

1966

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Gordon P. Means

*Gustavus Adolphus College*

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### Recommended Citation

Means, G. P. (1966). The Internal Challenge to Malaysia. *Journal of the Minnesota Academy of Science*, Vol. 33 No.2, 141-145.

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# The Internal Challenge to Malaysia

GORDON P. MEANS

*Gustavus Adolphus College*

**ABSTRACT**— This paper presents an account of the activities of the major opposition parties in Malaysia. Because Indonesia has tried to utilize some opposition parties to bring about the downfall of the present government of Malaysia, special attention has been given to the impact of Indonesia on the Malaysian political scene.

Indonesia's announced policy of "crushing" the newly formed Federation of Malaysia has threatened to plunge Southeast Asia into turmoil and internecine war. The reasons for Indonesia's campaign against Malaysia have been examined at some length elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> What has received slight attention heretofore has been the impact of the dispute upon the internal political situation in Malaysia.

A brief sketch of the political scene in Malaysia must precede an account of how Indonesia has tried to manipulate Malaysian politics in its attempt to strangle the new federation in its infancy.

The Federation of Malaysia was formed on September 16, 1963 by the union of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, and North Borneo (Sabah). Malaya is the largest and most important of these states, and its political and economic stability is essential for the success of the new federation. Since 1955, the ruling party in Malaya has been the Alliance, a coalition of three communal parties representing the major ethnic communities of Malaya. The United Malays National Organization (UMNO) represents the Malays, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) the Chinese, and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) the Indians. While these three parties have retained their separate identity and communal structure, their leaders operating within the Alliance coalition negotiate compromises that balance the competing demands of Malaya's multi-racial population. As a consequence the Alliance Government has taken moderate positions on both communal and economic issues to obtain wide popular support from all elements of the population.

Gordon P. Means was an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Gustavus Adolphus College at the time this article was written. In 1965-1966, he was promoted to Associate Professor but was given a leave-of-absence to take a Visiting Assistant Professorship at the University of Iowa. He resigned from Gustavus Adolphus College effective August 31, 1966 to take a position at the University of Washington as Associate Professor. During the summer of 1966 he taught at the NDEA Southeast Asian Institute, Central Washington State College. In 1954-55 he was a Ford Foundation Research Fellow in Malaya, and in 1962-63 he held the Smith-Mundt Visiting Professorship in Political Science at the University of Malaya. During the summer of 1963 he taught at the University of Singapore. His Ph.D. and M.A. are from the University of Washington, and his B.A. is from Reed College.

<sup>1</sup> Donald Hindley, "Konfrontasi—The Dynamics of Indonesian Politics," (a paper presented to the Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting, March 20, 1964); George McT. Kahin, Malaysia and Indonesia, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Fall, 1964), pp. 253-270.

The Alliance policies that have been evolving since 1955 have tended to be along the following lines: First, extreme communalism in politics has been avoided, but the Government has recognized a special responsibility for improving the economic position of the Malays because of their poverty in comparison with the other communities. Besides extensive rural development programs, "special rights" are available to the Malays in the form of reserved lands, and special Malay quotas are established for employment in the public services, scholarships, and certain business licenses.

Second, while recognizing the importance of the Chinese, Indian, and European cultural traditions in Malaya, the Government has been placing increased emphasis upon Malay culture and language that are expected, not to replace the other cultural traditions, but to provide a common bond to unite the nation.

Third, the Government has stimulated substantial economic growth by encouraging private capital investment, both domestic and foreign.

Fourth, the Government is openly anti-Communist, having survived a Communist guerrilla insurrection of about 12 years. Although it permits limited trade with Communist China, it is fearful that Communist China will utilize the overseas Chinese to promote revolution or to extend its dominion.

By its monopoly of the moderate center of the political stage, the Alliance Government has forced the opposition parties to recruit support among those elements of the population that reject moderation and are willing instead to divide the country against itself or to look abroad for support. The main pockets of political opposition have congregated at both extremes of the communal axis of conflict. Chinese chauvinists attack the Government for being too "pro-Malay" and for policies designed to encourage the Malayan Chinese to forget their political and historical ties with China. The Government's education, immigration, and foreign policies have been subjected to a continuing barrage of criticism from an embittered minority of these Chinese chauvinists, some of whom believe that their political salvation and the future of "Chinese culture" depend upon the expansion of Communist Chinese influence over Southeast Asia.

At the other end of the communal spectrum are the militant Malay nationalists who claim that "Malaya belongs to the Malays" and that all other communities are "alien." They contend that the non-Malays, regardless of their loyalties or length of domicile, should not be

given citizenship or allowed to share equally in the economic wealth of the country. These Malay communal chauvinists want the Government to pursue more militant "pro-Malay" policies and to give no concessions to the political and economic demands of the non-Malay communities. Because the Malays constitute slightly less than a majority of the population of Malaya, the radical Malay nationalists have hoped to redraw the political map in Southeast Asia to tip the political balance in their favor and, thus to nullify the present power of the Chinese and Indians. For years these militantly racist Malays have been toying with the idea of *Melayu Raya*—loosely translated as "Greater Malaysia" but taken to mean the formation of a Southeast Asian empire embracing all peoples of Malay ethnic stock. The same objective has been promoted by Indonesian nationalists, but they prefer to call it *Indonesia Raya*. Presumably, this empire would incorporate all of Islamic Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, Malaya, the Borneo states, the southern part of Thailand, and the southern part of the Philippine Islands.

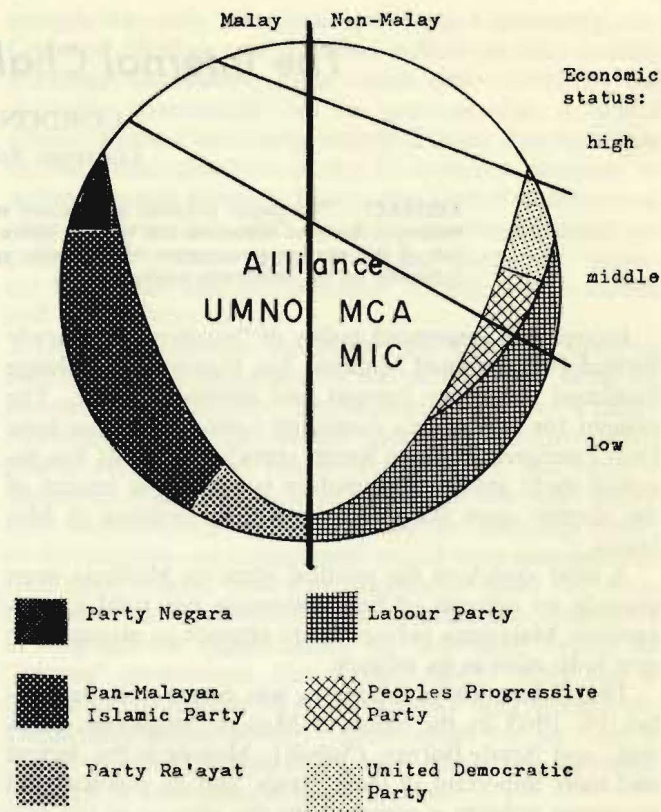
Although poles apart, Malay communal chauvinists and Chinese communal chauvinists have shared some common objectives that include the defeat or overthrow of the present Malaysian Government and the disruption of the Federation of Malaysia; the discrediting of the parliamentary process that promotes moderation and compromise; and the encouraging of anti-westernism tinged with racial overtones. Although holding incompatible views, communalist leaders have cooperated in their joint attacks upon the Government. The Marxian model of politics as "class warfare" has proven to be a convenient meeting ground for communal chauvinists among the opposition parties, since it facilitates cooperation among communal extremists by temporarily shifting the axis of political conflict from communalism to economic grievances. Thus, Malayan politics demonstrates that Marxism can be utilized as a temporary tactical expedient to promote communal objectives, just as nationalism has at times been utilized to promote Communism.

The political complex of Malayan politics may be illustrated by Figure 1 that diagrams the relative position of the Alliance Government and the opposition parties along the communal and economic axes of political conflict.<sup>2</sup>

An important factor in the creation of the Federation of Malaysia was that such a wider union would retain approximately the same communal and political balance as that of Malaya. This was possible because Singapore's large Chinese majorities could be offset by large majorities of Malays and native peoples in the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak.

The negotiations to create the Malaysian Federation were exceedingly complicated, since the new union had to take into account the different cultural, ethnic, economic, and political interests of each of the four units

<sup>2</sup> The economic axes on the diagram are not at right angles to the communal axis because of the greater poverty among the Malays as compared to non-Malays.



joining the federation. Since these negotiations were conducted by those who controlled political power in each of these states, the final Malaysia Agreement reflects the points of view of the majority party or the majority coalition in each constituent state. Even though the major opposition parties were consulted during the negotiations, the opposition parties have generally opposed Malaysia as finally constituted because their views were not given higher priority, and because the majority parties strengthened their political position by the new union. Although the new federation was negotiated with the view to creating a minimum political disturbance in each of the constituent states, it has had the effect of exacerbating communalism among the opposition parties because it weakened their power and presented a direct challenge to the hopes of some opposition leaders for fundamental realignments in Southeast Asia.

Table 1. Communal Distribution in Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, Sabah and Malaysia

	Malaysians <sup>3</sup>	Chinese	Indians	Others
Malaya . . . . .	49.8%	37.1%	11.1%	2.0%
Singapore . . . . .	13.6%	75.1%	8.6%	2.7%
Sarawak . . . . .	68.1%	30.7%	0.3%	0.8%
Sabah . . . . .	68.2%	23.1%	0.7%	8.0%
Federation of Malaysia total . . . . .	46.5%	42.0%	9.3%	2.2%

<sup>3</sup> The category "Malaysians" includes Malays and indigenous tribal peoples, on the assumption that their political and communal interests are very similar. However, there are important differences which undermine this assumption when certain political issues are at stake.

A review of some of the activities of the more important opposition parties will illustrate some of the communal tensions that have surfaced since the formation of Malaysia.

The Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP) is the strongest and most effective spokesman for Malay communalism. Its leader, Dr. Burhanuddin, was included in the Malaysia Solidarity Consultative Committee that drew up the first proposals for Malaysia. After five months of silence, the PMIP finally announced its opposition to the formation of Malaysia because Indonesia and the Philippines were not included. In criticizing government policy, the PMIP tried to impress upon the Malays that the new union would place them in a minority and not "safeguard their interests." The Malay communalist position of the PMIP was strengthened in late 1962 when the Alliance Government removed its Minister for Agriculture and Cooperatives, Abdul Aziz bin Ishak, because he persistently administered his department with such a "pro-Malay" bias that the communal compromises of the Alliance were being imperiled. Abdul Aziz later tried to found a new party based on his personal following among the Malay peasantry, but ultimately his National Convention Party became little more than an ancillary to the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party in espousing Malay communalism and the ideas of *Melayu Raya*.

Another opposition party in Malaya is the Socialist Front. It is a coalition of two separate parties of which the largest is the Labour Party of Malaya, which is primarily Chinese-led and has close ties with some of the larger unions in the country. In 1957 it joined forces with a radical left-wing Malay party called Party Ra'ayat. The latter was led by Ahmad Boestamam who had led a revolutionary Malay youth organization that was banned in 1947 by the British. He is widely known for his Indonesian sympathies and for his militant approach to politics. In order to hold the Socialist Front together, communal issues were ignored or glossed over. Economic grievances and anti-western anti-imperialism were stressed instead. The two parties agreed to oppose Malaysia "because of the way it was implemented," thus avoiding the problem of offering specific alternatives. Even so, the Socialist Front has suffered from grave internal stresses, particularly since the non-Malay political following of the Labour Party has been so much larger than Party Ra'ayat's Malay support.

The extreme chauvinist and Communist-inspired Chinese are scattered and are not too effective in Malaya. However, in Singapore they are concentrated in two opposition parties — the Barisan Sosialis and the United People's Party. Since 1961 these two parties have been engaged in an extended campaign to block or break up Malaysia, and to defeat or overthrow the relatively non-communal Peoples Action Party, which has retained power in Singapore since 1959 despite its near defeat in 1961 when the PAP split and its legislative majorities were reduced to the minimum. Shortly after the formation of Malaysia, elections were held in Singapore and the Peoples Action Party was returned to power, polling

47 per cent, while the remainder of the vote was split among pro- and anti-Malaysia opposition parties (see Table 2).

Table 2. Party Distribution in Singapore Legislative Assembly Before and After September 1963 Elections

	Before	After
Peoples Action Party .....	25	37
Barisan Sosialis .....	14	13
United People's Party .....	2	1
Singapore Alliance .....	7	..
Independents .....	2	..

In Malaya the Government also decided to renew its mandate, confident that it would secure popular support despite the severity of Indonesia's attacks against Malaysia. The election held in April 1964 resulted in increased majorities for the Alliance.<sup>4</sup> By adding the seats from Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah to the Malaysian Parliament, the Alliance held 125 seats out of a total of 159, while only 14 seats were held by opposition parties that were definitely "anti-Malaysia."

Table 3. Parliamentary and State Elections in Malaya, 1959 and 1964

	1959		1964	
	Parliament	State	Parliament	State
Alliance .....	74	207	89	241
Pan-Malayan Islamic Party ..	13	42	9	25
Party Negara .....	1	4	..	..
Socialist Front .....	8	16	2	7
Peoples Progressive Party ..	4	8	2	5
Malayan Party .....	1	..	..	..
United Democratic Party ..	..	..	1	4
Peoples Action Party .....	..	..	1	..
Independents .....	3	5	..	..

The election results throughout Malaysia made the more extremist opposition politicians more desperate than ever; the results provided ample evidence that the governments in these states had gained general popular support for the Malaysian Federation and had been able to capitalize on a growing sense of Malaysian nationalism that was being generated in large measure by the severity of Indonesia's military and economic offensive against Malaysia.

The anti-Malaysia opposition began to take desperate action even before Malaysia was formed. In February 1963 the Governments of Malaya and Singapore, and the British authorities, which were then still in control of internal security in Singapore, obtained evidence that Communist extremists in Singapore would try to join forces with Indonesia to make havoc, to attempt the overthrow of the Singapore Government, and to block the formation of Malaysia. The Government used its emergency powers to arrest 107 pro-Communist and pro-Indonesian politicians in Singapore, including some

<sup>4</sup>The party distribution in Parliament including all the states of Malaysia was as follows: Alliance, 125; Peoples Action Party, 13; Pan-Malayan Islamic Party, 9; Barisan Sosialis, 3; Peoples Progressive Party, 2; Socialist Front, 2; Sarawak United Peoples Party, 3; Independent, 1.

prominent figures in the Barisan Sosialis Party, as well as the Chairman of Party Rakyat Singapore. Shortly thereafter, Ahmad Boestamam, the leader of Malaya's Party Ra'ayat was also arrested for planning subversive activities with Indonesian cooperation. In prison, Boestamam made the following statement that was later released by the Government: "I am prepared to cooperate with the Communists to achieve my long-term plan to unite Indonesia, the Philippines, the Borneo territories, South Thailand, Malaya and Singapore into a greater Malaysia state. . . . In other words, I shall use the Communists, but I shall not be indebted to them." It is hardly necessary to add that the Communists and the extreme Chinese chauvinists have been following the same tactic, but with a different end in mind.

Capitalizing on the disillusionment and frustrations of pro-Indonesian opposition leaders, Indonesia began direct involvement in Malayan politics on an increasing scale after 1963. During the 1964 Malayan election campaign Indonesia gave secret financial assistance to the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party and Party Ra'ayat amounting to about M\$250,000. After the overwhelming Alliance victory, Indonesian secret agents began to press for the formation of a "Malayan Government in Exile" to be formed by as many opposition leaders as could be persuaded to leave the country. Such a move was to be coordinated with internal disorders and, hopefully, the formation of anti-government guerrilla forces in Malaya aided by Indonesian arms and "volunteers." The pattern was to be somewhat similar to the one that had been followed during the Indonesian-inspired Brunei revolution of January 1962, which, although it failed, resulted in the formation of an exile "Government of Kalimantan Utara" in Jakarta and claimed authority over the Borneo states.

The planned disorders were touched off in Singapore in July 1964 with the apparent cooperation of Communist-leaning Chinese extremists and militant pro-Indonesian Malays. Both elements hoped to capitalize on the chaos that was expected to follow. In a Machiavellian maneuver, racial rioting was triggered in Singapore when a small bomb was tossed into a Muslim procession celebrating the Prophet Mohammed's birthday. About a dozen persons were killed and about 400 were wounded in the ensuing racial clashes between Malays and Chinese. Singapore was placed under strict curfew for several weeks while government-sponsored "goodwill committees" tried to reduce communal tensions.

Shortly after the Singapore rioting, in August and September, Indonesian guerrillas were landed by boat and air-dropped into southern Malaya. Indonesian agents also succeeded in persuading pro-Indonesian opposition leaders to prepare to form a "Malayan Government in Exile" in order to lend credence to Indonesia's contention that Malaysia was a "neo-colonialist plot" imposed upon the people against their will. However, before these Malay opposition leaders could leave the country, the police intercepted a large number of their secret communications to and from Indonesian agents. In late Jan-

uary 1965, the top leaders of Malay communal extremism were arrested. The list included Dr. Burhanuddin, President of the PMIP; Dato Raja Abu Hanifah, Vice-Chairman of the PMIP; Abdul Aziz bin Ishak, President of the National Convention Party; Ishak bin Haji Mohamed, former Chairman of the Socialist Front; and V. David, former Socialist Front Member of Parliament. Ahmad Boestamam, President of Party Ra'ayat, had been imprisoned earlier.

The evidence against these individuals was published in a parliamentary white paper, which, if accurate, clearly demonstrated that the radical Malay opposition parties had been engaged in a series of acts that were nothing short of treason. Despite the evidence, no political parties were declared illegal, and action has been taken only against individuals for their activities.

These events illustrate that the fundamental problems of nation-building involve more than the creation of stable majorities at the polls. Extremist minorities, ever ready to resort to violence, pose a serious threat in any society, but this is especially true in the emerging states of Asia and Africa. Under these circumstances, democracy and constitutional order are subject to serious threats from at least two quarters: First, from opposition parties willing to use a political crisis and foreign support in the pursuit of political power heretofore denied at the polls; and, second, from a government that could become so preoccupied with meeting a crisis that it might decide democracy and constitutional processes are luxuries which cannot be tolerated during such a national emergency. Even in an established and stable country the distinction between a "loyal opposition" and a "disloyal opposition" is difficult to make with precision. In a country only just beginning the process of nation-building, such a distinction is even more uncertain and, in any case, too subtle to be appreciated by most of the population who have yet to think in terms of loyalty to the nation-state "Malaysia."

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