

BRITISH COLONIAL POLICY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN MALAYA, 1945-1957: TAMING THE SHREW?

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Abstract

This article examines the policies of the British colonial administration in Malaya towards the formation and development of political parties between 1945 and 1957. The period 1945-1957 witnessed the emergence of political parties of various ideological dispositions and was an important formative period in the development of the modern party system in Malaysia. While there are numerous studies of political parties in Malaysia, no serious study has been undertaken to examine the policies and legislation governing the formation and activities of political parties in the post-war period concerned. This article examines the policies of the colonial administration towards political parties and legislation that were introduced during this period to regulate the establishment and functioning of political parties. In a broader sense, this study examines the extent to which the British colonial administration attempted to influence party politics and political activities in the period leading up to Malayan independence in 1957.

Introduction

British policy towards the development of political parties in the postwar period in colonial territories in general was quite ambivalent.¹

In Malaya in the early postwar period there does not appear to be any clear plan to regulate or shape Malayan politics, although this is more discernible from 1948. Party politics and political activity in the post-war period in Malaya (1945-57) was quite vibrant. A broad range of parties of different ideologies emerged to champion various causes and often were stridently anti-colonial. Interestingly a kind of embryonic parliamentary

democracy was also evident in the legislative council. The Federal Legislative Council debates in Malaya in the post-war period indicate a lively House that discussed openly and critically a wide range of issues – political, economic, social, administrative and security. The discussions were free, fair, passionate and almost unhindered. Although the federal legislature was a wholly nominated body with the High Commissioner at the apex of the system as the Chief Executive with veto powers, it nevertheless appears a fairly ‘democratic’ forum for the deliberation of issues affecting the nation based on the Westminster model. There were high quality debates on almost any issue of public interest. Bills were debated, Acts were passed and budgets and financial expenditure carefully scrutinised. Malaya’s external relations too frequently received attention in the Federal Legislative Council. The political relationship between the colonial administration and the subjects as such at times appeared to resemble that of any normal sovereign state.

Nevertheless, such a highly functional ‘administrative state’, raises the question of whether there were any efforts on the part of the British administration directly or indirectly to shape or regulate political parties and, in general, political activities. It must be noted that in Malaya the nationalist movements were very visible and vocal in the period immediately after the war. In this context, this paper examines British attitudes toward the development of political parties in Malaya between 1945 and 1957 to examine whether specific measures were taken to regulate party politics and political activity in general.

Most historical works on Malaya dealing with this period tend to avoid investigating this element. The reluctance is partly because of the previous inaccessibility to classified Colonial Office documents. But there is also a general tendency among some historians to avoid dealing with such ‘negative’ and fairly controversial aspects of British colonial policy and practice.² That is, to ask the difficult questions in conducting related historical enquiries and to question the master narratives. The exceptions are perhaps the works of some political scientists who have examined the development of political parties in Malaya with greater openness in their lines of investigation and are more critical in their analytical approach. These include G.P. Means, R.S. Milne and D.K. Mauzy, R.K. Vasil and Karl von Vorys who comment on these elements largely in passing. Nevertheless, these works by political scientists have not examined adequately British policy in this respect and lack the historical depth that historians bring to their investigations.³ More specifically, these political scientists have not examined the primary records revealing insight in the minds and decisions of the colonial policymakers. Clearly there is a certain inadequacy in terms of the amount and nature of research conducted on British policy towards the development of political movements in Malaya in the postwar period.

This article will first provide an overview of the development of political parties in Malaya in the post-war period to provide some background and context to the ensuing discussion. It will then consider legislation enacted in the post-war period which had an impact directly or indirectly on party formation and political activities in general. The following section will consider British policy and attitudes towards political parties in the period examined to discern their thoughts, reasoning and actions. The concluding section will consider the impact of legislative measures and non-legislative measures on the development of political parties in the Federation of Malaya. This article will argue that British policy in postwar Malaya was increasingly restrictive and while political parties were allowed to operate fairly freely, new legislation introduced, particularly in the context of the Emergency, inhibited the full development of political parties and political activity in general.

Overview Of Political Activity 1945-1957

The end of the Second World War saw a rapid resumption of political activities in Malaya barely months after the Japanese surrendered in August 1945. Several political parties were formed in late 1945 while the country was still recovering from the ravages of the war and placed under the British Military Administration (September 1945-April 1946). Two notable political parties which emerged during this period were the leftist Malayan Democratic Union (MDU) and the Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM). Means notes that the British Military Administration were suspicious of the MDU but did not object to civil servants joining the party.⁴ In addition, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), which was formed in 1930 and which served as a resistance force during the Japanese Occupation, resumed its political activities and was becoming quite influential.

Three other important communally based parties, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) were formed between 1946 and 1949. UMNO was formed on 11 May 1946 as a direct response of the Malays and Malay organisations to the introduction of the Malayan Union plan which was unveiled in October 1945.⁵ UMNO, which brought together more than 40 Malay social-economic and political organisations, was set up to oppose the Malayan Union scheme which deprived the Malay Rulers of their sovereignty and the perceived liberal citizenship regulations. The MIC was formed in August 1946, bringing together a number of disparate Indian organisations to better represent Indian interests.⁶ Another important political organisation which emerged during this period was the All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA) which attracted several political parties that came together to oppose the new Federation proposals replacing the Malayan Union constitution in 1947.⁷ One other party formed in this period was the Hizbul Muslimin, a religious based party which was formed by a splinter group from

UMNO in 1948. The MCA was formed in 1949, encouraged by the British administration as an alternative to MCP and to gain the allegiance of the Chinese.⁸ Initially the MCA was a social-welfare organisation that was intended to assist the government in the resettlement of the Chinese squatters into New Villages as a counter-insurgency plan. But in 1950, the party became a fully-fledged political party following a rethink among the party leadership.⁹

In the following period between 1949 and 1957, there was a further flurry of political activities and a host of new parties were formed. The introduction of local elections to a large extent inspired the formation of most of these parties. But several parties also emerged as a result of splits within the existing parties. The more notable ones were the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP), a non-communal party which was formed on 16 September 1951 by Dato' Onn Jaafar, the founder of UMNO, who quit his party to found the IMP.¹⁰ Another UMNO splinter group formed the religious-based Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP) in 1951. Several labour parties were formed in 1951 at the state level (Penang, Perak and Selangor) and then consolidated to form the Pan-Malayan Labour Party in 1955. The labour parties were modelled along the British Labour Party. In 1954, Parti Negara was formed by Dato' Onn as a successor to the IMP which had failed to gain support among the voters in the local municipal and state elections. Two other socialist parties, Parti Ra'ayat (1955) and People's Progressive Party (1956)¹¹ were also formed.

The wide range of political parties that were formed in the post-war period would appear to suggest that there were no major obstacles to party formation between 1945 and 1955. A closer examination, however, offers a more varied and complex picture. It must be noted at the outset that an Emergency was declared throughout Malaya in mid-June 1948 following a spate of killing of British planters purportedly by the MCP. Following this declaration the British administration under Sir Edward Gent banned the MCP, Hizbul Muslimin and several smaller political organisations from the Malay left. The administration deemed these organisations a direct threat to national security. The MDU dissolved itself shortly after the declaration of Emergency stating that the conditions then were not suitable for political activity. In the section below we will examine some legislation that were introduced by the British administration during this period which had an enormous impact on political organizations.

Legislation And Regulating Political Activity

British colonial governments were shrewdly legalistic in their approach to subduing and managing colonised territories and its peoples. The ingenious indirect rule system introduced in Malaya in the late 18th century achieved through a sleight of a pen, what may have taken considerable effort and time to gain control of through military force. Yet amid the seemingly gentlemanly capitalist administrations that governed British territories, a complex web of

rules, 'invisible' regulatory controls, political posturing and elements of state coercion are evident.¹²

In Malaya, the British government, which had gained a foothold in the states in peninsular from 1874,¹³ consolidated its position through the formation of the Federated Malay States (FMS) in 1895 comprising a union of the states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang. Appearing to offer some kind of protective status to the Malay states, the British colonial administration, which until 1874 was largely restricted to the control of Straits Settlements of Penang, Singapore and Melaka, gradually intervened in the Malay states through various treaties. Thereafter gradually through treaties signed with the Malay Rulers and legislation, the British expanded their formal and informal control over Malaya. The formation of the Federal Council in 1909 to serve as a central legislature enabled them to enact new legislation on practically all subjects with the exception of matters relating to religion and customs of the Malays.¹⁴ In the pre-war period the nascent political movements did not pose a threat to British control over Malaya. The situation, however, changed considerably after the Second World War and following the defeat of the British by the Japanese.

In the post-war period, the British administration faced strong challenges from nationalist movements. As India, Ceylon and Indonesia regained their independence the British in Malaya were concerned with rising tide of nationalist movements. The developments in Vietnam where the French were facing intense pressure from nationalists were also raising concerns. In response the British colonial administration devised various way of 'managing' the political parties which sought to champion the issues of self-governance, Independence and labour issues. This ranged from direct and indirect measures, both legislative and non-legislative and at times coercive. Malaya was an important dollar earner for the Sterling bloc¹⁵ and for the recovery of the war-ravaged British economy largely from the rubber and tin exports. There were no indications despite British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's assurance to United States President Franklin Roosevelt during the Second World War under the Atlantic Charter that Britain was prepared to let go of its colonial territories soon. This was clearly evident in the case of Malaya. A joint memorandum of the Colonial Office and Foreign Office prepared in 1942, for example, noted: 'It is our intention to foster self-government in accordance with the spirit of Article 3 of the Atlantic Charter but it is evident that the attainment of complete self-government involves a degree of responsibility to which some peoples have not yet attained.'¹⁶ Thus there was a need to devise a mechanism to control the exuberance of the nationalists movements; in other words, to tame the shrew. The section below will examine some of the legislation that were introduced in the post-war period to regulate political activity.

British control over political parties and political activities in general were not done overtly. Rather they were ingeniously implemented through a range of legislation, indirect measures and the expansion of security agencies to monitor political movements. The more extreme measures used were detention without trial and banishment. The use of restrictive legislation is most evident in the immediate post-war period. One of the earliest legislation introduced by the British to curb political activities was the amendment to the Trade Union Ordinance. On 31 May 1948 the British introduced an amendment to the Trade Union Ordinance that required office bearers of trade unions, other than the secretary to have worked in a particular trade for at three years before they are allowed to hold trade union posts.¹⁷

This was targeted mainly at the MCP via the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU). As Anthony Short notes: 'At this stage the Government was not touching the MCP as such but was putting the blame on the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions which was now to be proscribed, as a federation, by the Trade Union Amendment Bill which was read on May 31st.'¹⁸ The target of the British administration, as Short succinctly notes, was the MCP. One councillor, the trade unionist P.P. Narayanan, opposed the legislation arguing that it was conceived under a false notion. 'If the purposes of this Bill is to eliminate all outsiders because of the fear of unofficial strikes, it is a false notion, as the remedy does not lie there at all: you will have to war against want and fight exploitation...By insisting on three years' qualification, many of the young and progressive unions will fade away; the workers, wherever they are, being docile and illiterate, have always depended upon some public-spirited people to guide them; it is a natural phenomena, as the workers lack education and initiative.'¹⁹

But this lone voice was drowned by the large majority of voices in the house who supported the bill without seriously considering its implications. Beyond its immediate effect, this legislation not only deprived the trade union movement of able leaders, but also had the reverse effect of depriving the political organisations of potential political leaders often harnessed from trade union movements. This situation was of course quite distinct with what was happening in Britain in relation to the relationship between the Labour Party and trade unions where the trade union movement was highly influential in party affairs. Some scholars²⁰ have attributed this new legislation to the raised tension between the MCP and the British colonial administration and the outbreak of the Emergency. The MCP secretary-general Chin Peng has noted that this legislation would 'deprive the CPM of the right to lead the trade union movement.'²¹

The sweeping powers accorded to the state under the Emergency Ordinance introduced in 1948 following a spate of killings of British planters, conducted purportedly by the MCP, was possibly one of the most effective instruments at the hands of the British to control the populace. It was almost

a knee jerk reaction. One colonial document refers to it euphemistically as 'screwing down the people'.²² The Emergency Ordinance, which was rushed through the legislature (all three readings in one sitting), gave the security agencies, in particular the police, sweeping powers to search, arrest and detain anyone suspected of collaborating with the MCP. Stubbs notes, for example: 'The basis of the Government's use of coercion and enforcement to restore law and order was the Emergency Regulation under which the State of Emergency was maintained. The powers acquired by the Government included the right to raise a force of special constables, the right to control movement on the roads, increased rights with regard to search and arrest without a warrant, the right to order detention, the right to register the entire population, and the right to try all but capital offences *in camera*. Those societies thought to be in support of subversive activities were proscribed.'²³

People who were suspected of aiding the guerrillas, he notes, were liable to arrest. By the end of July 1948 1,445 persons were detained under the Emergency regulations.²⁴ By 1949, 12,000 people were deported mostly under the Banishment ordinance.²⁵ The legislation were not designed to directly restrict political activity but it invariably had such an impact. The resettling of almost half a million people into New Villages during the Emergency is perhaps a clear testimony of this iron fist policy.

The Emergency Ordinance provisions certainly had a serious impact on political activity. The Malayan Democratic Union (MDU), one of the earliest political parties to be formed in Malaya, decided to cease functioning as a party from 25 June 1948 stating that 'serious curtailment of civil liberties',²⁶ through the use of Emergency measures were not conducive to party politics. The British also banned the Malayan Communist Party and the Islamist party Hizbul Muslimin and several smaller left-leaning and radical political organisations which were deemed a threat to national security. The Emergency Ordinance was in place right up to Independence and in a sense hung as a 'sword of damocles' over the heads of the political parties and organisations, and to an extent political activities.

Several other legislation introduced around this time also served to act as a damper on political parties and directly or indirectly had a negative impact on political activity. These restrictive legislation included the Banishment Ordinance 1948, the Restricted Residence Bill 1948, the Societies Bill 1949, the Printing Presses Bill 1948, the Sedition Act 1948, the Undesirable Publications Bill, 1949. There were also restrictions placed on the entry of political activists into Malaya from other countries.

The Banishment Ordinance²⁷ was intended to curb the activities of secret societies and other trouble makers, but it also invariably had considerable impact on political activities. Difficult trade unionists could be, and in some cases were, deported using this legislation.²⁸ As noted above, by 1949, 12,000 were deported under this ordinance. The Restricted Residence Bill 1948²⁹ on

the other hand served to curb criminal and other illegal activities but also some impact on political parties in general and enabled the administration to 'keep an eye on the bad hats'. When moving an amendment to this act in the Federal Legislative Council on 6 July 1948, the Acting Attorney-General noted: 'It is felt by the Government that it would be a very good thing to have this on the Statute Books in case there was anyone we did not wish to detain under Regulation 15, we could very much restrict his movements under this; and quite apart from that, when the present emergency is over, and the Emergency Regulations will have gone, it would be, I suggest, a good thing to have a law like this on the Statute Book, to keep one's eyes on the bad hats.' Clearly political activists were high on the list of potential offenders.

A more sweeping legislation that assisted the regime in curbing political activity was the Societies Bill 1948. The Societies Bill required all societies to be registered and, more importantly, gave the Registrar enormous powers to reject the registration of a society or to deregister a society. Officially, this legislation was directed at curbing the formation of societies which were political in nature and which were linked to political organisations based abroad. But it served an equally useful instrument to restrain difficult local political organisations by threat of deregistration. The Chief Secretary in moving the Societies Bill told the Legislative Council noted: 'It gives the Registrar discretion to refuse registration, that is, where the Registrar is satisfied that the society is a branch of, or is affiliated or connected with any organisation of a political nature established outside Malaya and where it appears to him that such society is likely to be used for unlawful purposes.'³⁰ The Registrar is also given the power to deregister the society. This legislation was clearly intended to regulate the formation of new organisations and the continued operation of existing political organisation, with the registrar having enormous personal powers to reject the registrations of societies.

Further, there were several legislation introduced in this period which were aimed at imposing restrictions on the Press. These were the Printing Press Bill 1948, the Undesirable Publications Bill 1949 and the Seditious Publications Act 1948. These regulations went beyond mere registration and regulation and were intended to introduce controls over both local publications and the entry of foreign publications. The first legislation in this category was the Printing Press Bill 1948 which required all newspapers to obtain a permit. This appears in part a response to left-leaning publications that were then in circulation. In introducing the Bill, the Acting Attorney-General said: 'It is never a very popular thing to enact legislation which seeks to control in any way the Press. Freedom of the Press is one of the things which we have evolved in Great Britain and other countries which share our way of life, and a very excellent thing it is – there is no doubt about it. At times, it is abused; but the Press is a very powerful organ for ensuring that injustices are ventilated, and that Government does not go too far in repressive measures, and so on; but I say it

has never been a very popular thing to introduce legislation which seeks to control the Press. It has however been felt by Government that at this particular juncture in our affairs, this power should be taken.³¹ Evidently there seems to have been a gap between the principles of governance that the administration espouses and practices.

In 1957 a further amendment to the Printing Presses Bill sought to control publications from abroad that were being circulated in Malaya.³² These restrictions were clearly intended to restrict the freedom of the press and in a broader sense to control free political discussions through restrictions placed on political literature emanating from outside the country.

The second legislation which placed controls on the media was introduced a year later. This was the Undesirable Publications Bill 1949. This bill as explained in the tabling of the legislation in the Federal Legislative Council was seemingly intended to consolidate the existing laws in the federation in relation to controlling undesirable publications but had clear implications on personal liberties. There were some objections in the legislative council to the new bill with one councillor suggesting that the bill could be a little retrogressive in terms of political liberties and involved a departure from existing policy. Councillor R. Ramani pointed out that the consolidation of bill should not involve a change of policy, noting, 'in consolidating legislation we ought to keep pace with the spirit of the times and the demands of liberal ideas,' and felt that the bill 'involved fundamentally an abridgement of the liberty of the subject.'³³ Under this Act in 1952, for example, a total of 33 newspapers and journals that were imported were banned. Most of the newspapers and journals were those published by leftist organisations mainly in the United Kingdom and India.³⁴ While hardcore leftist oriented publications were perhaps justifiably restricted, the legislation appears to have been used to restrict fairly harmless anti-colonial writings and publications.

The third legislation which also imposed some controls on the media was the Sedition Act 1948. This bill was aimed at newspapers to prevent publication of seditious material and to consolidate existing seditious enactments in the federation. But the implications of this bill were much wider as the legislation hung as a new threat to freedom of expression over the heads of both on the media and political activists. Two new clauses gave the courts substantive powers to suspend the publication of newspaper convicted 'of having published anything having a seditious tendency'. The new act also allowed a person to stop the publication of a seditious article by going to court. All three readings of the Bill was done at the same setting with hardly any debate and while it was introduced speedily during the early stages of the Emergency, served as a useful legislation for the authorities to curb political dissent well beyond the period.

The powers of the police under the Police Act were considerably expanded during latter part of the Emergency and seemed directed at political activity rather than the insurgency. An amendment to the Police Bill 1955, for example, widened the scope of arrests for unlawful assembly considerably. The amendment expanded the expression 'public roads' to include 'every public highway, street, road, bridge and square.' This amendment was seemingly innocuous and intended to allow police to better regulate 'playing of music and the conduct of assemblies, procession and meetings in public roads, streets and places of public resort.' The effect of the amendment was in fact might wider and inhibiting to political activities, apart from non-political activities.

These wide-ranging legislation introduced during the period discussed when viewed in a broader context provide a different image of the seemingly vibrant embryonic democracy that was developing in postwar Malaya. A kind of political dichotomy in reality appears more evident. A systemic curbing of political activity is evident from 1947 and particularly after 1948. It also indicated signs of an increasingly authoritarian and repressive colonial regime that appeared intent on snuffing out political dissent, and dissenting politics that were contrary to its approved image of political correctness. These legislation had the effect of restricting political activities, of asserting immense state control over the media, and more importantly, inhibiting the formation of political organisations. The voluntary dissolution of the MDU is a clear instance of a party deciding not to continue operation in such a restrictive environment.

The Security Agencies And Managing The State

Apart from restrictive legislation, the work of the security agencies is also important in the context of 'invisible' state controls and pressure over political parties and political organisations. The rapid expansion of the security agencies in the post-war period was an important and decisive instrument of state control and coercion over political organisations and political activity. The Emergency amplified the perceived need of the authorities for an expansion in the scope and width of powers of these security agencies. It also provided wide-ranging powers to the British authorities to expand the reach of their intelligence gathering agencies with little internal or external resistance to this trend. There was almost unanimous agreement in the Federal Legislative Council when the Emergency Ordinance was tabled in 1948. The occasional murmur of erosion of civil and political rights that surfaced in the Federal Legislative Council in Kuala Lumpur and the Commons were largely drowned by the major political organisation and political reports, were compiled on every Colonial Office.

With the outbreak of the Emergency, the monitoring and surveillance agencies and instruments were considerably expanded. While emphasis was on the intelligence gathering on the MCP activities, the other political organisations and activists were not spared the snooping from these agencies as evident in the intelligence reports. Every discussion held by Dato' Onn bin Jaafar, Tan Cheng Lock and later the Alliance Party leaders' were carefully monitored and faithfully reported in the intelligence reports. The effectiveness of these intelligence gathering agencies is well illustrated in Anthony Short's work where he details the deep infiltration of the MCP by intelligence agents. On the Malayan Security Services intelligence gathering Short notes: 'Pride of place in the MSS reports was always given to Malay political activities and although, in general, the impression of omniscience was created – reading these reports one has the impression that political activists had hardly blown their noses before the MSS heard of it.'³⁵ The role of 'strategic propaganda' which includes the critical roles of several government agencies in boosting government efforts in the anti-insurgency campaign during the Emergency has been highlighted in recent works. These at the same time indicate the depth of the government propaganda in discrediting dissenting political organisations, largely in the name of national security.³⁶

A closer reading of the so-called weekly Pan-Malayan Intelligence reports, for example, indicate a vast network of surveillance and information gathering on parties, political organisations, trade unions and individuals throughout the period leading to Malayan Independence. This intelligence gathering had of course begun before the war but in the post-war period³⁷ and particularly after the declaration of a State of Emergency, these activities were vastly expanded. The reports were detailed factual information and analysis of political meetings and discussions, of assessment of political activists, of political trends and so on. Hack notes that in the period 1945-47 details on political organisations such as PETA, KRIS, Saberkas, API and the PKMM and others 'crowded the pages of the Malayan Security Service's reports'.³⁸ Area security committees that emerged during the Emergency further served as the 'eyes and ears' of the government in detecting clandestine political activities. The framework of area security committees (state security committee, town and village security committee) provided the security agencies with enormous control over the activities of the residents at the various levels of a geographical area, reaching to the smallest unit at the village level. This security framework was prevalent throughout the period of discussion and well beyond.

British attempts to shape the emergent pattern of politics in postwar Malaya is also clear from their policies and ideas, reflected in the statements of the administrators and internal communication between the bureaucrats, of the kind of political movement that they felt would suit Malaya. The British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia Malcolm MacDonald, High

Commissioners, Sir Henry Gurney (1948-51) and Sir Gerald Templer (1952-54). The British colonial administration attempted to encourage the emergence of a non-communal centrist party. In the initial stages of the postwar period, the British had hoped that Dato Onn Jaafar³⁹ would be able to produce such a party. But the Independence of Malaya Party formed by Onn in 1951 failed as did the Party Negara that he established in 1954. Senior British officials were closely involved in the formation of Party Negara. As it turned out, a coalition of communal parties called the Alliance Party emerged as the strongest political party when local elections were introduced from 1951. By late 1952 the alliance of UMNO and MCA established themselves as the leading nationalist movement. And in the first federal elections in July 1955, the Alliance soundly defeated the Party Negara which was unable to win even a single seat.

Shaping Malayan Politics And Identity

The discussion above indicates that British attitudes towards political parties in Malaya while on the whole not overtly repressive were nevertheless inhibiting, restrictive and at times coercive. The state amassed a wide range of powers to curb political activity and to arrest, detain and/or banish political activists. Various legislation introduced in the post-war period, the Emergency serving as justification, armed the colonial administration considerably and clearly had a dampening impact on the development of political parties and political activity in general. The parties of the left were crippled early on after the declaration of the Emergency in mid-1948. This invariably enabled, perhaps unintentionally, the more centrist parties to dominate the political scene and skewing the development of party politics and political plurality. The British administration secretly attempted to bolster the IMP⁴⁰ and Party Negara, but their efforts failed as the inter-communal alliance of UMNO and MCA (and later MIC) swept the local elections and established itself as the leading nationalist movement.

Equally important in this respect, the numerous legislation introduced particularly in the late 1940s, after the declaration of the Emergency, had a strong debilitating impact on party politics and in a broader sense political activities. The legislation introduced not only muzzled the more vocal parties, but also had a negative impact on the more moderate parties and on political activity; even stunting to an extent the natural growth and maturation of political parties. This evidently was well before the Cold War became a serious issue in Asia. The powers of the registrar vested in the Societies Bill, for instance, were wide and almost unfettered. The registration and continued functioning of political organisations were at the pleasure of the registrar. This is further supplemented by other legislation such as the Banishment Ordinance, the Restricted Residence Act, the Sedition Act and the Printing Presses Bill. The media was also considerably restrained.

When these separate but related developments, legislative and non-legislative measures, are viewed together a rather different picture emerges in postwar Malaya from that of a benign colonial power. While political parties of different shades rose to compete for political power, there were attempts to influence the emerging pattern of Malayan politics, and more specifically to reduce the challenge from the exuberant nationalist movements. The parties of the left were clearly snuffed out early in 1948, with a few less radical parties of the left (the Labour parties, People's Progressive Party) being allowed to function. The other parties were also inhibited in the organisation of their activities. Political activities were subject to a range of regulatory controls, some more visible and other less so.

Equally important, the legislation and mechanisms introduced by the administration set in place a highly restrictive security structure and surveillance system that continued to hamper the development of a more liberal democratic political system. The institutionalised system eroded considerably the basic civil and political liberties in the late colonial state and which continued to haunt the post-colonial state. The restrictive legislation were never really reviewed and although conceived for specific conditions during the Emergency continued to remain in the statute books well past the period.

Thus viewed in a broader context, it can be said that the British policies towards political organisations attempted to shape the pattern of Malayan politics. Malayan political development, unlike perhaps the developments in India and Ceylon, were somewhat distorted resulting in a lack of political plurality. British policy thus clearly had an enormous impact on the emergent pattern of party politics in Malaya.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that British policy in the period discussed inhibited and to an extent distorted the full development of political parties and political pluralism in Malaya. Through a range of legislative and non-legislative measures the Malayan polity was considerably 'regulated' to prevent the growth of radical anti-colonial political movements and at the same time to keep a lid on the nascent nationalist movements and even middle-of-the-road parties and political organisations. The Emergency in a sense provided convincing grounds for the colonial administration to restrict political organisations and political activity. But the discussion above has also shown that restrictive legislation in Malaya were well in place even before the Emergency was proclaimed and in the post-war period increased to regulate political parties and political activity. There was clearly a conscious effort to attempt to regulate political movements and political activity in the post-war period in Malaya well before the Cold War began to provide further legitimating

grounds for British policies in Asia. This was more closely associated to Britain's long term plans to consolidate its control over Malaya which was invariably linked to the importance of the territory to Britain's economic post-war recovery

Notes

- ¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the Fifth International Convention of Asian Scholars, 2-5 Aug. 2007 in Kuala Lumpur.
- ² See, for example, Robert Heussler, *Completing a Stewardship*, London: Greenwood Press, 1983; Anthony Short, *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats*, Singapore: Cultured Lotus, 2000; Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerilla Warfare*, Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1993; Karl Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, London: Curzon, 2001; Tim Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; and Nicholas J. White, *Business, Government and the End of Empire*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- ³ G.P. Means, *Malaysian Politics*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976; R.S. Milne and D.K. Mauzy, *Politics and Government in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publications, 1977; and R.K. Vasil, *Politics in a Plural Society*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971 and Karl von Vorys, *Democracy Without Consensus*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.
- ⁴ G.P. Means, *Malaysian Politics*, p. 83. The MDU was a largely Singapore based party which drew members from the English-educated non-Malays.
- ⁵ Ramlah Adam, *Kemelut Semenanjung Politik Tanah Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 1998, pp. 1-28.
- ⁶ Rajeswary Ampalavanar, *The Indian Minority and Political Change, 1945-1957*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1981, pp. 152-156.
- ⁷ The MDU convened a meeting of 11 political organizations on 7 December 1946 to form what was initially called the Council of Joint Action and later called the Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action and then All-Malaya Council of Joint Action. Several radical Malay political organizations including the Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Melaya (PKMM) also briefly joined this organization. The Malay organizations later withdrew to form a separate organization to oppose the constitutional proposals. The AMCJa called a 'hartal' on 20 October 1947 to protest the Federation proposals.
- ⁸ Heng Pek Koon, *Chinese Politics in Malaya*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, pp. 54-97.
- ⁹ Joseph M. Fernando, *The Making of the Malayan Constitution*, Kuala Lumpur: Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 2002, pp. 17-20.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- ¹¹ Means, *Malaysian Politics*, p. 156. This party was formed in 1954 and was known as the Perak Progressive Party. It aligned itself with the Alliance Party to contest local elections in Ipoh.
- ¹² See P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000*, London: Longman, 2001. For an overview of British colonial expansion.
- ¹³ British entry into mainland Malaya is usually dated to the Treaty of Pangkor signed with the Ruler of the State of Perak in 1874. Following this British advisers were appointed to the states of Selangor, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan. In 1895 these four states were brought under a centralised administration called the Federated Malay States. Earlier, the British had gained control of the settlements of Penang (1786), Singapore (1819) and Melaka (1824) which became crown colonies known collectively as the Straits Settlements.

- ¹⁴ Eunice Thio, *British Policy in The Malay Peninsula, 1880-1910*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969, pp. 140-162.
- ¹⁵ Nick White, *Decolonisation*, London: Longman, 1999, p. 7. See also discussions on the Sterling bloc in the Federal Legislative Council proceedings of 20 Nov. 1952.
- ¹⁶ CO825/35/4 (52), 'A Post-war settlement in the Far East: Need for a Definite policy', Joint Memorandum by Colonial Office and Foreign Office, August 1942, cited in A.J. Stockwell, *Malaya*, London: HMSO, pp. 18-25.
- ¹⁷ Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, 5-6 July 1948. The Bill provides for the suspension of the new provisions for one month to enable the unions to make the changes.
- ¹⁸ Anthony Short, *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats*, Singapore: Cultured Lotus, 2000, p. 60.
- ¹⁹ Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, 5-6th July.
- ²⁰ See, for example, Anthony Short, *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats*, pp. 60-70.
- ²¹ Chine Peng, *My Side of History*, pp. 204-205. Chin Peng notes: 'It became very obvious to all present that not only would such a piece of legislation restrict union powers, it would also deprive the CPM of the right to lead the trade union movement. With this in the pipeline we saw as the inevitable next step the outright banning of our party. We would have to be prepared. If the banning took place we would have no other option but to fight.'²² Karl Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, London: Curzon, 2001, p. 113.
- ²³ Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, pp. 69-70.
- ²⁴ Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, 27 July 1948.
- ²⁵ Karl Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, p. 127. Hack says the intensification of resettlement into new villages from 1950 was due to the 'closing off of outlets for banishment as China fell under communism.'
- ²⁶ G.P. Means, *Malaysian Politics*, p. 88.
- ²⁷ This ordinance provided for the banishment to China and India, or the countries of origin, those who are deemed to be troublemakers.
- ²⁸ See, for example, CO 537/5997 (14), Minutes of Malaya Committee (c. April 1950). The minutes of the meeting notes that the threat of repatriation 'could be held over the head of uncooperative Chinese in Malaya'.
- ²⁹ Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, 6 July 1948. The Restricted Residence Enactment provided for the making of an order requiring any person to reside in a particular place as well as exclude a person from a particular place. See also Proceedings of Federal Legislative Council, 24 February 1948.
- ³⁰ Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, 3 Aug. 1949.
- ³¹ Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, 6 July 1948.
- ³² Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, 11 July 1957.
- ³³ Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, 3 Aug. 1949.
- ³⁴ Among the newspapers, journals and other publications that were banned were *Action News Service* (UK); *Angles* (UK); *British Union Quarterly* (UK); *Communist International* (US); *Dheeran* (India); *Free Press* (UK); 'Indian Struggle' by Subhas Chandra Bose (UK); *The Indian War of Independence* by V.D. Sarvakar; *Malayan Monitor* (UK); *Moscow News* (UK); *Netaji* (India); and *Student Voice* (France).

- ³⁵ Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948-1960*, London: Frederick Muller, p. 80.
- ³⁶ See Kumar Ramakrishna, 'Telling the Simple Truth': The Role of Strategic Propaganda in the Malayan Emergency, *JMBRAS*, Vol. 75 Part I, 2002, pp. 49-68; and Anthony Short (2000), pp. 416-438.
- ³⁷ Karl Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, p. 115. Hack notes that by February 1946 Britain had started demarcating 'permissible political activity, preventing the use of unions for political purposes, and blocking the use of demonstrations as tools to undermine British authority.'
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47. Ramakrishna identifies the three key elements of the strategic propaganda as the Department of Public Relations, Radio Malaya and Malayan Film Unit.
- ³⁹ CO 537/7303, Higham to Gurney 6 July 1951. Higham notes that the Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs felt that 'Dato Onn represents the only real hope of the Malayan peoples breaking away from race and turning to party.'
- ⁴⁰ CO 1022/86 (20), Note by MacGillivray, 6 April 1953. The Commissioner-General Malcolm MacDonald was involved in talks with Dato Onn and others to revive fortunes of IMP and which eventually led to the formation of the Party Negara.