

**THE
PEOPLE'S**

**CONSTITUTIONAL
PROPOSALS**

**FOR
MALAYA**

**70TH
ANNIVERSARY EDITION**



**ESSAYS BY
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DEVARAJ
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SYE

UTERA-AMCTA



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The People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya

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Syed Husin Ali
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Malaysia



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Publisher's Note

Seventy years after its first publication, SIRD is proud to republish the PUTERA-AMCJA's *Peoples Constitutional Proposals for Malaya*. In the year of the 60th Anniversary of Merdeka it remains important to remember that *sepuluh tahun sebelum Merdeka*, to borrow the title of Fahmi Reza's documentary, there was another struggle for independence underway, a struggle not premised upon elite conciliation and compromise with the British colonial power but one based upon the principles of popular democratic action and multi-ethnic solidarity which sought to produce a fully free, independent and sovereign Malaya.

The British, as all colonial powers do, believed that the ideals of democratic self-governance and multi-ethnic nationalism were unrealistic and premature for an 'underdeveloped' plural society such as Malaya. And yet the Proposals continue to stand as an eloquent and thoughtful refutation of British pretensions of paternalism and benevolent rule, exposing behind this facade the attempt to prolong colonial rule far beyond its expiry date.

The PUTERA-AMCJA was by no means without its problems. The PUTERA-AMCJA was home to a broad spectrum of political parties and ideologies, and as Mustapha Hussain's account of the drafting of the Proposals shows, tensions between parties of the Malay Left and non-Malay parties existed. Yet in spite of this, through co-operation such parties produced not only a coherent set of proposals but also a series of hartals which brought Malaya to a standstill.

With the British rejection of the People's Proposals and then the implementation of their own Federation of Malaya proposal in 1948, and later the declaration of emergency, the space for political action grew smaller and smaller. With a crackdown on the parties of the

Malay Left and the banning of the API, the PUTERA-AMCJA was dissolved and its members dispersed. Some withdrew from politics; others took the struggle for independence into UMNO, whilst others entered the jungle, taking up arms against the British coloniser. The MIC and those Chinese businessmen allied to Tan Cheng Lock would go on to form, with UMNO, the Alliance Party.

Yet in spite of this the Proposals remain with us today as both a reminder that the independence attained by Tunku Abdul Rahman was not the only game in town and as source of ideas for how a multi-ethnic country might be organized to benefit not only a small elite of politicians and businessmen but all of those who live within its borders. We hope then that the republishing of the Proposals contributes both to the growing interest in the history of Malayan independence as well as the attempt to think of an alternative future for Malaysia beyond the legacy of colonialism and elite politics.

August 2017
Petaling Jaya

Essays



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One

The Relevance of the People's Constitutional Proposals Today

SYED HUSIN ALI¹

In the aftermath of the failure of the Malayan Union project, the British colonial government set up a Working Committee to draft a new Constitutional Proposal for Malaya. The Committee was made up of six representatives from the Malayan Union administration, four representatives of the Malay Sultans and two representatives of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). The Committee invited the public - organisations and individuals - to submit their views.

On the initiative of Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (Malay Nationalist Party, PKMM or MNP), several political organisations, workers' unions and civic organisations as well as individuals held a series of discussions on the proposed new constitution for setting up a Federation. On 22 December 1946, two days before the Constitutional Proposal was announced, a coalition called All Malaya Council for Joint Action (AMCJA) was formed. Membership of AMCJA comprised political parties, worker's unions, womens associations and youth associations from various ethnic groups. Among the most

¹ For the first half of this essay, I have extracted much from my book *Syed Husin Ali: Memoirs of a Political Struggle*, Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2012, pp. 205-209.

THE
PEOPLE'S CONSTITUTIONAL
PROPOSALS FOR MALAYA

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