

**The 'social contract' and May 13**  
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The current debate over the 'social contract' is not the first time that attempts have been made to revise history for reasons of political expediency.  
MCPX

Nearly 40 years ago, after the searing Sino-Malay race riots of Friday, May 13, 1969 in Kuala Lumpur, many historians attributed the bloodshed to the 'breakdown' of the 'social contract' when non-Malay political parties made substantial gains in the Tuesday, May 10, 1969 general elections. The island of Penang, the Pearl of the Orient, had fallen to the newly-formed Gerakan.

Rakyat Malaysia, which was, in fact, mostly composed of ousted rebel leaders from MCA, a key member of the ruling Alliance Party.

DAP, the Malaysian chapter of Singapore's ruling PAP, had almost won half the seats in the Selangor state assembly while the PPP (People's Progressive Party) made similar gains in its Perak heartland. The MCA saw no further purpose in being part of the Federal Government and pulled out while still remaining as a member of the Alliance.

MIC, the other key member of the Alliance, stayed put in the federal government and in the states and at the local level even as quite a number of panicky Indian families sold their properties for a mere song and packed their bags for India. Elsewhere, long queues of would-be migrants formed for weeks outside the Australian, New Zealand, and Canadian high commissions and in particular at the US embassy.

The MCA pullout from the federal government was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Race riots erupted first in the Chinatown area of Chow Kit which had a Malay hinterland and soon spread all over the capital city. The incomplete polling was abandoned, Parliament was disbanded, democracy suspended, a state of emergency declared by the caretaker government and Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, seen as too pro-Chinese, ousted and placed virtually under house arrest for a while. It was like a coup d'etat. There were isolated incidents everywhere.

The police were hopelessly outnumbered and overwhelmed and the Royal Malay Regiment was brought in while the multiracial Federation Army and the famed Sarawak Rangers of elite Iban and other Dayak troops were both confined to their barracks. The Malay Regiment were mindless robots who contributed to the carnage as well as to the perceived defence of race, religion and country. They were eventually ordered, albeit reluctantly and gently, to return to their barracks but not until the blood-letting had dragged on for some 10 days or more of unspeakable tales of horror.

In hindsight, the apologists and conspiracy theorists rationalised that the Malay Regiment ran amok in revenge for the killings over two weeks by the Communist Party of Malaya's Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army which virtually had a free run of the country while awaiting the return of British troops in strength following the Japanese surrender after World War II. The Japanese looked on.

The MPAJA's victims were mostly Malays seen as Japanese collaborators. There were feeble

attempts in official circles to blame the communists for May 13 but these were quickly denounced and roundly condemned by the man-in-the-street. At the height of the Vietnam War, the communists were the eternal bogeyman in Southeast Asia and everywhere in the free world.

The Malay Regiment, disgraced in the eyes of the non-Malay population, was replaced by the Federation Army and the Sarawak Regiment and calm quickly returned to the burnt-out streets of Kuala Lumpur. There had been a heavy price to pay in innocent lives, all because the extreme right Malays in Umno, the lead player in the Alliance, had been rattled by the electoral setbacks suffered by the MCA and feared the unraveling of the 'social contract'.

Apparently, this right wing's game plan was to intimidate the political opposition, punish the voters and force the MCA back into the government. The fact that the political opposition had never been party to the 'social contract' was lost on the right wing instigators of the May 13 bloodbath.

Even so, the Gerakan and the PPP were virtually blackmailed, with the promise of democracy being restored, to become members of an enlarged Alliance which was renamed Barisan Nasional. The 'social contract' was back on track. The Alliance, symbolised by a sailing boat, had sunk. The BN chose the scales of justice as the new symbol.

Hardly five years before May 13, Singapore had queried the 'social contract' as a member of the Federation and was quickly ushered out. It's important that Malaysian history books explore the expulsion of Singapore from the Federation. However, this tragedy along with the Japanese occupation is simply glossed over. The key lies in former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's 'infamous' outburst: 'If these people (Kuala Lumpur) think they can squat on Singapore and get away with it, they are sadly mistaken'.

Apparently, Lee was alarmed that Kuala Lumpur had rapidly changed track after Malaysia was formed with the extreme right wing in Umno calling the shots. A serious deviation of the 'social contract' was the misinterpretation by the right wingers that it was a carte blanche for Ketuanan Melayu, Malay political dominance and supremacy. This was an anathema to Lee. Surely such a system could not be good for anyone, even including the great majority of the Malays themselves.

Sabah and Sarawak, the Borneo states, remained in the Federation after some initial demands for a review by Sabah. Kadazandusun leader, Donald Stephens (later Mohd Fuad Abdullah), was eventually packed off into 'exile' as the high commissioner to Australia, before making a stunning political comeback in 1976 and dying mysteriously in an air crash shortly after with almost his entire state cabinet.

Is the 'social contract' still relevant in this day and age? Every two people have three opinions.