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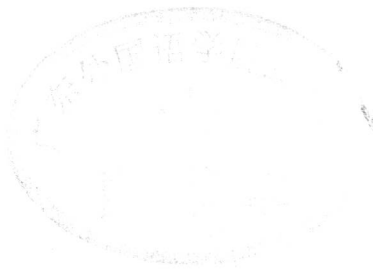
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VIRGINIA THOMPSON • RICHARD ADLOFF

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THE LEFT WING IN Southeast Asia



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THE LEFT WING IN
Southeast Asia

Previous books by VIRGINIA THOMPSON

FRENCH INDOCHINA

THAILAND: THE NEW SIAM

POSTMORTEM ON MALAYA

LABOR PROBLEMS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

To
CORA DU BOIS

“It goes without saying that the popular uprising can take place only when the impoverished people are ripe for revolution—for example, when a people of 55 millions prefer death to the life of slaves and will laugh at the sight of mounted and armed policemen; when the prisons will be opened and the leaders released; when the railroad and dock workers will refuse to assist in transporting their leaders sent into exile; when soldiers refuse to suppress the movement and to fire on the innocent and unarmed masses; when Europeans will have to sleep with revolvers in their hands and will be afraid to eat anything that has not already been chemically analyzed. All those things will be proofs that the revolutionary spirit has taken firm root, that it has strongly developed, and that nothing short of liberty can stop it.”

Tan Malaka, *Semanget Moesa*,
Tokyo, January 1926

The Institute of Pacific Relations is an unofficial and non-partisan body founded in 1925 to facilitate the scientific study of the peoples of the Pacific area. It is composed of autonomous National Councils in the principal countries having important interests in the Pacific area, together with an International Secretariat.

The Institute as such and the National Councils of which it is composed are precluded from expressing an opinion on any aspect of national or international affairs. Opinions expressed in this study are, therefore, those of the authors.

AUTHORS' PREFACE

DOCUMENTATION FOR A STUDY OF LEFT-WING movements in southeast Asia suffers from a lack of unbiased sources. Indeed, little has been written on the subject at all. In part this is traceable to the very nature of communism, and in part to the fact that, except for brief interludes, Communist parties in the area have been illicit organizations. Personal contacts with communists in southeast Asia were not very fruitful as to information concerning their strength and programs. During a six-month journey in southeast Asia in 1947 the writers conscientiously tried to interview all communist leaders who would consent to talk with them. Although at that time the Communist parties were not proscribed, only a few of their leaders granted interviews, and none of them was informative.

In consequence, much of the factual material used in the following chapters has been based perforce on what is virtually the only printed information on the subject—newspaper reporting and, in some cases, the police records of the colonial powers in southeast Asia. Specifically, we are indebted in large part for data in the chapter on Vietnam to *Le Parti Communiste Indochinois*, written by members of the French Sûreté and published at Hanoi in 1934; for those on Indonesia, to *Le Communisme aux Indes Néerlandaises* (Paris, 1929), a translation of a study by the Dutch official, J. T. P. Blumberger; and for those on Malaya, to excerpts from the work of a former police officer of the Straits Settlements,

AUTHORS' PREFACE

R. H. Onraet, printed in the *Straits Times* (Singapore) during January 1946.

The writers wish to express their appreciation of the great kindness of Milton Sacks, whose study of Vietnamese political alignments is a work of excellent and authoritative scholarship. Their thanks also go to Charleen Egan, who has made a similar comprehensive analysis of Malayan Marxism, and to John F. Cady, for his constructive criticism of the chapter on Burma.

V. T.

R. A.

New York City
September 1949

FOREWORD

IN AN ATTEMPT TO ANTICIPATE THE PROBABLE PUBLIC need for an up-to-date, concise account of the momentous political changes now occurring in southeast Asia and of their bearing on the clash of Soviet, American, and other international rivalries in that part of the world, the International Secretariat of the Institute of Pacific Relations about a year ago invited Mr. and Mrs. Adloff to write this book. It is one of a group of inquiries which are being prepared as part of the international research program of the Institute of Pacific Relations on nationalism and politics in the postwar Far East. Companion studies will include a book on left-wing political movements in Japan by Evelyn Colbert, one on communism in China by Michael Lindsay, one on government and politics of China by Chien Tuan-cheng and one on communism in Japan by Rodger Swearingen and Paul Langer.

Other studies in the program relating more specifically to countries of southern and southeast Asia will include a report on postwar politics and nationalism in Indonesia by George McT. Kahin, one on Burmese nationalism by G. E. Merrells, one on the development of Vietnam by Ellen J. Hammer, a more detailed study of Vietnamese political alignments by Milton Sacks and a survey of the Chinese in southeast Asia by Victor Purcell. It should be noted also that the forthcoming Eleventh International Conference of the Institute, to be held in India late in 1950, will have as its main discussion

FOREWORD

topic the subject of nationalism in the Far East and its consequences for the western world. Many of the preparatory papers for that conference will therefore deal with recent developments in the nationalist movements of eastern and southern Asia.

The present volume includes chapters on Indochina, Thailand, Burma, Malaya, and Indonesia. Plans are being made for a separate I. P. R. study of politics and nationalism in the Philippines.

William L. Holland
Secretary-General,
Institute of Pacific Relations

New York
March 6, 1950

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1: The International Position of Southeast Asia

IN THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE, THE POSITION OF southeast Asia is nebulous and troubled and is likely to remain so for a long time to come. The region is subject to the same pressures, attractions, and repulsions as are other newly emerging groups of small nations in relation to the two main power blocs, led respectively by the United States and the Soviet Union. Yet southeast Asia lacks the religious cohesion of the Arab League and the cultural unity of the Latin American states, and it cannot reasonably expect a purely Asian solution to its problems. Its major common denominators are the political and economic subjection to the West in which southeast Asians have been held for centuries, and for which they want to substitute international relations that will aid their national development without endangering their sovereign status.

Quite apart from what may happen in the larger world arena, the degree and the rapidity with which the southeast Asian countries will gravitate toward one or the other of the major blocs depend upon a number of as yet unresolved local and Asian questions. If they continue to follow India's lead

toward a closer association with the Western bloc, the reward will be greater aid than they can obtain elsewhere. But the liabilities of such a policy include relegating the achievement of national independence and of drastic economic reforms to a position subordinate to the forming of a common front to fight communism. This, in turn, may lead to civil war within each of the countries of the area, for the group that allies itself with the West will inevitably lay itself open to the charge of having sacrificed national interests to those of selfish power.

If, on the other hand, southeast Asia moves into the Soviet orbit, co-operation with Communist China and a radical program of domestic economic changes will probably ensue. And this too might well lead to civil strife, for the expansionism of China and of the Chinese minorities in southeast Asia are feared more widely than are India and its nationals domiciled in southeast Asian countries. Furthermore, in opposing this development the region's nationalists would be joined by the local bourgeoisie and aristocracy, whose property and privileged status could not otherwise survive.

Thus the nationalist and socialist governments which form the hard core of southeast Asia's present independence struggle and which supply its leadership are hard pressed from all sides, and their main hope of survival lies in their opponents' continued lack of unity. On the Right are to be found the metropolitan powers of Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands, as well as capitalists, both foreign and indigenous, and the local aristocracy—all of which are trying to retain as much as possible of their former power and position. Yet division exists within the ranks of each, between the die-hards and the compromisers. And these in turn may be reclassified into those who oppose or who advocate change on principle or according to practical considerations. On the

Left are the Stalinist and Trotskyite communists, who differ not in their opposition to both the nationalist-socialist governments and the imperialists but in the timing and methods by which their enemies can be most effectively destroyed. Somewhere between the two extremes come the small groups of fanatics, such as the conservative wing of Masjoemi in Indonesia, who fear co-operation with any outside group but who might make a temporary alliance with what they regard as a less dangerous opponent for the sake of eliminating the major adversary. The Chinese and Indian minorities, insofar as they do not succeed in standing aloof from the whole struggle, are the most divided groups of all. Prosperous members of those communities naturally align themselves with the Rightist opponents of the nationalist-socialist governments, whereas the laboring class has shown receptivity to indoctrination by the extreme Left.

Nevertheless, ideologies are still not the determining factor in southeast Asian alignments, either internally or externally. The great bulk of the people are illiterate, politically unawakened, and concerned almost wholly with daily down-to-earth problems. Then too, personalities continue to play a dominant role even among the small intelligentsia. It is no exaggeration to say that the assassination of Aung San in 1947 has had a far more decisive effect on subsequent Burmese history than have the conflicting programs of the rival groups now fighting each other for control of the country. Violence has now become so pervasive in southeast Asia that a country's course may be altered from one day to the next. Yet certain basic forces remain, and these will ultimately determine which way the region will go. It must gravitate toward one or the other major power bloc, for neither India nor China alone—though they are the most powerful nations on the continent today—can do much more than provide

southeast Asia with spiritual and cultural leadership. Capital and technicians can come only from outside Asia, and these are what the region now feels are its greatest needs.

National sovereignty and unity in their respective countries are the two basic aspirations of all the politically conscious peoples of southeast Asia. Of the two, the older and stronger cry is for independence, and it has been only during the postwar period that the desire and need for national unity as well has come to the forefront. The conviction that these two desiderata can be attained only by revolutionary methods has been strengthened since the Japanese surrender by the actions of the colonial powers.

Sovereign statehood is the natural goal of peoples who have lived for generations under colonial rule. During the interwar period, when nationalism spread like fire throughout the southeast Asia region, independence appeared to be a relatively simple ideal, and the major differences that arose among local nationalists concerned the method—whether constitutional or violent—by which alien rulers could be replaced by indigenous leaders. Only in Thailand, which has always been nominally independent, was there even the slightest realization that sovereignty had economic as well as political facets, and that foreign capital and techniques might be indispensable, though still dangerous, for national development.

In the postwar years the economic aspect of sovereignty has been strongly played up by local Communist parties, which insist that the “independence” granted by an imperial power, such as that accorded by Britain to Burma and India, is a snare and a delusion. The propaganda line now adopted by the extreme Left throughout southeast Asia is that any political concessions made by the colonial nations derive solely from temporary weakness and serve simply to disguise their