

THE COMMUNIST STRUGGLE IN MALAYA

GENE Z. HANRAHAN

**With an introduction by
VICTOR PURCELL
and a postscript by
SIR ROBERT THOMPSON**



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FOREWORD

This study is one of a series on Communist movements in Eastern and Southern Asia which have been prepared for the international research program of the Institute of Pacific Relations. Other volumes include *Red Flag in Japan* by Rodger Swearingen and Paul Langer; *Government and Administration in Communist China* by S. B. Thomas; *The Viet Minh Regime* by Bernard B. Fall; and *The Communist Party of India* by M. R. Massani. Subsequent reports planned for later publication include an analysis of the Communist movement in Indochina by Milton I. Sacks and a documentary history of the Philippine Communist movement by Mr. Hanrahan.

The present study does not claim to be a comprehensive discussion of the 'Emergency' which has so seriously disturbed the military and political security of Malaya for several years, but only with one important phase of it. For a much more extensive account of Malayan political and economic problems in recent years, readers should consult a newly published I.P.R. study, *Malaya: Communist or Free?* by Dr. Victor Purcell who has been kind enough to write the introduction to Mr. Hanrahan's report.

Though, in many ways, Malaya can be regarded as an encouraging example of how a Communist rebellion can be suppressed by a combination of vigorous military and police action coupled with wide-ranging measures of resettlement and political reform, it is also a striking instance of the difficulties and high costs of such measures in an Asian colonial area. Even so vigorous a military commander as General Sir Gerald Templer has recently acknowledged that the Malayan Communist guerrilla forces, though severely weakened and discredited, are by no means eliminated but have been able to recruit new adherents and partially make

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up for their heavy losses. In his farewell speech on leaving Malaya General Templer spoke of his greatest disappointment as the Communists' obstinate persistence in an apparently hopeless struggle and the smallness of the number of surrenders.

The Communist rebellion in Malaya, though now largely contained and driven back into the jungle, is still a factor of some importance in a South - East Asia which is only too well aware of the recent ominous Viet Minh victories in Indochina. It thus deserves continuing attention by students of Asian nationalism and of international Communist tactics.

Mr. Hanrahan, who is a lecturer at Adelphi College, New York, has specialized for some years in the study of guerrilla warfare and has done research on this subject for the U.S. Department of the Army. He is the author of a report, *Chinese Communist Guerilla Tactics* (July 1952) and of articles on the Chinese Communist army and navy in various military journals. He is now engaged on a comprehensive study of the evolution of the Chinese Red Army.

The author and the Institute are grateful for valuable comments and editorial assistance to Mr. Lucian Pye of Princeton University, Miss Catherine Porter and Mr. S. B. Thomas.

WILLIAM L. HOLLAND
Secretary-General
Institute of Pacific Relations

New York, 14 May 1954

INTRODUCTION

BEFORE World War II, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was not a major force in local politics. It was active underground, being illegal, especially in Chinese schools and through its agency, the 'General Labour Union', and the youth bands calling themselves 'Anti-Japanese-Backing-Up-Association', but the Party did not constitute a real threat to the administration. The war, however, brought about a fundamental change. When Germany attacked Russia in June 1941, the MCP was for some months in an anomalous position: on the one hand it had now to back Soviet Russia in its fight against Germany, and on the other hand it was still committed to fighting 'imperialism' in the shape of Soviet Russia's ally, the British. But when Japan came into the war on 8 December and her troops landed in Malaya, the anomaly was removed and the MCP declared its full support for the Allies. It was not, however, until late in December 1941 that the Malayan Government, alarmed by the rapid advance of the Japanese, agreed to the inclusion of Communists among their resistance forces. A Chinese Mobilization Committee under the direction of a Singapore industrialist, Mr. Tan Kah-kee, had the approval both of the Kuomintang in Malaya and of the MCP and received also the blessings of the Governor, Sir Shenton Thomas. A contingent of Communists, a part of 'Dalforce', though without firearms, fought in the mangrove swamps of Singapore with considerable bravery.

The Japanese regarded the Chinese of whatever political colour, but especially the Communists, as their implacable enemies, and as soon as they had occupied Malaya they began mopping-up operations. In Singapore, the *Butai* (military detachments) swung into action, parading the Chinese population *en masse* and picking

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out Communists or alleged Communists by the hundreds with the aid of informers — men, women, and children — hooded like members of the Ku Klux Klan. The persons thus singled out were at once executed, the total number perishing in this way probably exceeding five thousand.

While the Japanese were still advancing, the British army had trained some squads of Chinese Communists for sabotage operations behind the enemy lines and these, under Colonel Spencer Chapman, were active in blowing up trains and bridges and interrupting Japanese communications. With the fall of Singapore, however, these operations were discontinued and the Communists, reinforced by those who had escaped from the clutches of the *Butai*, betook themselves to the jungle highlands to organize what became known as the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). This was the military arm of the Communists and under MCP control.

The MCP was concerned more with its objective of establishing a Communist Republic in Malaya than in resisting the Japanese, but guerrillas (not more than 4,000 at the time) were nevertheless a big thorn in the side of the invader, harassing his communications and forcing him to divert a large number of troops to contain them. Then from May 1943 onwards a reconnaissance party of Force 136 arrived in the country by submarine or parachuted from aeroplanes. Contact was made with the Communist guerrillas in the highlands of Perak and eventually an agreement was signed between the MPAJA and the Supreme Allied Commander, Lord Mountbatten, whereby the former, in return for arms, money, and supplies, undertook to accept the latter's orders in the intended invasion of Malaya. (Temporarily, at least, the Communists dropped the aim of a Malayan Republic from their nine-point programme.)

As is well known, the Japanese surrendered and an invasion of Malaya was therefore not necessary. Instead, Lord Mountbatten's troops arrived to liberate Malaya from the Japanese. But in the

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meantime the MPAJA had emerged from the jungle and had taken over control of the country. When the British arrived they received a warm welcome from the general populace but found that in all the towns and villages of the interior triumphal arches had been erected in honour of the MPAJA who were given the sole credit for the Japanese defeat! However, the MPAJA gave way with ill grace to the British Military Administration, and early in December they agreed to be disbanded, each receiving a gratuity of M\$350 (about US\$163 at the then prevailing exchange rate).

But while the Communists' military arm was disbanded and, temporarily at least, ineffective, the MCP itself was extremely active, and attempted by underground action to make the position of the British untenable. Through their General Labour Union they organized a series of strikes which paralyzed the country for several days at a time. Finally, however, they over-reached themselves when they attempted to enforce a general stoppage of work in 'a day of mourning for' (i.e. 'celebration of') the British defeat at Singapore in 1942, on its fourth anniversary on 15 February 1946. The British now took effective action, including the arrest of some of their leaders, which caused the MCP to confine its action to limited civilian objectives for more than two years. It was able, however, to infiltrate a number of the new political parties which sprang into being for the first time in the history of Malaya.

The circumstances leading to the Communist decision to challenge the British in open warfare in June 1948 are still, in some major respects, obscure. Attempts have been made to connect the outbreak of hostilities in Malaya and the Communist insurrections in Burma and Indonesia with the Communist conference held in Calcutta early in 1948, but some important links in the chain of evidence are missing. All that is certain is that from this time forward, the Malayan Communists attempted to gain a decision in their favour by terrorism and force of arms.

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The course of what has come to be referred to as the 'Malayan Emergency' has for nearly six years been reported in the world press with emphases and slants differing with the reporters and with the policy of the newspapers. The outstanding development in the military operations against the guerrillas was the putting into operation from 1950 onwards of the 'Briggs Plan' by which over 500,000 Chinese squatters brought in from isolated clearings in the jungle were resettled in over 500 'New Villages'. The effect of this was to force on the MCP a change of policy, and on 1 October 1951 they issued a new directive in which they admitted their mistakes, especially that of engaging in indiscriminate terrorism and the sabotage of industry which had alienated so many labourers by injuring their source of livelihood. In future, the directive ordered, armed 'incidents' would be limited to specified objectives and the main energies of the MCP itself would be directed towards infiltrating labour and gaining its support. Because of the nature of the terrain, this directive took several months to reach all branches and outposts, and it was nearly a year before a copy of it fell into British hands.

In the meantime there had also been a radical change in British policy. On 6 October 1951 (five days after the issue of the new Communist directive) the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, was ambushed and killed while motoring up the mountain road to Fraser's Hill. The new Conservative Government which had just come into power in Britain decided to replace him by a soldier who should be in charge of both the civil government and military operations. The soldier appointed was General Sir Gerald Templer. On assuming duty, General Templer applied himself primarily to his military task, his civil assignment, namely to lead Malaya towards self-government by the creation of a common citizenship and representative institutions, being relegated to second place. The energy with which the General speeded up military operations against the guerrillas, together with the decline in the number of 'incidents', was generally interpreted

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as promising an early end to the war in the jungle. It was only when the new Communist directive came to light that the main reason for the comparative immunity of the countryside from acts of violence became apparent — but only to those who cared to face the facts. The main force of the guerrillas had withdrawn into deep jungle to re-form, but there were still enough of them in the settled areas to stage 'incidents' when such were necessary to maintain prestige or to capture food or arms. General Templer himself admitted that the Communist guerrillas were still as numerous as they had been at the beginning of the Emergency and were obtaining all the recruits they needed. The number of surrenders meanwhile remained constant (about one a day).

Mr. Hanrahan correctly sums up the situation as I see it, namely, a stalemate or a *status quo* but adds that 'this *status quo* is in respect of Malaya itself, since any radical change in the situation outside of Malaya would probably destroy the existing balance of power'.

British policy is officially declared to consist of measures aimed at securing a complete military victory over the guerrillas side by side with steps leading Malaya towards self-government. Unfortunately, while the military campaign to date shows no signs of reaching a successful conclusion, the measures taken by General Templer to bring Malaya further on the road towards self-government or to raise the standard of living of the people have not been impressive enough to rally the support of the people as a whole on the side of the Government. Nor have the General's collective punishments done anything to improve the regard in which the administration is held by the inmates of the 'New Villages'. The result is widespread apathy when there is not active hostility towards the regime. The departure of General Templer in June 1954 is thus likely to leave the Malayan problem still far from solution.

The real battle in Malaya (as General Templer has repeatedly affirmed, though the persuasive mildness of the phrase is in

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strange contrast with his coercive methods) is for 'the hearts and minds of the people'. The Communists claim that the guerrillas constitute a Malayan People's Liberation Army — the 'liberation' being from British 'imperialism'. The 'Emergency' of 1948 is represented as a spontaneous rising of the people of Malaya — Malays, Chinese, and Indians — against British 'oppression'. The truth is, however, that 95 per cent. of the guerrillas are Chinese and the movement is a Chinese Communist one. Their propaganda department has taken great pains to explain to the people the basic ideological theories of Communism. The 'British enemy' is shown in uncompromising terms as the originator of a 'reactionary, criminal war'. The Communists look for support (moral if not material) from Communist China and their theory has obvious affinities with Maoism, but seems also to be orthodox Marxist - Leninist in some respects. The strength of their propagandist position is that they can confine themselves to promises while the Federal Government in Malaya is judged only by immediate results.

The British task has been to offer a counter-attraction to the promises of Communism in the shape of an improved standard of living and a concrete advance towards self-government. The depression in the rubber industry and the fall in real wages since 1939 have made it exceedingly difficult for the Government to offer more than the palliatives of 'welfare' and the moral consolations of 'uplift' in place of improved living standards, while the steps taken ostensibly in the direction of giving the people self-government have been widely interpreted by sections of the Malayan public as a concealed means of withholding it indefinitely from them. The slogans of democracy and the mottos of Samuel Smiles blared from loud-speakers over kampong, 'new village', and empty jungle have therefore been heard by the people as 'a plaintive and tremulous sound'.

In his study Mr. Hanrahan has, from various authentic sources, analysed the nature of Communist propaganda in Malaya and

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has produced a very valuable aid to the understanding of the basic issues in the Malayan conflict. He makes it clear that the Communist arguments are put forward with considerable plausibility and skill and are calculated at least to impress the Chinese squatters, uprooted from their homes and (as so many of them are tappers) suffering from the depression in the 'capitalist' rubber market. Hitherto the Malay peasants have paid little heed to Communist blandishments, but the existence of an agrarian problem in their midst, as revealed by the recent report of the Committee on Rice Production, accompanied by almost universal rack-renting, means that they are by no means to be considered as permanently insulated from Communist contamination. Propaganda of a much cleverer kind than that at present relied on by the Government is required to meet the challenge. The tactics of treating social, political, and economic reform as a mere instrument of psychological warfare in aid of a military objective have manifestly failed. The departure of General Templer, if the British people can be made aware of the facts, should be the signal for a complete reconsideration of British policy and attitudes.

VICTOR PURCELL

Cambridge University, March 1954

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE rise of Communist movements in South-East Asia has proved to be one of the important but little-understood political developments of the post-war era. Full appreciation by Western students of the true nature of Communist growth in this area has been hampered largely because of the absence of detailed studies on the local movements in each country.

This study is concerned principally with the strategy and tactics of the Communist revolutionary movement in Malaya. The problem is treated historically: tracing the origins and early development of Malayan Communism, its activities in World War II, and its revolutionary course in the post-war years. The time span covers roughly nineteen years — from 1924 through 1953.

Special attention has been given throughout to the revolutionary doctrines and practices of the Malayan Communist Party. Much of this study therefore is concerned with such topics as armed insurrection, revolutionary techniques, labour activities, and guerrilla warfare. There are sound reasons for this emphasis. Western students of the Orient are, for the most part, more familiar with the purely ideological or social manifestations of such movements and many are prone to under-emphasize the importance of the ways and means employed in carrying out a militant Bolshevik revolution. Needless to say, the Communists themselves have always taken full cognizance of the realities of these media in achieving their own revolutionary goals.

In order to provide the student of South-East Asian Communism with some basic source materials, six important Malayan Communist Party documents (in translation) are included in the second half of this book. These documents have been selected

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

not only for their importance in the Communist struggle in Malaya itself; but as a guide to Marxist-Leninist strategy and tactics as applied in other Far Eastern areas as well. Explanatory notes have been given where needed to acquaint the reader with special or unfamiliar terminology.

Most of the documents and sources used in this work are primary in nature, many of them having received little serious study to date. Captured Japanese Occupation records, Malayan Communist Party directives and histories, personal narratives and guerrilla texts have been referred to and, whenever possible, all data have been checked closely with other existing evidence.

I am indebted to the Institute of Pacific Relations for assistance in preparing the study and for arranging its publication. I also wish to express my thanks to Mr. William L. Holland, Secretary-General of the Institute, for his encouragement and editorial help, to Mr. Philip J. Jaffe for making available to me a number of documents from his library, and to Mr. Richard Howard who was particularly helpful in problems of Chinese translation. Though the study appears under the auspices of the International Secretariat of the Institute of Pacific Relations, I am solely responsible for opinions expressed in the volume.

GENE Z. HANRAHAN

New York, May 1954



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CHAPTER I

EARLY COMMUNISM IN MALAYA

MARXISM-LENINISM AND THE COLONIAL COUNTRIES

Early Communist thinkers long argued that the Orient represented a vast pool of reserves for the world revolution. In planning for the First International, Marx prophetically wrote that the Asian struggle would 'give off the sparks into the charged mine of the modern industrial system'.¹ Similarly, as early as 1908, Lenin pointed up the 'sharpening of the revolutionary democratic struggle in Asia', emphasizing clearly that the Orient as well as Europe would prove to be 'the great international ally of the Bolsheviks'.² But in the years preceding the success of the October Revolution, the Asian picture was perhaps too confused — its lands too distant and removed from the 'European revolutionary centre' — to be of immediate concern. In 1919, however, the stunning Bolshevik defeats in Germany and Hungary, followed by a marked decline in the Red tide sweeping Europe, caused Communist theoreticians to look to the East with renewed interest.

This was paralleled by the founding of the Third International (Comintern) in March of that year. The Comintern was to be a professional revolutionary organization to coordinate, assist and direct national revolutionary movements. As a result of the failures in Europe, Lenin made some exploratory attempts to redirect Comintern efforts at least temporarily away from the

¹Article dealing with the Taiping Rebellion, written in 1853. Cited in L.G. Safarov, *Marx and the East* (New York, 1934), p.8.

²Cited in Stefan T. Possony, *A Century of Conflict* (Chicago, 1953), p. 149.

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