

Confrontation at the Polls

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"The momentous victory gives us very much courage," said Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman. "I pray that God will give us help and shelter from adversity and that Malaysia will continue to flourish and prosper in peace. To hell with Sukarno."

It was quite a post-election statement, but justified in the sense that the big issue at the polls had indeed been Sukarno and his vicious guerrilla and propaganda offensives against the new Federation of Malaysia. In a lively five-week campaign, heated slogans in Malay, English, Tamil and four dialects of Chinese filled the air as candidates ran for most of Malaysia's national Parliament and state assembly seats. Charges flew that politicians were luring women voters with love potions. More serious were charges that some of the parties were playing into the hands of the Indonesians by opposing the Prime Minister's stand against Sukarno.

The Tunku aimed his sharpest shots at the Socialists, alleged that they were cooperating with the Indonesian Communist Party; leftist workers have become increasingly militant since the stoppage of trade by Indonesia caused layoffs. But the Tunku also condemned the right-wing, fanatical Moslem groups, who might be receptive to Indonesian arguments because of their distaste for the multiracial, multireligious character of the federation. Pressing hard for a decisive endorsement, the Tunku exploited every appeal. He offered tidy development funds to strategic regions. Two days before elections, the government published a 64-page white paper charging an Indonesian plot to assassinate the Prime Minister and annex most of Southeast Asia.

Casting their ballots at 3,400 polling stations, voters gave Abdul Rahman's policies landslide approval. His three-party, multiracial Alliance won 89 of 104 seats at stake in the federal Parliament, 241 out of 282 seats in the state assemblies. In Indonesia, Sukarno responded with irritation, blustered that he had "ordered all 21 million volunteers to hold simultaneous roll calls throughout Indonesia to receive my command of action."

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