

THE COMMUNIST MENACE IN MALAYA



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High Commissioner of the Federation of Malaya from January 1952 to June 1954.

Photo "Straits Times"

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暨南大學
東南亞研究所
圖書資料室

FREDERICK A. PRAEGER
NEW YORK



BOOKS THAT MATTER

*First published in the United States
of America in 1954 by Frederick A.
Praeger, Inc., Publishers, 105 West
40th Street, New York, 18, N.Y.*

Reprinted 1955

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*Composed in Granjon type and printed at the St Ann's Press
Park Road, Altrincham. Made in Great Britain*

DEDICATED

*to the European women in the Federation of
Malaya—particularly the wives of planters and
police officers—who have quietly and courage-
ously stood with their husbands against Com-
munist terrorism*

*to the Asian women who have also suffered
much with Eastern impassiveness*

*to the widows whose husbands met harsh deaths
and to my wife, Catherine, who encouraged me
to write this book*

Preface

THIS is not a political book; I leave such a task to others more competent than myself. This is presented as a newspaperman's report of the reasons behind, and the progress and implications of, the most difficult small war that British, Malay, Gurkha, and other Commonwealth troops, the Federation Police, and the Government have had to fight in British Colonial history. It must be admitted that the first three years of the war were largely three years of failure in the field; hence it has not been easy to write without underestimating the occasional successes of the troops and the Government and over-emphasizing those of the terrorists.

British troops have gone through far worse ordeals in Malaya than their predecessors did in the jungles of Burma; Gurkha warriors have enhanced their reputations as jungle fighters; young Malay soldiers have asked only to be well led to show their prowess in the field; the police, in the forefront from the very beginning, have done an exceptional job in their unaccustomed rôle. It has not been possible, of course, to relate every gallant episode by every battalion or each group of policemen, or to tell of all fine work by individuals—such as that of the engine-drivers, who kept the Malayan railways running in spite of derailments and other acts of sabotage.

The canvas of the Malayan war is a tremendous one, and my difficulty has been to select the highlights and the murky and deep black patches to give a fair picture. If I succeed in giving readers a good impression of what the war is all about, how it reached heights and dropped to depths, and how it clarified the problems that confront a country which craves only for peace, so that it can build itself up to become the most progressive in South-east Asia and receive independence in a tranquil atmosphere internally, then I shall be satisfied. I feel that too little is known in Great Britain and the United States of this war, which closely affects those two countries.

The conquest of the Communists and their eradication from Malaya for good and all are of the greatest importance to the democratic world. I do not think the peoples of Britain and the United States have sufficiently realized this; neither have they appreciated, I think, that time is not on our side anywhere in South-east Asia where Communists are waging war.

Much of my task on this book would have been impossible but for the considerable help I received from the police forces of Singapore and the Federation of Malaya. They gave me access to confidential documents, particularly those relating to the history of the Malayan Communist Party, the enemy of the country. I have to thank, too, many personal friends in both police forces, in the Federation Government, and in the planting and other worlds for the time and trouble they spent in telling me everything. As far as my police friends are particularly concerned, Malaya cannot be told too often how much it owes to the police force in the Federation. Whatever their deficiencies might be, they carried out a tremendous task, for which they were poorly equipped for at least three years.

Finally, I wish to thank my employers, the Straits Times Press, Ltd, in Singapore, for permission to use material and to reproduce photographs which appeared in their group of newspapers. Part of the material in this book was gathered while I was, for five years, their Chief Correspondent in the Federation, based in Kuala Lumpur. They were interesting years, and when the Emergency occurred they were not without danger. That made the job all the more exhilarating.

HARRY MILLER

NOTE

In the first part of the book I call the enemy Communists 'bandits,' which was their popular name in the early years. They are known now as 'terrorists,' the official term.

I have also taken the liberty of saying 'Malaya' instead of 'Federation of Malaya.' In the country itself the general geographical description 'Malaya' is taken to mean Singapore and the Federation of Malaya.

H. M.

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Introduction

WITH the end of World War II there were signs that Russia had high hopes for expansion in the Far East. Stalin had spoken both before and after the War. He urged Communists the world over not to worry about "capitalist strongholds" in the West, but to look to the Far East, to the peoples "coming to nationhood" and awaiting "leadership."

China was the first to be engulfed in the maw of Communism. Korea would have been too, but for the intervention of the United Nations. To-day a great part of Viet Nam, one of the Associated States of Indo-China, is torn by a war launched by Communist zealots headed by a Moscow-trained Annamite, Ho Chi-Minh. Burma is attempting to destroy Communism. So is Malaya.

Of the South-east Asian countries on the mainland of the great continent of Asia, only Thailand is relatively free from internal Communist strife. Thailand has declared itself absolutely anti-Communist, but most close observers believe that if Indo-China was overrun and Red armies moved still farther southward Thailand would submit to Communism instead of waging war against it.

It was not until the middle of June 1948 that Malaya became the scene of conflict with Communists as represented by the Malayan Communist Party. This party had lived illegally from its birth in the nineteen-twenties until the Japanese declared war on Britain in 1941, when, in view of Russia's alliance with Britain in Europe, it offered its members as a guerrilla force against the new enemy.

After the surrender of Japan and the liberation of Malaya the services of the Party were recognized, as was Russia's status as one of the four Great Powers, and Communism in Malaya was no longer illegal. For the next two years the Party inspired industrial strife, published and uttered inflammable propaganda, and finally provoked terrorism and murder, which it hoped would turn Malaya upside down and force the British to quit.

In June 1948, only after strong public demand in Malaya and London, the Government of the Federation of Malaya declared the existence of an "Emergency," banned the Malayan Communist Party, and pitched British, Malay, and Gurkha troops and police against a Communist army which had been secretly built up and trained from the day the Japanese laid down their arms.

The British Government in London and the Federation Government at its capital in Kuala Lumpur, in the centre of Malaya, were confident that the Emergency would be over in a few months. They ignored the warnings of the experts in Malaya—the police and intelligence officers and civil servants, who knew the thoughts and ways of Chinese and the Communists among them—that, once the Red revolt broke, it would take years to defeat.

The Malayan war developed into the most complex and expensive small war in the history of the British Commonwealth. (It has cost the British and Federation Governments over £1,000,000 a month, apart from millions of dollars in property destroyed by the Communists.)

Malaya had a very narrow escape. It could have lost territory to the Communists in the first few desperate weeks after the declaration of an Emergency. The country was unprepared for war—for that is what it amounted to. Its police force was untrained and ill-equipped to combat large-scale internal hostilities.

The Communists possessed every initial advantage an army could desire. Its total strength was unknown. It could launch attacks on any rubber-estate, tin-mine, police station, village, or town at any time it liked, and with disastrous effect. Unlike the defenders, it had plenty of weapons and ammunition. A number of its leaders were experienced guerrillas.

Fortunately for Britain and Malaya, the Communists' plan of campaign went off at half-cock. The Party had far too complicated a military and political set-up throughout the length and breadth of the country for its war to be conducted effectively. Its forces lacked the equipment for successful modern guerrilla warfare, such as radio communications and transport.

Also terrorism and murder alienated the people whose open support would have won greater victories for the Communists. Another important reason for the Party's failure was the gallant stand of the producers of rubber and tin, who did not close their estates, mines, and factories as the enemy thought they would.

So the war developed into a war without a front line, a war with no military threat to the country in which it was being waged.

This campaign must be considered as part of a preconceived, world-wide Russian plan to establish Soviet republics in the Far East. In Malaya they were trying for the first time to conquer British territory, although until now Russia and Communist China have given only lip support to the "struggle" by the Malayan Communists.

Despite this, a Communist invasion or infiltration via Indo-China and Thailand or Burma is still Malaya's greatest danger—and the Malayan Communists live in hopes of receiving such aid.

Malaya is one of the loveliest countries in South-east Asia. It is a country which knew peace and harmony from the days when it came under British rule in the nineteenth century right up to the beginning of the war with Japan.

With 50,600 square miles of mountain, jungle, and plain, it is a little larger than England without Wales, a little smaller than Florida, in the United States.

The country is always green. Rice-fields, rubber-estates, and tin-mines have been cut out of the jungle, which, however, still encompasses three-quarters of the country.

In the jungle there are elephant, tiger, rhinoceros, wild bison, deer, and a murderous bearded pig, 130 varieties of snakes, and more than 800 species of butterflies and 200 dragon-flies.

A mountain range down the spine of the country forms an effective economic barrier between the western and eastern coasts. In spite of more than a hundred years of progress, only the western half of the peninsula has been developed, and here are to be found almost all the 720 tin-mines and most of the three million acres of rubber-estates. The eastern half of the country still contains backward territory.

The population of the Federation of Malaya is about 5,300,000. The Malays number 2,600,000, the Chinese 2,040,000. The next largest groups are the Indians and the Pakistanis, who total 578,000. There are only about 12,000 British and other Europeans.

No Malay State on the west coast has remained predominantly Malay. Chinese preponderate, and control most of the business.

Only Kelantan and Trengganu, 'lost' on the isolated east coast, with limitations to economic expansion, have absolute Malay

majorities in population. It is significant, therefore, that they have never really been sorely troubled by the Malayan Communists.

Politically this small country is divided into eleven separate governments. Each of the nine Malay States—Johore, Pahang, Negri Sembilan, Selangor, Perak, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, and Trengganu—has a Ruler who is head of his Government and possesses a certain autonomy. Each is assisted by a Malay Mentri Besar (Prime Minister) and a Malay State Secretary. Each State Council has a majority of Malay members.

The two remaining territories, the Settlements of Penang and Province Wellesley and of Malacca, are headed by British officers of the Malayan Civil Service.

The supreme authority in the country is the Federation Government. The Chief Executive is a British High Commissioner appointed by Her Majesty. He is advised by an Executive Council. A Legislative Council of seventy-four men and women endeavours to mould the country for self-government.

That briefly is the unique system of government in Malaya. It strives hard, but efficiency is retarded because the Federation Government has to consult each little entity before being able to introduce a measure important for the whole country.

This long process is aggravated by a lack of unity among the Malay States themselves.

Perplexing political problems have developed in post-war Malaya, and they mainly concern the two predominant races, the Malays and the Chinese, who are as unlike in character and ways of living and thought as a gazelle and a leopard.

The Malays are open, smiling, easygoing people, who are peace-loving. Despite the changing scene and the problems and dangers around him, the Malay outside the towns still lives from day to day. If he has enough money and rice to feed himself and his family for the next day he is content, and he relaxes in the pleasant company of his fellow-men under the fruit-trees in the tranquil kampongs.

A Chinese bends his back to labour, works most of the day, if need be, to make money. His ambition is to make enough to live comfortably in old age, in his own house which stands on his own land—properties he can pass on to his family. Even in Malaya a Chinese likes to follow the ancient national tradition of land-ownership. He only has a sense of permanent ownership when he can