJA to suppress any trouble there.

On 29 September, Force 136 reported that frightened Malays were arriving in Pekan (Pahang) with stories of MPAJA killings and intimidation. On 12 October, a Malay chief of Negri Sembilan, the Datuk *Mentri* of Jelebu, was arrested by the MPAJA on charges of instigating the Japanese to kill Chinese and British troops found sheltering in his village. On 26 October, tension was reported between Chinese and Malays in Merbok village (Kedah).

Although these racial incidents were assuming serious proportions, the MCP, the BMA, and the Malay leaders did not do much to defuse the overall tension. On 6 November, there occurred the worst racial incident subsequent to the BMA takeover. At about six in the morning, a party of Malays armed with *parangs* (machete) and *kris* (dagger) descended on the Chinese settlement at Padang Leb near Kuala Pilah, and killed thirty-five women and children and five men. According to Victor Purcell, who rushed to the spot with the Senior Civil Affairs Officer (SCAO) for Negri Sembilan, Colonel Calder, the Malay attackers had buried the bodies except for those of the children, which they threw down the well.

<sup>9</sup> Force 136 reports, 15 and 16 Sept. 1945.

<sup>10</sup> Force 136, report, 26 Sept. 1945.

Ten Malays were arrested immediately and seven others later. They said during interrogations that they had risen in protest against being coerced to join the Communist Party by the Chinese who had also used threats to obtain subscriptions.<sup>11</sup>

A Malay view of the incident was that the BMA failed to contain these racial clashes because it was too weak in its early phase. This same source revealed that the Sabillillah Movement of Batu Pahat was directly involved in the Padang Lebar massacre. Kiyai Selamat, of Batu Pahat, one of the chief disciples of Kiyai Salleh, was said to have led a thousand Malays on the rampage from Batu Kikir to Padang Lebar, killing about 170 Chinese. British military intelligence subsequently found that Kiyai Selamat had been to Segamat, to Lenggeng, and as far afield as Mantin in Negri Sembilan to spread the teachings of Kiyai Salleh and to recruit followers. He was thought to be of North Borneo origin.<sup>12</sup>

The next day, there was a clash at the nearby village of Batu Kikir between Malays and MPAJA guards posted there to restore order. Four MPAJA guards were killed, while Malay casualties were six killed and two injured. On 8 November, Purcell and Calder toured Kuala Pilah and Bahau, towns in the neighbourhood, to comfort Chinese refugee families who had been placed under military protection. Both assured the refugees, especially the women, that the situation was in hand, enumerated the places where troops were stationed, explained that tanks and soldiers were patrolling, and told them that a meeting to prevent further bloodshed was to take place the next day to which the Chinese and Malay headmen had been summoned.<sup>13</sup>

At Batu Kikir Colonel Calder addressed a large crowd of Malays in the course of which he rebuked those who had committed the massacre. As Purcell reported it:

Colonel Calder made them assemble in one spot and made a long and eloquent speech to them in Malay. He told them, with several references to their own proverbs, that they had lost in one day the reputation it had taken years to build. He rebuked them as cowards and criminals who had slaughtered innocent women and children. They listened intently and were now obviously sobered. When asked by Colonel Calder to do so they signified their intention of keeping the peace according to the Koran of which he reminded them.<sup>14</sup>

Purcell said he spotted one Malay among the crowd carrying a *parang* in a sheath. The man was seized and disarmed, and his case was used as an object lesson to the crowd. "Others no doubt carrying concealed *parangs* or knives edged to the outside of the crowd", Purcell added. The firm action taken by the BMA, such as arrests of ringleaders, brought the situation temporarily under control.

On 7 November, the MCP held a meeting in Seremban, the capital of Negri Sembilan state, to discuss the situation. The communist leaders were obviously shaken by the events, and among the resolutions passed was one that they should change their hostile attitude towards the Malays to one of conciliation.<sup>15</sup> The Chinese reaction bordered on panic. Chinese settlers from Padang Lebar and the outlying areas

<sup>11</sup> Victor Purcell, "Malaya's Political Climate III, (19 Oct. – 9 Nov. 1945)", in *WO 203/5* 22; see also *idem*, *The Chinese in Malaya* (London, 1949), p. 268.

<sup>12</sup> Hamzah bin Mohamad, "The Fourteen Days of Terror, Before, During and After", (B.A. thesis, University of Malaya, 1969/70), pp. 17–20. See also ISUM, Hqs. Malaya Command, 2 Feb. 1946, in *WO 172/9773*.

<sup>13</sup> Purcell, "Malaya's Political Climate III".

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



were reported to be pouring into Seremban.<sup>16</sup> The situation in the local areas was so bad that in talks with the SCAO, Malay villagers in the Ulu Berenang area stated that the Chinese-Malay feud was of too long standing for them to guarantee their own good behaviour to allow the evacuated Chinese to return to their village.<sup>17</sup>

Chinese in Singapore and elsewhere in the country viewed the Padang Lebar massacre with horror and alarm and urged the British authorities to take steps to prevent Malays from attacking Chinese. The *Nanyang Siang Pau*, a Singapore daily, reported that the KMT party in the city and its branches had jointly despatched telegrams to British Prime Minister Attlee, appealing for an order to the BMA to protect effectively the lives and properties of Chinese. The newspaper noted that for the last few months cases of wholesale massacre of Chinese by Malays had flared up in rapid succession in Johor and Negri Sembilan, resulting in enormous loss of Chinese lives and property.<sup>18</sup> As an indication of the desperate plight the Chinese were now in, on 20 November a joint telegram was sent to Mountbatten by the Southern Johor branches of the MCP, the KMT, the People's Committee, and Chinese associations of Johor, to express Chinese concern over the Padang Lebar massacre, to put blame on the BMA for allowing it to happen, and to demand protective measures from the local garrisons for the Chinese population.<sup>19</sup>

The Padang Lebar massacre had repercussions not only in the whole of Negri Sembilan and the neighbouring state of Malacca but also in Selangor, Kedah, Pahang, and Johor. It encouraged Malays to step up attacks on Chinese. According to military intelligence reports, Malay over-confidence was based on exaggerated Malay accounts of the Padang Lebar incident. At Gemas (Johor), Malays boldly staged a procession through the Chinese quarter, but no incidents were reported.<sup>20</sup> All Malays now seemed united in their struggle to prevent Chinese political domination of their country. A BMA intelligence report indicated Malay thinking behind the struggle:

... there appears to be an appreciable concern among educated Malays regarding the future status of Malays in Malaya [following publication of the Malayan Union policy] and there is a fairly widespread belief that the Chinese are securing an economic grip of the country which, if unchecked, may eventually lead to political control. Thus any movement designed to rouse Malays to take greater interest in securing their position is sure of support and reports from all regions refer, in a lesser or greater degree, to the prevalence of inter-racial feeling.<sup>21</sup>

In view of the increasing inter-racial conflicts, the proposed disbandment of the MPAJA and KMT guerrilla movements on 1 December was naturally viewed with much disfavour by the Chinese population and, conversely, welcomed by the Malays, even though a few Malay guerrilla units such as the Wataniah (Patriots) were also being disbanded. The ratio of Chinese guerrillas to Malay guerrillas was in the region of twenty to one. In Alor Star and Sungei Patani, both in Kedah state, the local Chinese population was reported to be unwilling to let the MPAJA disband.

<sup>16</sup> See Report, "Situation in Malaya", 14 Nov. 1945, in *WO 172/1791*.

<sup>17</sup> SACSEA to War Office on Malaya, 17 Nov. 1945, in *WO 172/1792*.

<sup>18</sup> *Nanyang Siang Pau* (Singapore), 17 Nov. 1945.

<sup>19</sup> Telegram from Johor Bahru to SACSEA, 20 Nov. 1945, in *WO 172/1792*.

<sup>20</sup> BMA (Malaya) Monthly Report No. 3 for Nov. 1945, 3, in *Confidential BMA PSD/39/45*.

<sup>21</sup> BMA Monthly Report for Nov. 1945, *Confidential SCA9/45*, 3.

because it regarded the MPAJA as protection against possible trouble from the Malays.<sup>22</sup> The MPAJA Supreme Headquarters was also not happy to disband, but had agreed to carry it through in line with the MCP's decision. In Kota Bharu, the KMT guerrillas refused to disband on 1 December, giving as their reason Chinese demands for protection against attacks from Malays. Several groups of KMT guerrillas, totalling about forty people, fled the town with their arms and withdrew to the Malay-Thai border. The BMA had rejected the KMT guerrillas' request to be allowed to keep their arms.<sup>23</sup> A few days later, however, Chinese-Malay trouble broke out in the state. The KMT guerrillas in Upper Perak also refused to disband and absconded with their arms to the Thai-Perak border, where they teamed up with their Kelantanese comrades and terrorized Malays in the countryside. KMT guerrillas, now termed "bandits" by the military, held sway at the Thai-Malay border for eight months. They did this mainly by obtaining the tacit support of Thai border police and military through suitable inducements and a share of their spoils gained by highway robberies, kidnappings, murders, and raids on helpless Malay, Chinese, and Thai farmers and settlers on both sides of the border. It was only in July 1946, after several fruitless attempts to negotiate with the leaders of the KMT guerrillas, and the intervention of the Chinese Consul-General in Malaya, that the British authorities finally succeeded in inducing a large portion of the KMT guerrillas to disband and disarm.

Throughout December, inter-racial tension increased in every state throughout the country. It was thought by British military intelligence that the areas of greatest danger were those where the Malays were smaller in numbers or of equal proportion with Chinese. Areas and states where the Malays were in overwhelming majority, such as Kelantan and Trengganu, reported relatively fewer inter-racial clashes, although tension existed. But after the Padang Lebar incidents, there were reports of Malays in Trengganu and Kelantan attacking Chinese. The *Kin Kwok Daily News* of 19 December reported Malay attacks on Chinese in Besut (Trengganu) and urged the BMA to protect Chinese lives and property. There were reported cases of inter-racial friction in Kota Bharu (Kelantan), culminating in a clash on 20–21 December. Three Chinese were killed and one wounded, while one Malay was killed and three wounded. The friction was attributed to Malay reaction to the arrogance of the Chinese before the disappearance of the KMT guerrillas.<sup>24</sup>

In Perak inter-racial trouble erupted again. It started with the murder of four Chinese women at Ayer Tawar on 27 December, followed the next day by the murder of another six women at Layang Layang Kiri, northeast of the Perak River. These clashes reached serious proportions when forty-one Chinese were killed, thirty-two others reported missing, and thirty-two Malays killed. The centre of the trouble was Bruas. Counteraction was taken by about a hundred Chinese, on 30 December, attacking the Malay village of Lambor Kanan, further down the Perak River. Casualties in this clash amounted to nearly fifty, more Chinese than Malays being killed. The Chinese also attacked another riverside village nearby on the

<sup>22</sup> Weekly Intelligence Review (WIR), No. 61 Hqrs. SACSEA, 10 Dec. 1945, in *WO 172/1794*.

<sup>23</sup> WIR, 25 Indian Division, 12 Dec. 1945, in *MU Secret 335/46*.

<sup>24</sup> *Min Sheng Pau*, 20 Dec. 1945.

following day and killed sixteen Malays, including seven children who were deliberately burnt to death.<sup>25</sup>

Chinese residents in the area began evacuating south to Telok Anson for fear of Malay reprisals. South of the Bernam River, thirty Chinese families living near the Malay village of Bagan Nakhoda Omar left their homes and withdrew into a local Chinese settlement. The general state of tension was indicated when one of the British patrols visited Kampong Gajah, on the Perak River north of Telok Anson, and reported Chinese having been cut up by Malays in the market. They found the whole Malay population armed with *parangs*, swords, and spears. They remarked that though Chinese reports claimed that the Malay gangs had carried firearms and even automatic weapons, all Chinese casualties had been inflicted with cold steel.<sup>26</sup> Chinese newspapers reported that because of the inter-racial clashes Chinese traders in Sitiawan and the Dindings had suspended business.

For the remaining period January through March 1946, a brief summary of the major inter-racial incidents shows the deteriorating situation throughout the country. The summary is taken from a BMA report:

... there were later outbreaks in various parts of the country, especially in Lower Perak where in the first three weeks of January, the death toll amounted to approximately sixty Chinese and thirty Malays, and in the Raub district of Pahang where on the 11th of February the Malays made a sudden attack on the Chinese and killed thirty and wounded sixteen, two of themselves being killed and ten wounded. The first big incident in which the Chinese were the aggressors was at Bekor, on the Perak River, on the 2nd of March when seventy-six Malays were massacred in a surprise attack made at dawn.<sup>27</sup>

In the Raub incidents the Sabilillah was very much in evidence. The disbanded elements of the wartime Malay guerrilla force Wataniah were said to be involved. Trouble between the MPAJA and Wataniah was of long standing. On the date of the incident, 11 February, the Acting DO, Encik Annuar, arrived at the village of Batu Malim, wartime headquarters of the Wataniah, to collect rent due on state lands. He found racial trouble brewing and "religious fanatics" inciting a mob to violence.<sup>28</sup> Annuar tried repeatedly to persuade the hostile gathering to disperse. But members of the mob who were in various stages of religious ecstasy that led them to believe they were invulnerable refused to be calmed. The following account narrates what occurred:

A few minutes after he [Annuar] had returned to the area headman's house to send off a messenger to collect reinforcements of police, Annuar heard the frenzied beating of the mosque drum, followed almost immediately by terrified shouts and screams. When he tried to break up the riot that was then raging he was resisted, and as he had too few police available to help him, drove off to collect a more effective force. By the time that he returned with an adequate party of armed policemen, however, the fighting had ended and thirty Chinese and two Malays lay dead, while sixteen Chinese and ten Malays had been wounded. His own career was an extra casualty.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> ISUM Hqrs. Malaya Command No. 10, up to 5 Jan. 1946, in *WO 172/9773*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> H.R. Hone, *Report on the British Military Administration in Malaya, September 1945-March 1946*, p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> William Shaw, *Tun Razak: His Life and Times* (Kuala Lumpur, 1976), p. 58. The account is believed to be based on an interview with the late Malaysian Prime Minister.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

More signs of the Sabilillah appeared in the Malay attacks on Chinese in Telok Anson in early March. The Chinese reported that the attacks were well-planned, well-organized, and very extensive, marked by vigorous bell-ringing in mosques from the thirteenth milestone to the twenty-eighth milestone of the Bagan-Natul Road.<sup>30</sup>

After the incidents in March, Malay attacks suddenly ceased, and calm was gradually restored throughout the country. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the British authorities had finally started to use the sultans to restrain their subjects. In mid-December, the Sultan of Selangor exhorted his subjects to restrain themselves and to maintain inter-racial harmony. The sultan attributed blame for the trouble on wartime conditions created by the Japanese.<sup>31</sup> In January and February, the Sultans of Perak and Pahang toured the affected areas in their respective states, urging their subjects to remain calm. The Sultan of Perak helped the BMA to set up goodwill committees. The MCP also joined the Chinese Chambers of Commerce in appealing to Chinese to keep calm. Secondly, the Malay anti-Malayan Union campaign had now reached its climax on 1 March, with the meeting of the All-Malay Congress at the Sultan Suleiman's Club at Kampung Bahru in Kuala Lumpur. This congress decided to form a national Malay political organization, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) to rally Malays throughout the country to "crush" the Malayan Union plan. Henceforth, this campaign was to take top priority over all other matters, and it was now neither the Chinese nor the MCP but the British Government which became the main target of Malay hostility.

### Conclusion

Largely because of their own policies and strategies as well as wartime circumstances beyond their control, the communists and their guerrilla organization had become identified with the Chinese community in Malay eyes, although they aspired towards multi-racial goals. Caught in a fix, where Malays saw communists as Chinese and Chinese as communists, the communists became involved in the inter-racial clashes more by default than by design. On the other hand, the Chinese community neither had a plan nor a political readiness to dominate the country. Ethnic Chinese unity, fostered and enhanced through common suffering during the Japanese occupation, was extremely fragile; political differences among the Chinese submerged during the war soon broke into the open when hostilities with Japan ended. However, attempts of the predominantly Chinese-led MCP and MPAJA to take over the country did meet with Malay resistance, and in fact were successfully checked. Henceforth, Malay fears of communism began. Before the war, Islam and communism did not appear as incompatible forces, but it was Islamic religious leaders who led the struggle against the Chinese communist guerrillas in the 1945/46 inter-racial clashes. These leaders opened Malay eyes to the dangers of Chinese communism that was detrimental to their race and religion.

It is possible to assess the short-term and long-term effects of the inter-racial clashes on the MCP. In the post-war period, Malays generally became suspicious if

<sup>30</sup> *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 12 Mar. 1946.

<sup>31</sup> *Seruan Raayat* (Kuala Lumpur), 12 Dec. 1945.

not hostile to communism. A major problem of the MCP was the tendency among Malays to equate Chinese and communist as synonymous. Learning the lessons of the clashes, the communists attempted to overcome Malay antagonism by seeking compromises through the mediation of their Malay cadres. During the period 1945-48 the MCP entered into an uneasy alliance with the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) which lasted until the Emergency in June 1948 drove the communists into the jungle.<sup>32</sup> Although Malays in the rival conservative and aristocratic-led UMNO spurned the communists, communist efforts towards the MNP paid off when several hundreds of leftist MNP members followed them underground. This suggests that had there been more time for the MCP, it might have successfully minimized the ill-effects of the 1945/46 clashes with the Malays. However, its efforts at proselytization of the Malay community were cut short by the timely British declaration of the Emergency in 1948. The MCP's limited success was eroded when the government's psychological warfare measures were widely accepted by the Malays. Thus, the absence of widespread Malay support in the communist struggles today could well have its roots in the racial clashes of those turbulent months in the immediate post-war era.



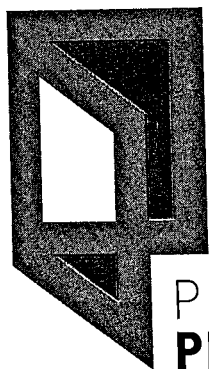
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Journal of Southeast Asian Studies Volume XII, No. 1 — March 1981



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YAYASAN  
KEPIMPINAN  
PERDANA