

ALBERT LAU

**THE
MALAYAN UNION
CONTROVERSY
1942-1948**

South-East Asian Historical Monographs



Oxford University Press



PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

The Second World War set Malaya upon a new course and forced British planners to rationalize the structural anomalies that had kept Malaya constitutionally disunited and racially divided. The revolutionary plan unveiled was the Malayan Union which sought to embrace the Malay States and the Straits Settlements, excluding Singapore, under a constitutional union, and to confer, for the first time, political rights on Malaya's non-Malay population through the creation of common citizenship. This sudden abandonment of the old principles that had governed Anglo-Malay relations since 1874—the sovereignty of the Malay rulers, the autonomy of the Malay States, and the notion that Malaya was primarily a Malay country—provoked an impassioned constitutional controversy which threatened to undermine the very basis of British rule in Malaya and forced the British, barely three months later, to scrap their experiment. A negotiated settlement resulted in its replacement by the Federation of Malaya in February 1948.

Drawing on the widest range of primary sources used to date, this book goes beyond other studies to unravel the inside story of why and how the Malayan Union scheme was formulated and implemented, and why it was forcibly scuttled.

The author is Lecturer in the Department of History, National University of Singapore.





PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA



PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

SOUTH-EAST ASIAN HISTORICAL MONOGRAPHS

The Malayan Union Controversy
1942–1948



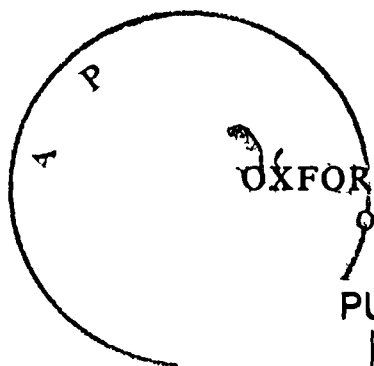
PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA



PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

The Malayan Union Controversy 1942–1948

Albert Lau



SINGAPORE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
OXFORD NEW YORK
1991
PUSTAKA PERDANA



1004501



PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

Oxford University Press
Oxford New York Toronto
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi
Petaling Jaya Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town
Melbourne Auckland
and associated companies in
Berlin Ibadan

Oxford is a trade mark of Oxford University Press

© Oxford University Press Pte. Ltd. 1991

Published in the United States by
Oxford University Press, Inc., New York

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press

ISBN 0 19 588964 9

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Lau, Albert 1956-
The Malayan union controversy 1942-1948.—(South-East
Asian historical monographs).
1. Malaysia, history
I. Title II. Series
959.5

ISBN 0-19-588964-9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lau, Albert, 1956-
The Malayan Union controversy 1942-1948 / Albert Lau.
p. cm.—(South-East Asian historical monographs)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-19-588964-9 :
1. Malaya—Politics and government. 2. Malaya—Constitutional
history. 3. Singapore—Politics and government. 4. Singapore—
Constitutional history. I. Title. II. Series.
DS597.L38 1990
320.9595'1—dc20
90-41470
CIP

Printed in Singapore by Kyodo Printing Co. (S) Pte. Ltd.
Published by Oxford University Press Pte. Ltd.,
Unit 221, Ubi Avenue 4, Singapore 1440

3 0.959
LAU



To Lee Mei and Zhi Jun



PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA



PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

Preface and Acknowledgements

THIS is a study of the evolution of British constitutional policy towards Malaya and Singapore between 1942 and 1948. Driven by the new forces unleashed by World War II, British planners in the Colonial Office embarked on an ambitious experiment to impose, for the first time, a constitutional union on the Malay Peninsula, excluding Singapore, and to confer a common citizenship on her peoples. The old principles which had governed Anglo-Malay relations since 1874—the sovereignty of the Malay Rulers, the autonomy of the Malay States, and the notion that Malaya was primarily a Malay country—were finally abandoned.

Constituted on 1 April 1946, the Malayan Union scheme provoked an immediate and impassioned constitutional controversy which threatened to undermine the very basis of British rule in Malaya. Barely three months later, the decision was taken to abort the Malayan Union scheme, and in February 1948 it was replaced by the Federation of Malaya.

This study traces the origins of the Colonial Office's plans for 'union' and 'citizenship', examines the assumptions which guided the British planners involved, and how these were overturned by post-war developments, and discusses the interaction of historical forces which led eventually to the demise of the Malayan Union. It analyses, also, the separate political development of Singapore and the initial attempts to unite the island with the mainland, a process which succeeded (in retrospect) briefly in 1963, only to result in separation in 1965.

The preparation of this book, which is a revised version of a thesis presented to the University of London in 1986 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, would not have been possible without the generous assistance which I have received from many institutions and individuals. I am particularly grateful to the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission for the award of a Commonwealth Academic Staff scholarship which permitted me to undertake my research in London. I wish also to express my appreciation to the British Council for administering the award, the National University of Singapore for the sponsorship and study leave, and the Malaysian Government for permission to conduct research in Malaysia.

I would like to record my thanks to the staff of the following institutions for showing me much courtesy and for accommodating my many requests: Public Record Office (London), the Arkib Negara (Kuala Lumpur), the National Archives (Singapore), Royal Commonwealth Society Library (London), the School of Oriental and African Studies Library (London), the London School of Economics Library, the Rhodes House Library (Oxford), the National University of Singapore Library, and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Library (Singapore).

For permission to use the photographs in this book, I am grateful to Tan Sri Dato Mubin Sheppard, the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum (London), the Director of the National Army Museum (London), The British Library, Muzium Negara (Kuala Lumpur), and the National Archives (Singapore).

Part of Chapter 2 was published in R. B. Smith and A. J. Stockwell, eds., *British Policy and the Transfer of Power in Asia: Documentary Perspectives*, London, School of Oriental and African Studies, in 1988. Permission to use it here is gratefully acknowledged to the editors and to Mr M. J. Daly of the Publications Committee of the School of Oriental and African Studies. I am grateful also to Professor Ernest Chew, Chairman of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, for permission to use an article entitled 'Malayan Union Citizenship: Constitutional Change and Controversy in Malaya, 1942-48' (Vol. 20, No. 2, September 1989).

My colleagues in the Department of History, National University of Singapore, have helped in many ways. I am especially grateful to Professor Ernest Chew for his interest, support, and generous encouragement throughout the course of my research; to Professor Yeo Kim Wah who was helpful in clarifying some aspects of British policy in the 1920s; to Professor Edwin Lee who never failed to cheer me up with a card at Christmas, and to Professor Eunice Thio, formerly of the National University of Singapore, whose lively enthusiasm during lectures inspired my own interest in history as an undergraduate. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to the late Professor Wong Lin Ken, former Raffles Professor of History, National University of Singapore, for his advice and for facilitating my research.

My supervisor, Professor R. B. Smith, has guided my research with much patience and diligence. His perceptive and valuable comments helped to ensure the coherence of the original thesis. I am also grateful to Professor Smith, Dr A. J. Stockwell, Mr J. M. Gullick, and other members of the Seminar on the Recent History of South-

East Asia at the School of Oriental and African Studies for deepening my understanding and interest in the region when I was a research student. Professor Peter Dennis, of The University of New South Wales, has also sustained my efforts through his friendship, advice, and encouragement.

Finally, my family has been unstinting in giving me much encouragement. My mother was unfailing in her support when I was in London, and I am especially grateful to my wife, Lee Mei, and daughter, Zhi Jun, for showing me much love and understanding.

National University of Singapore
October 1990

ALBERT LAU





PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

Contents

<i>Preface and Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>Tables</i>	xiii
<i>Plates</i>	xiv
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xvi
Introduction	I
1 The Anglo-Malay Treaties and Political Development in Malaya to 1941	8
Malay Sovereignty	8
Unfulfilled Goal; A United Malaya	11
Unresolved Issue: Non-Malay Political Rights	15
Retaining the Treaty System	21
2 The Colonial Office and the Emergence of the Malayan Union Policy	28
Circumstances for Change	28
Wartime Planning	32
The Malayan Planning Unit	40
The Influence of ‘Outsiders’	44
3 The Creation of Malayan Union Citizenship	64
The ‘Pro-Malay’ Policy Reversed	64
British Motives	70
4 From Broad Guidelines to Defined Policy	79
Cabinet Approval	79
Malayan Union Constitution	83
Singapore Constitution	91
5 ‘Negotiating’ the Treaties	98
Guidelines on Handling the Sultans	99
The Willan Mission	104
The MacMichael Mission	109
6 ‘Like an Electric Shock ...’: The January White Paper	123
Non-Malay Reaction	125
Malay Reaction	130



	The London Campaign	136
	Growing Inflexibility	140
7	Constitutional Negotiations: April to July 1946	151
	British Volte-face on the Malayan Union	151
	The Linehan Committee on Citizenship	173
8	The Anglo-Malay Working Committee: July to December 1946	188
9	Crossing the Rubicon: December 1946 to February 1948	212
	Opposition	212
	The Consultative Committee	219
	The Working Committee Reconvenes	229
	The Failure of the Anti-Federation Campaign	240
10	Constitutional Development in Singapore and the 'Union' Question: 1945-1948	257
	The Electoral Experiment	257
	The Merger Issue	264
	Conclusion	275
	<i>Bibliography</i>	287
	<i>Index</i>	299



Tables

4.1	Population Distribution in Seven Areas	90
8.1	Malay Proposals for the Composition of the Legislative Council	195
8.2	Revised Composition of Official Membership in the Legislative Council	196
8.3	Revised Composition of Unofficial Membership in the Legislative Council	197
8.4	Final Revised Composition of Unofficial Membership in the Legislative Council	198
9.1	Composition of Unofficial Membership in the Legislative Council Proposed by the Consultative Committee	221
9.2	Comparison of the Recommendations of the Seven Members of the Consultative Committee and the Two Chinese Members for the Composition of the Legislative Council	222
9.3	Revised Composition of Unofficial Membership in the Legislative Council Proposed by the Working Committee	234

