

**Race war in Malaysia**  
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MALAYSIA'S proud experiment in constructing a multiracial society exploded in the streets of Kuala Lumpur last week. Malay mobs, wearing white headbands signifying an alliance with death, and brandishing swords and daggers, surged into Chinese areas in the capital, burning, looting and killing. In retaliation, Chinese, sometimes aided by Indians, armed themselves with pistols and shotguns and struck at Malay kampongs (villages). Huge pillars of smoke rose skyward as houses, shops and autos burned.

Firemen drew sniper fire as they attempted to douse the flames, and outnumbered police watched helplessly at times as the street gangs rampaged. One man, trying to escape from his burning car, was thrown back into it by a howling mob, and died. By the time the four days of race war and civil strife had run their course, the General Hospital's morgue was so crowded that bodies were put into plastic bags and hung on ceiling hooks. Government officials, attempting to play down the extent of the disaster, insisted that the death toll was only 104. Western diplomatic sources put the toll closer to 600, with most of the victims Chinese.

No Longer Satisfied. From its inception, Malaysia has been haunted by racial divisions. By tacit agreement, the Federation's 4,300,000 Malays under Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman wielded political power. Economic power was largely in the hands of Malaysia's 3,400,000 Chinese. There are also the 1,000,000 Indians and Pakistanis who make up the third major ethnic group. What made it all work was the Tunku's Alliance coalition, in which Malay, Chinese and Indian parties participated. But for some time the Chinese and Indians had feared that eventually they would be pushed out as laws favoring Malays for schools and jobs bore fruit.

The trouble began two weeks ago, when newly formed Chinese opposition parties cut heavily into the Alliance's majority in parliamentary elections. It became suddenly apparent that many Chinese were no longer satisfied with just economic hegemony, but wanted a protective share of the political power as well. Nothing was more surely calculated to frighten the Malays, in particular the Malay "ultras" (right-wingers), who have long preached the doctrine of Malaysia for the Malays. Alarmed, the ultras began to discuss ways of retaining control. At a Malay post-election meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Chinese onlookers began to taunt those in attendance. Infuriated, the Malays attacked. At least eight Chinese were killed and within 45 minutes fast-spreading riots forced the Tunku to clamp a 24-hour curfew on the capital.

Returning to Singapore. Struggling to restore order as the fighting mushroomed, the Tunku and Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak took power into their own hands. Parliament was suspended, as were constitutional guarantees. Total administrative power was taken by the newly formed, all-powerful National Operations Council headed by Razak, which proceeded to suspend publication of all Malaysian newspapers for several days. Arrests began. Ninety-three alleged terrorists were bagged in a swoop on a Chinese apartment building in Kuala Lumpur, and Razak reported that all Communists and known sympathizers were being rounded up. Razak and the Tunku blamed all the troubles on Communist China, which, they charged, had funneled large sums of money to Communist agitators in Malaysia. Later, however, the Tunku backed off slightly, and praised "loyal Chinese elements," adding that he had been mistaken when he blamed Chinese Communists for all the troubles.

As tensions eased late in the week, curfews were lifted long enough to allow householders to go out and buy food. The fires burned on, however, and there were still occasional racial clashes. For some time to come, Malaysia would be a bitterly divided society. Already many Chinese have given up hope: one senior government official spoke of abandoning everything in Kuala Lumpur and returning to his native Singapore. There was no doubt that if many others followed his example, severe damage to Malaysia's once-prospering economy would result. Beyond that was the question of whether the wounds opened last week would ever sufficiently heal to permit Malaysia's diverse peoples to resume their quest for a working multiracial nation.

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