



**UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA**

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Kertaskerja I

" TULISAN-TULISAN MENGENAI MEI 13 "



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Perpustakaan Negara

WRITINGS ON MAY 13

by

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The eruption of serious communal violence on May 13, 1969 caught the immediate attention of the world press and brought Malaysia an unsought international prominence. Internally the May 13 Incident, as it has come to be known, is widely regarded as the most significant event in the country's turbulent post-independence history. It is a phenomenon which needs to be explained in the context of the country's political development as a whole, and must inevitably also affect perceptions of this development. What follows is, in part, an essentially descriptive inventory covering the various explanations of the causes and effects of this phenomenon; more importantly it is an analysis of such writings for what they reveal about the development of political science in relation to Malaysia as a whole, and the manner in which such writings will themselves influence the future development of this field. It should be observed that this is not an attempt to present a comprehensive analysis of the May 13 Incident itself, or advance a 'theory of Malaysian politics' in place of various limitations perceived in the works under review, though some of the groundwork for tasks such as these has hopefully been laid. Consideration is here limited to publications in the form of books or journal articles, since the very considerable contributions made at the time by the international press constitutes a topic in its own right.

The main publications dealing with May 13 to appear so far in this country<sup>1</sup> are as follows: Lau Teik Soon, "Malaysia: The May 13 Incident", Australia's Neighbours, July - August, 1969; Frank Mount, "Malaysia: The May 13 Post-Election Riots", Pacific Community 3, (Summer 1969); Anthony Reid, "The Kuala Lumpur Riots and the Malaysian Political System", Australian Outlook, Vd.23, No.3 (December 1969); Goh Cheng Teik, The May Thirteenth Incident and Democracy in Malaysia, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1971; Felix Gagliano, Communal Violence in Malaysia 1969: The Political Aftermath, Publication for the Centre of International Studies, Ohio University, Athens, 1970; Tunku Abdul Rahman, May 13 Before and After, Utusan Melayu Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1969; and National Operations Council, The May 13 Tragedy, Kuala Lumpur, 1969. These accounts vary considerably in terms of perspective, credibility and depth, but all lay some claim for consideration in academic circles. Future reference to these sources will be by way of the author's name, sometimes in an abbreviated form.

Few of these accounts have a very detailed analysis of the long-term factors giving rise to May 13. Where this has been touched on the explanations are primarily in terms of the inter-related issues of communalism, the nature of the Alliance system of government, and Malaysian's history of violent inter-racial conflict. An additional interpretation focuses<sub>on</sub> the disrupting effects of communism, generally seen as pursuing its ends through attempts to foster communal disharmony.

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1. Some accounts dealing with May 13 are banned in this country. I am informed that it is not possible to discuss such works in this paper.

### The Importance of Communalism

Reflecting the overwhelming view of political scientists Gagliano writes that "Communalism has always been the salient feature of the Malaysian political system ..... The motif of Malaysian politics is the tension between Malay and Chinese" (p.2). A distinction is drawn between Malays on the one hand who believe that as indigenes they have a natural right to political power, and fear making further concessions on this until the Chinese have made over an appropriate share of economic power; and Chinese who fear that without greater political power their economic position and cultural identity are threatened.

Communalism as an explanatory concept in relation to Malaysian politics has clearly stood the test of time, and there is much that is recognisably correct in Gagliano's comment, Nonetheless this approach has serious limitations. In the post second world war era political scientists have achieved a degree of sophistication in relating political developments to the ecology of the total environment, which generally includes such variables as class, the nature of bureaucratic power, and the relationship between economic and political power. There has been very little recognition that attention to such variables might lead to a better understanding of political processes in Malaysia, though it is apparent that this country does not represent a unique exception to a universal trend. To illustrate this I will confine myself initially to issues of class and bureaucratic power, since the relationship between economic and political power will be discussed shortly within the context of the workings of the Alliance government.