THE MALAYAN SCENE

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Lecture delivered to the Royal Central Asian Society on October 26, 1955, Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt, G.B.E., K.C.B., in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Mr. Corry, who has very kindly come here this afternoon to speak on what he calls the Malayan Scene, has had some 30 years' experience in Malaya in the Civil Service. He has now retired and, amongst other things, he looks after the Malayan students here in London. Last year he was out in Malaya as a member of a Commission of the Federation of Malaya.

I AM more diffident about addressing you on the subject of the Malayan Scene today than I would have been a year ago, because I left it in October 1954, and a very great deal has happened in the Peninsula during the past twelve months. I am sure you would like to have as up-to-date a picture as possible; indeed, the modernity of the picture in this rapidly changing scene is the measure of its value. I am obliged to rely on letters from friends, newspapers and periodicals for the latest facts. Perhaps, however, you may be kind enough to consider that a background knowledge of the country acquired in thirty years' residence there is of some value in interpreting the facts to you, even if some of the latest ones have been acquired at second-hand.

Let us first of all look at the picture from the standpoint of a year ago in the autumn of 1954. When we speak of the Malayan Scene we include Singapore, which was separated politically from the rest of the Peninsula after the war. As you know, the Federation of Malaya is composed of nine Malay principalities and the Settlements of Malacca and Penang—in fact, all the country south of the Siamese frontier with the exception of the Island of Singapore. This entity as at present constituted came into being under the Constitution of 1948.

It is most pertinent to remember that during almost the whole of the period since, the country has been at death-grips with militant Communism, whose objective was the overthrow of that Government and the substitution for it of a Chinese-dominated Communist Republic dependent on Peking.

The Constitution of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 was born out of the reaction of Malay nationalism to the British Government's immediate post-war scheme to set up a Malayan Union in the Peninsula. It was a compromise between the demands of British influence in the East and Malay Nationalist, but conservative, sentiment. It suffered from the inherent weakness that the other domiciled races—and notably the Chinese—had not been consulted in its formulation, and we can appreciate the extent of this weakness when we reflect that slightly more than half the population is non-Malay. But in 1947 the Malay claim to special consideration for the sons of the soil was still historically valid in our eyes, and in any case, conservative though it was (its enemies called it reactionary), this constitution did contain within itself the promise of progress in a

liberal direction, in particular by the introduction at a future date of democratic elections to the State and Federal legislatures.

The war against militant Communism is on its Malayan stage, a part of the world-wide struggle between the Totalitarian and the Free Worlds. In Malaya, fortunately, the issues were clearer-cut than elsewhere—notably in Indo-China. Racial differences between the Malays and the Chinese emphasized by the actions of the three-star Chinese guerillas who came out of the jungle in September 1945, before we resumed control, and the fact that the revolt itself is almost entirely a Chinese affair, meant that in Malaya Communism has not been able to assume the guise of a national liberation movement inspiring a majority of the population against Western Colonialism. The Malays may have had their doubts about us, but they liked the Chinese Communists even less, and that outstanding fact meant that full popular support would not be given to this revolt. With a few notable exceptions in Central Pehang, the Malays were wholeheartedly behind the Government in a war which looked to them to be an attempt to set up an alien Communist régime in the Peninsula. This is a fundamental fact and has indeed made the difference between possible victory and almost certain defeat, such as the French have suffered in Indo-China.

We are not here today to study the history of this struggle, but we must realize that it provides the background to recent Malayan history: we cannot get away from it. It is sufficient to say that a year ago the picture was one of steady progress towards military success on the part of the Security Forces, and of considerable parts of the country freed from terrorism and proclaimed White Areas where many of the most irksome of the Emergency Regulations no longer apply, particularly those restricting the movement of foodstuffs. More White Areas have been proclaimed since, and today over one-third of the population lives in them. Parts of Johore have proved the exception to the general trend, where the situation in central Johore is just as grim as ever it has been. It seems that Communism in these areas has got a grip on the Chinese population which no force yet can shake off. But the military side is barely half the picture, and there were still too many fence-sitters in the country—persons too timid to take sides and viewing the struggle as one between British Colonialism and the new China, of which they are the more or less helpless spectators. The Government has been wooing this segment of the population in its struggle "for the hearts and minds of the people," but the Communists, too, have their bait and cleverly disguise the hook within it.

During the desperate days of 1948-1951, when the issue was in doubt, the politicians' voices were stilled. But when it became apparent that Malaya was not to become a satellite of Mao's, they began to take heart of grace, and to press for some advance along the road towards the democratic liberal institutions promised in the Constitution. They also claimed that they, speaking with the backing of the people, could lead all the people in a crusade against Terrorism to an extent which the Colonial Government itself could never emulate.

If the Communist war provides the background to the Malayan Scene,

the multi-racial nature of its society provides the foundations on which the stage rests. The two predominant parts of that society are the Malays and the Chinese, almost equal in numbers and between them accounting for over 90 per cent. of the population. I do not think I need describe in detail the differences between these two halves of the population. They are wide and deep and, I am sure, familiar to you. Traditionally the Malays have looked upon themselves as privileged sons of the soil and to the British for protection against external enemies and economic domination. The Chinese were content to make money as privileged aliens in a well-governed country to which they have emigrated in such large numbers. This state of affairs was an unstable one, and could only last so long as British control was unquestioned. The Japanese army and the onward march of political thought in Asia destroyed the concept of permanent British rule. It was obvious, therefore, that a Malayan nation must be called into being to whom we could hand over the reins of government, and the task of turning this plural society into a nation, with a sufficiency of common loyalties to itself, became the supreme task laid upon Malayan statesmanship.

Between 1948 and the autumn of 1954 two important steps were taken, and, it is to be noted, taken at the instance of the Protecting Power.

The first step codified Citizenship, a matter of supreme importance in democracy where citizenship confers the right to vote, and the second step defined a positive Malayan programme of Education. Citizenship had been almost completely ignored in Malaya in the complacent halcyon days up to 1941. Persons born in Singapore, Penang and Malacca were (and are) British subjects; the Malays outside these Settlements looked upon themselves as the subjects of the Ruler of the State in which they were born, but did not consider this attribute extended to persons of other races born in the States. So long as all persons born in Malaya could obtain passports as " British-protected persons " the matter had not been one of great moment.

The Constitution of 1948 gave legislative clothing to the concept of local citizenship for the first time: some local inhabitants were citizens by operation of law, some could acquire citizenship on conditions. All Malays, of course, were citizens, but only a minority of the other races fulfilled the necessary conditions, and this is not surprising when we realize the Malay fears of being swamped by the alien tide—and after all the Constitution had been made by them and the British.

The Chinese never willingly accepted an inferior status, and with the growth of their political consciousness after the war they began to claim that citizenship should be decided by the principles of the *jus soli*—which means that persons born in a country are *ipso facto* citizens of it. Conservative Malay opinion of course opposed this. But the question was tackled; some concessions were made by the Malays, and after debate in State Councils, where Malays were in the great majority, and in Federal Legislative Council, a new code of citizenship was enacted in a series of complex and technical enactments. These laws do not as yet put non-Malays on the same footing as the Malays, but they do widen the field, and it is now true to say that over 40 per cent. of the Chinese in the country are

either citizens or are eligible for citizenship. So far by no means all those eligible for citizenship have taken the trouble to register, but numbers are increasing. To the Chinese this is not yet enough; they want the *jus soli*, and it is probable that in course of time this will come about.

In the matter of Education I think it is not unfair to say that before the war the British administration had not faced up to its responsibilities. It was considered sufficient to provide vernacular education for the Malays, and English schools for a minority of the intelligent children of all races. Monetary help to mission and denominational schools was granted when they conformed to the standards set by the Education Department. Similar encouragement was given to good Chinese schools, established and run by the Chinese community for their own children. So long as these schools conformed to the code, and taught nothing politically undesirable, they received support from a government which was only too pleased thus to " get by " on the cheap, without having to cater directly for the education of all its people. These Chinese schools were almost exact replicas of schools in China, and conformed largely to the National Government's code of education. They taught the young only their own mother tongues, and, in fact, how to remain Chinese in an alien land. In spite of the advice given by their experts, it does not seem to have occurred to the British administrators of a generation ago that their established system of education was omitting to train half the population to be " Malayan " citizens.

It was realized after the war that a positive educational policy was essential; the plan adopted was the creation gradually of truly National Schools throughout the Federation. I have no time to go into details; it must suffice to say that these schools were " to provide for children of all races a six-year course of free primary education with a Malayan orientation and appropriate for children between the ages of six and twelve." By the autumn of 1954 this policy had hardly been started; it required money at a time when revenue was falling, and in itself it was by no means unanimously welcomed by the Chinese, who saw in it an attempt to denigrate their own ancient culture. Now the new Government of the Federation is reconsidering its educational policy *de novo*.

We have considered two major bricks built into or planned for the building of the new nation, and the " bricks " were designed and emplaced or planned by the Protecting Power. It now behoves us to examine what the leaders of local opinion themselves had attempted and achieved by the autumn of 1954. In the main this was the statesmanlike realization of the most influential of the Malay and Chinese political leaders that unless communal differences could be overcome and a common denominator of loyalty to Malaya created there was no hope of building a self-governing Malayan nation. Encouraged by the work of the Communities Liaison Committee, presided over by the Commissioner-General, their leaders got together and have now created the Alliance of the United Malay National Organization with the Malayan Chinese Association, which has one common political platform and has fought elections at municipal and State level as one seemingly closely knit body. The Alliance has had very great success at the polls and can be said to be the only political " horse " in the

race at the moment. A tribute is due to the statesmanship which created this Alliance, to the Malay and Chinese leaders who realized so clearly the great danger for the country if political opinions were to be split along the lines of racial cleavage. This anti-communal approach to Malayan problems has now become a plank in the platform of all political parties. To some extent, of course, this process was only a papering-over of very wide cracks.

In the structure of the Malayan Constitutions themselves two big changes had been effected between 1948 and 1954. First of all, in Singapore the Rendel Commission had recommended sweeping changes, and these had been adopted. The Colonial Legislature created in 1946 had 25 seats, of which 12 were held by elected members. The new Legislature contains 32, of which no less than 25 would be elected. The Executive Council was to consist of a majority of Ministers in charge of departments with seats in the Assembly. The Governor still has general reserve powers over the whole field of government for emergency use, and is in sole charge of defence and foreign affairs.

In the Federation political pressure to start elections had been steadily mounting, and a Select Committee of the Federal Council had reported on the matter. In this event, and as a first step, it was agreed between Her Majesty's Government and the Rulers that the Federal Legislature should be increased to 100 members, of whom 52 were to be elected. *Pari passu* the States and Settlements also began introducing elected seats into their Councils, some with a minority and some with a majority of such seats.

There is little time to examine the economic picture. It remained, speaking generally, true to type, with ups and downs in the prices of the two chief products—rubber and tin—prices being high during the Korean War and declining rapidly in 1952 onwards. When rubber and tin are high, revenue is buoyant, and the converse is true. Truly here the "eggs are nearly all in one basket," and Malaya is ultra-sensitive to the values of these two commodities. Since the autumn of 1954 the pendulum has begun to swing again and prices have been much more buoyant.

Wise men have, of course, year in year out suggested a diversification of the Malayan economy in order to place it on a wider basis, but the fact remains that, taking the good and the bad years together over a considerable period, the cultivation of rubber will certainly have brought in more cash to the small farmer than any other crop. For the sake of the good years he will tolerate the bad. Another fundamental factor is that Malaya is not ideally suited to the cultivation of rice in large quantities. Scientific methods are increasing the areas under cultivation and, above all, the yield; but it looks as though increased production will at best only keep pace with the increasing population, of which the Malayan ricefields will at best continue to feed but one-half. All this points to the continuation of a brittle, sensitive economy sitting on a narrow base-plate; and it means that the development of industry—no easy task—will be needed to cope with increasing population; and this postulates stability and good government.

In our quick and rather superficial glance over the Malayan landscape

we have considered some of the outstanding facts and problems as they appeared a year ago. This was a convenient point of vantage for reasons which I hope are clear to you. The electoral urns were ready and it remained to see what would come out of them.

In Singapore the shady side has been ventilated in the English Press in larger quantities by far than is usual for Malayan news. The first General Election for the new Legislative Council there showed a sharp swing to the Left; the Conservative Progressive Party, led by Mr. C. C. Tan, which had been the largest elected element in the old Legislature, was heavily defeated, and Mr. Marshall has become the first Chief Minister, backed by a Labour Front majority. The opposition consists for the most part of the People's Action Party, well to the Left of Mr. Marshall. We have read how Mr. Marshall has had to cope with Communist-inspired rioting by hooligan schoolchildren and with intense labour unrest. He has had to forget conveniently his demagogic promises in dealing with incipient chaos. He has already challenged the prerogative of the Governor, but has succumbed to the charm of the visiting Secretary of State. Mr. Marshall has learnt the hard way; we can have confidence that he will ride clear of anarchy; we can and must hope that he will stay in the saddle lest worse befall.

In the Federation the Alliance won last July the most resounding victory probably ever achieved by a political party at the polls anywhere, winning 51 out of 52 contested seats. Tenghu Abdul Rahman has been acknowledged as Chief Minister and holds the portfolio of Member for Home Affairs in the Executive Council, and other leading members of the Alliance have been appointed to portfolios with seats in the Executive Council. In both Singapore and the Federation the new Governments are planning further steps along the road to full democratic status, and no doubt 1956 will see the planning of new Constitutions in both areas.

What, then, are the problems and the possibilities which face these new young Governments in the onward march, first to self-government and then to independence, we hope within the Commonwealth?

The first big executive act of the new Federation Government has been the offer of an amnesty under terms to the Terrorists, which has as yet produced little results. Tengku Abdul Rahman and Mr. Marshall are hoping to meet the Communist leader Chin Peng and to persuade him to order his followers to lay down their arms. It, however, looks as though the terrorist leaders were hoping to negotiate a settlement rather than accept the offer of an amnesty. There lies danger for the two Ministers, as the temptation to negotiate and stop the war is strong, especially today when the woolly complacency of the Geneva spirit is appealing so greatly to the sentimental and the woolly-minded and the West seems to be lowering its guard. But if temptation is not resisted and Communism—as at present constituted in South-East Asia—is allowed to have its legal place in the political life of the country, then I think we can write off these young growing democracies, to say nothing of our own influence and our capital in South-East Asia. Fortunately, the influence of the Protecting Power is still strong, but it will tend to wane, and that quickly. Sir Donald MacGillivray and Sir Robert Black must now tread

gingerly, but let it never be forgotten that it is by British power alone that Malaya has been so far kept on this side of the Iron Curtain.

There is another great Malayan problem in the relationship of Singapore to the Federation. Shall they continue as separate entities or coalesce or federate into some form of union? Their separation was always something of an anomaly, bound together as they are by the facts of geography, the flow of trade and communications, and the realities of defence in South-East Asia.

Conservative Malay elements in the Federation fear the Chinese preponderance in Singapore and the chauvinist unrest of the Chinese proletariat there. With the lesson of Cyprus before them they may well feel, too, that Singapore, for high strategic reasons, may not be allowed the choice of complete independence by Great Britain. As for many of the local Chinese in Singapore, they do not want to be tied to a backward Federation advancing, in their eyes, so slowly along the road to complete democracy. Mr. Marshall stressed the need for some form of political unity in his election propaganda; in fact, he and the Federation Chief Minister have stalled on this point, and for the moment the only visible bonds are occasional *ad hoc* meetings between the heads of the two Governments.

No doubt in the end it will be inevitable that some closer union comes about—we see this process at work in Central Africa and the West Indies —but the road to it will not be easy.

In the Federation the Chinese demand for the *jus soli* as the test of citizenship may split the unity of the Alliance, and that unity may be still further strained in the search for a new and mutually acceptable educational policy. The Alliance itself as an omnipotent monolith runs the danger of heading towards Fascism, and signs of this have already appeared in the conduct of some of the more irresponsible elements in the party. A parliamentary opposition is essential to the proper workings of a democratic parliamentary machine, and as the other parties like Negara and the Labour Party are at present almost defunct, it may well be that that opposition may be created by rifts in the structure of the Alliance itself. The complete rout of other parties also, of course, results in a number of able men being excluded from public life, and one of these is Dato Onn himself. It would, however, be a major tragedy if the Alliance were to split vertically into two racially-inspired halves.

Malay poverty and lack of capital is another big problem for the future, again likely to strain Malay-Chinese relations. This may well prove to be the stimulus to the creation of a bigger and more influential Labour Party with Socialistic leanings. I think, in fact, that the Socialist " horse " may be a strong runner at the next General Election.

There is another problem in the matter of the Malay States. Will a democratically elected Central Government tolerate the amount of power still exercised in State matters by Governments which still tend to be ultra-conservative monarchies resting on a feudal basis? We know how Mr. Nehru has solved that problem in India, and his example is powerful.

Bound up with this, of course, is the question of the future of the Malay Sultanates. These Princes are still the objects of loyalty from their

subjects, and certainly no sagacious politician would seek to upset this state of affairs. In a sense the question is a technical one: how can sovereignty be exercised in an area containing nine Sovereign Princes, and two Settlements in which sovereignty rests with the British Crown? It looks as though sovereignty will have to be delegated if possible to one individual—one of the Princes maybe—who can exercise it as an individual.

What of the political leaders? What sort of men are they? Mr. Marshall is impetuous, inclined to be demagogic and has had everything to learn of the art of administration. But he is no Communist; he has learnt quickly and has appreciated what a drift to chaos would mean. We can hope that he will remain in the saddle lest worse befall.

In the Federation, Tenghu Abdul Rahman has acquired great popularity amongst the people by living simply amongst them and listening to them, even though he is a member of the Kedah Royal Family. He is, I think, sincere and friendly, but as a Prime Minister with full powers in the future one can be apprehensive about his mental capacity for so great a task. Fortunately, he has some able lieutenants in Colonel H. S. Lee, the Minister of Transport; Dr. Ismail, the Minister for Natural Resources; and Dato Razak, the Minister of Education. These three men provide the main driving force in the new Government.

Dare one hazard a prophecy? I feel that the Malays have made the mistake of clamouring too soon for the shadow of freedom—*merdeka*—and the departure of the British. For the moment they are politically in the ascendant, and the Alliance rests on a majority of Malay votes. But the Chinese have yet to "present their bill," and when they do and we are on the way out, the Malays may well regret that there are no friends present to redress the balance in their favour.

I should like finally to say one special word to an English audience. As head of the Malayan Students' Unit in Great Britain, I realize what a target Malayan Students are for the Communist Party. The approach is subtly made through fellow-Malayans, most of whom would not admit to being Communists, but who as "fellow-travellers" propagate the Communist "line." That teaching is, of course, that the Malayan Races Liberation Army is what it says it is, the "starry-eyed" vanguard of an army liberating the people from colonial tyranny. None of these gentlemen, living in security in the suburbs of this great city, have really much conception of the methods of the murdering thugs who have plagued Malaya for so long, nor of the aims of the leaders of those thugs. I have tried to suggest the true picture to you, and you may well have the opportunity to use it in discussion some time in the future.

Miss KELLY: There is an enormous amount of Communist literature in this country which is seen by Malay students. Can the Russians envisage using the Malayans as a card eventually to use against China? Translations as well as ordinary Soviet literature are buttering up the Malayans against the Chinese in a most incredible fashion.

Mr. CORRY: I have no doubt that the whole situation is being exploited by the Kremlin for its own purposes. It is rather difficult to know how far they leave things to the Chinese and how far they interfere directly

themselves. They are doing the same in the Middle East and buttering up the Arabs. One thing I would add is that it does not by any means follow that the Chinese are going to play the game for ever. They possibly have their doubts about the Russians.

A MEMBER: How do the birth-rates compare as between the Malays and the Chinese? What are the probable future rates of increase?

Mr. CORRY: I cannot give you actual figures, but I would say the ratio is about five to three. Certainly the Chinese increase is considerably greater than the Malays, but that has been due somewhat to child mortality, which is now being coped with, and the tendency is for the gap to narrow a little.

Mr. MILLER: May I ask for your prophecy as to the future of the Malay Rulers? I do not think we need contemplate any drastic action but a more constitutional course. The Federation of Malaya, among the federations of the world, is, I think, unique in that the component parts, except the two Settlements, are sovereigns and the Federation Agreement is legally between nine sovereigns on one side and one sovereign on the other. It is a matter of technique. I am very interested to know, when the new Government gets into the saddle and possibly the present large nominated proportion is replaced by elected members and the Central Government is therefore stronger than it is now, what rôle these nine Rulers will be able to play.

At the moment one sees on every occasion the High Commissioner, accompanied by the Chief Minister, meets the Rulers, and there seems to be a very happy relationship between them. The next step may be elections in the States and an elected Prime Minister taking the place of the present nominated one.

Do you foresee, for the stability of self-governing Malaya, Rulers functioning as a conference of senior statesmen collectively, as they do now, being accepted by an elected legislature of the Federation as a whole?

Mr. CORRY: It is a very difficult question to which one can think of all sorts of theoretical solutions. Loyalty to the Rulers is a very live thing among the Malays, and any interference that was regarded as interference would provoke drastic consequences. It might be possible to have the nine Rulers functioning as a sort of Council of the Throne. You talk about the technique of it. How does a nine-headed sovereign deal with a Prime Minister and a Central Government? I think it is very difficult. One possible solution suggested was that the Rulers should elect an "emperor." Personally I think that is quite possibly a solution. They might give something in the nature of power of attorney to one of their number to act as a sovereign in federal matters.

The CHAIRMAN: If there are no other questions, I will on your behalf thank Mr. Corry very much indeed for all the trouble that he has taken in coming here and giving us this very clear picture of the Malayan Scene, which has been most interesting and which was put very clearly. We thank Mr. Corry very much indeed. (Applause.)