

This Mob for Hire
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A mob is an ugly mob anywhere in the world; some fanciers claim that a Middle East mob is the worst, although objective observers who have seen well-educated Chinese hoodlums from Singapore colleges getting to work with fire and iron on prostrate policemen are inclined to award them the palm; but all fair-minded witnesses will agree that a Djakarta mob in full cry under a noon sun ... can hold its own in world company.

—Richard Hughes, London Sunday Times

In screaming chorus, under a fiercely hot sun last week, a savage, looting Djakarta mob lived up to its world reputation. Boiling through the streets of the city, thousands of rioters went on a three-day rampage to protest the birth of the neighboring Federation of Malaysia, which joins Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo in a new British Commonwealth nation. With the tacit approval of Indonesia's rabble-rousing President Sukarno, who bitterly opposes the federation for the challenge it poses to his influence in Southeast Asia, the mob succeeded in presenting the fledgling nation with a full-grown diplomatic and military crisis before it was even one week old.

Shattering the Façade. The riots were triggered by independence ceremonies throughout the crescent-shaped new nation. Screaming "Crush Malaysia," Sukarno's mobsters stormed the Malayan embassy in Djakarta, threw rocks through the windows, pelted the building with rotten eggs, painted anti-Malaysia slogans all over the walls. As government police stood idly by, the enraged mob then turned its fury on the British embassy in nearby Friendship Square. They ripped down sections of the iron fence around the building and shattered its modernistic glass facade under a hail of stones. The rioters tore the Union Jack from its flagpole and set fire to Ambassador Andrew Gilchrist's Rolls-Royce.

Dodging stones, a British military attaché showed his contempt for the mob by parading in front of the embassy playing his bagpipes. In his glass-strewn office, Ambassador Gilchrist finally received a delegation of the rioters. A blunt, spade-bearded Scot who once dispersed an anti-British mob in Iceland by playing Chopin records from a phonograph set in his office window, Gilchrist explained to the rioters that the United Nations had sanctioned Malaysia, dismissed them with a contemptuous "Hidup [long live] U Thant."

"Got to Leave Now." Two days later, however, the mob returned to finish the job it started. Some 10,000 rioters, many of whom arrived in government trucks, poured into the embassy, smashed everything smashable, then set it afire. A fire engine dispatched to the scene was seized by the rioters and driven away. As smoke curled through the building, Gilchrist sent one last cable to the Foreign Office in London. "Building on fire. Got to leave now. Goodbye. Gilchrist Ambassador."

He was given sanctuary at the home of the U.S. ambassador, and his staff was taken under police protection to a hotel. But still the rampage continued. Rioters wrecked the 119-year-old British Club and plowed up its cricket field and tennis courts, then moved on to sack suburban homes of British residents. Getting into the act, the Indonesian government seized all British business firms in the country "in the interest of their safety," but denied that this heralded a sweeping new nationalization order.

Back in Malaya, Sukarno's mob action stirred up retaliatory rioting. "Sukarno is a

Communist bastard," howled a mob of 1,000 youths who invaded the Indonesian embassy, hoisted Malaysia's flag up the flagpole, and ripped down a heavy crest of a Garuda—a mythical bird that is Indonesia's national emblem. Escorted by motorcycle cops, the mob dragged the Garuda through the streets and onto the lawn at Abdul Rahman's official residence. There, they lifted the Tunku onto their shoulders, then lowered him so that he could put his feet on the battered Garuda. "I admire your patriotism," said Abdul Rahman somewhat nervously. "But you must not take the law into your own hands." Then the Tunku's servants appeared with cold drinks and biscuits for all to enjoy.

Out to Singapore. Diplomatically, the Tunku got tough. He severed relations with Indonesia and with the Philippine government, which sponsored some anti-Malaysia demonstrations of its own—in support of tenuous Filipino claims to North Borneo. Then Abdul Rahman alerted the Malayan army reserve against the possibility that Sukarno might try to infiltrate Sarawak and North Borneo with guerrilla troops.

In Djakarta, Ambassador Gilchrist recommended that British dependents be flown to safety in Singapore, and in London, the Foreign Office threatened to break diplomatic ties with Indonesia unless it guaranteed to protect British lives and property. Both Britain and Australia pledged military aid to Malaysia if Indonesia stirred up any trouble—as it had threatened—along the jungle border separating Sarawak and North Borneo from Indonesian Borneo.

Indonesia's mob diplomacy served Sukarno well. In heating up a new crisis over Malaysia, he has created an issue to take the minds of his underfed, underemployed people off Indonesia's slide toward economic ruin and once again raised the specter of a bloody, interminable guerrilla war in the steaming thickets of Borneo. For the new nation of Malaysia, it was an ominous, inauspicious start.

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