

Malaya: Dominion in the Making

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STRADDLING the main trade routes between East and West lies the island of Singapore, land of mystery and legend, of exotic splendor and dazzling color.

Singapore constitutes the southernmost extension of the Asian continent. It lies on the tip of the Malay peninsula and is centrally situated in relation to the United States of Indonesia, Siam, Indo-China, Burma, India and Borneo.

Malaya comprises the Federation of Malaya and Singapore. The Federation is made up of the state of Johore, Pahang, Negri, Sembilan, Selangor, Perak, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, Trengganu and the British settlements of Penang and Malacca. The colony of Singapore includes Singapore island, Christmas Island and the Cocos (or Kneeling) Islands. The total area of Malaya is that of England, excluding Wales.

I make no excuse for sounding like a Geography teacher in my introduction. When I toured Canada earlier this year, I was often asked by Canadians: "So you come from Singapore. Tell me, how are things in China these days? Are you people making a go of it under your new Chinese leader Mao Tze-tung?" So many North Americans confuse Singapore with China that I'm sometimes staggered by the thought that, abroad, my homeland is almost an unknown country.

The attention of the West was focussed

on the problems of Asia at the time of the recent Conference of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers which met in Colombo, Ceylon. Much significance was attached to the exploratory talks of the Conference, especially in the light of international developments in China and South-East Asia.

At Colombo, Malaya's interests were ably looked after by our Commissioner-General, the Rt. Hon. Malcolm MacDonald. Well known to Canadians as the United Kingdom's High Commissioner at Ottawa from 1941 to 1946, Mr. MacDonald enjoys the greatest popularity with all classes in Malaya.

Canada was represented at the Conference by her Minister of External Affairs, the Hon. Lester B. Pearson. On his return from Colombo and a lightning visit to many vital parts of South-East Asia, Mr. Pearson told the press that while the great tide moving in the affairs of the peoples of Asia could lead to progress, peace and good things, "if it sweeps in the wrong direction (it) can lead to chaos, reaction and destruction."

Mr. Pearson adds: "Whatever the result, Canada, which once may have seemed to have been so remote from these matters and which now stands on the threshold of such great developments, will be deeply affected by the outcome of what is now going on in Asia."

And he pointed out the cost to the world

that would result should the Communists succeed in hammering their way into South-East Asia.

No one is more aware of this fact than millions of Asiatics. For events over the past two or three years have moved fast. The great Indian Empire, termed "the richest jewel in the crown of the British Raj", no longer is ruled by the British. Independence has been granted to India and Pakistan, to Burma and Indonesia. In India millions have taken up the slogan "Azad Hind Zindabad" (Long live free India). Over the Indian ocean and southwards the independence cry gathers momentum. In Indonesia today it is "Merdeka" (freedom).

To the north stands the mighty land mass of China and the Red Flag with five yellow stars—symbol of Mao Tze-tung's People's Army of Liberation. With all parts of the Chinese mainland (except for a small strip opposite Hong Kong island) and Formosa under a Red China regime, anything may happen.

There is civil strife in independent Burma and in Indo-China.

Although Indonesia is now free and the United States of Indonesia has been born, Dutch military might is still to be reckoned with. There is still a strong Dutch garrison in Indonesia today—a matter which many Indonesians regret. Can the Dutch be really sincere about their independence, they ask?

And in Malaya, scene of the British since the days of the East India Company, banditry and death stalk the land. Armed bands of Chinese are roaming the country, shooting, pillaging and bullying in order "to liberate" the people of Malaya and Singapore. Do we want to be "liberated" in this fashion?

The situation in Malaya at the moment of writing is explosive, even more so than when I went to Canada late in 1949.

Some weeks ago the military shelled bandit positions on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Hearing those mortars go off reminded us of the dark days of 1941 when we were fighting a different kind of enemy on our soil.

II

WHILE the military and police in Malaya are doing their utmost to wipe out banditry, the Commonwealth countries too can play a vital part in helping smash whatever minor inroads may have been made to "communise" Malaya's mixed population of 6½ millions.

This country and many other parts of South-East Asia can benefit by material help from Canada in the shape of technical equipment and assistance in increasing agriculture yields.

If such aid is forthcoming it will enable these countries to retain their independence and achieve a higher standard of living.

At the Colombo conference, a Commonwealth Consultative Committee for Asia was set up to deal with this problem.

When Mr. Pearson returned to Canada he stated emphatically that while Canada will help in working on this Asiatic problem his country could not give any large scale financial assistance.

And he further indicated that the work of developing the countries of South-East Asia could be really effective only if the United States participated.

Some Malaysians envisage a workable plan in which both Canada and the United States can help us if only America would buy more from us.

What has Malaya to offer? Tin, rubber, copra, coconut and palm oils, pineapples and bananas. To a less extent such crops as tapioca, tea, sago and derris, minerals such as kaolin, limestone, dolomite, bauxite and iron ore.

The prosperity of Malaya lies in rubber and tin. And in Malaya's relationship with other parts of the British Commonwealth, she continues to be a major dollar-earner through these two vital industries.

Total rubber production during 1948 was 697,689 tons or 52,460 tons more than that produced in 1947. This figure is the highest recorded in Malaya and it reflects great credit on the staffs of rubber estates who have worked under great difficulties, sometimes in the face of terrorist attacks and ambushes.

Unlike rubber the production of tin is still below that of pre-war years. In 1948 44,832 tons of tin-in-ore were produced, as against 27,026 tons in 1947. The slow recovery in tin mining is largely due to difficulty in obtaining and replacing mining equipment.

Consequently imports of tin ore from Indonesia, Siam, Burma and Indo-China for smelting at Singapore and Penang are also much below pre-war figures. The total exports of tin metal from Malaya in 1948 stood at 47,214 tons compared with 32,072 tons in 1947 and 7,598 tons in 1946. It should be recalled that Malaya was liberated from the Japanese yoke in September, 1945.

On the other hand, great progress has been made in Malaya's pineapple industry. The forecast is that the pre-war output of about $2\frac{3}{4}$ million cases of pineapples yearly export may be reached by 1953. The bulk of the 1948 pack was sold to the Ministry of Food in the United Kingdom but small sales were made to most of the principal pre-war markets.

Singapore and Penang remain the "free ports" of Malaya and, in addition to the goods handled into and out of the country, they also have important functions as entrepôt ports.

Owing to their geographical positions, both Singapore and Penang are the natural collecting centres of the produce and raw materials of neighboring countries. And they distribute to the same territories the inward trade received at these ports from Europe, India, China, America and Australia.

During 1948 the total trade in merchandise into and out of Malaya was £409,491,691—representing imports of £208,338,447 and exports of £201,153,244.

It is unusual for Malaya to show an adverse trade balance in any year. If consideration is given to the fact that during the past few years the value of imports was greatly enhanced by the requirements necessary for rehabilitating the country, and that during the same period the value of exports was affected by the low price obtaining for its large shipments of rubber, Malaya's trading position is very satisfactory.

The significance and extent of Malaya's trade will perhaps be more appreciated when one remembers that during the years 1937-1940 Malaya's total trade was more than the total trade of New Zealand or the Union of South Africa or all the African colonies put together and only slightly less than Australia's.

During 1948 with its exports of over £58 millions to the United States and Canada, Malaya has been the chief gold dollar earner for the Sterling bloc, a fact sometimes overlooked.

III

AS for the country's politics, marked activity has been seen in all parts of the country since the end of World War II.

A few weeks ago London diplomatic sources forecast the eventual grant of independence to Malaya. The proposal, according to London circles, calls for the setting up of a cabinet of Asian ministers in Malaya, the cabinet to include Malays as well as Chinese and Indians. It was also intended to ease present barriers to Malayan citizenship for Chinese residents.

At the same time the British Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee, made an absolute firm statement that Britain intends to smash the Communist bandits and help Malaya towards self-government.

Mr. Attlee told the British House of Commons: "It is our firm intention to implement the policy affirmed last April of (Malaya's) steady democratic progress towards self-government within the Commonwealth.

"We shall not be diverted from that policy," Mr. Attlee continued, "and we have no intention of relinquishing our responsibility to Malaya and the protection of its law-abiding people by all means at our disposal."

When referring to Malaya's aspirations towards self-government it is well to remember that Singapore went to the polls for the first time in the colony's history just two years ago. There have as yet been no popular elections in the Federation.

When Whitehall began to draw up plans for the political future of Singapore before the war was won, the question arose whether representation in any Singapore legislature should be on a communal basis. It was decided that this would be wrong because it would tend to force political developments along communal lines, contrary to the first broad aim of administration. But it was also felt that, at all events, at the beginning there should be a method of making sure of the representation of any of the major communities and of special interests such as trade unions.

It is this same principle which finds three representatives of the mercantile community on the present Singapore Legislative Council (European, Chinese, and Indian).

The Council's own powers are restricted because the colony of Singapore lacks sovereign status. Questions affecting defence and foreign affairs are consequently outside the Council's competence.

But in the domestic sphere the Council's authority is wide and the important change is that for the first time in Singapore's history the unofficial members of the colony's law-making body are in a majority.

Remember that both the Federation of Malaya and Singapore were over-run by the Japanese for three-and-a-half years. During that time an Asian national consciousness grew. We in the South-East of Asia saw the white race humbled and beaten and replaced by a victorious Asian power who believed in the creation of a so-called "South-East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere."

The Japanese believed that victory was already theirs. What they did not realize then was that this was only round one, and in the ensuing toe-to-toe slugfest during 1943-1945 it was the Anglo-Americans and their Allies who were to emerge victorious.

It seems a paradox but strangely true that out of Japan's defeat was born a burning desire for independence by the various Asian races. Those in Japanese-occupied countries began to think and ask themselves: If an Asian race like the Japanese

can rule us, then why can't we rule ourselves?

National consciousness was given a big fillup since the termination of the war and has gained momentum during the last few years.

In Malaya, although the people are gradually coming around to think in terms of "Asia for the Asians" they have no single leader of the genius or calibre of the late Mahatma Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru. Neither have they a Mao Tze-tung or President Soekarno.

Malays, the indigenous race of the country, are predominant in the rural districts and small kampongs (villages). In the Federation particularly they play a prominent part in Government administration. We have our Sultans, Rajas and Malay aristocracy or "blue bloods."

The Chinese of Malaya are in the main a business community. Their versatility and keen business acumen have contributed much towards Malaya's pre-war prosperity and post-war rehabilitation. Eminently successful as traders, shopkeepers and industrialists, the Chinese also own a considerable number of mines and rubber estates.

The Europeans, numbering not more than 25,000 are engaged in Government and public administration and in managerial duties on tin mines, rubber estates and in commerce.

A large proportion of the Indian population are labourers employed on rubber estates, but in the larger towns many enterprising Indian merchants have trading and commercial establishments.

A significant feature of life in Malaya is that all races and nationalities—and there are several—take part in public life and have shown themselves capable of adapting themselves to modern industrial processes.

Thus it will not be one community that is going to run Malaya's affairs in the future but all communities working harmoniously together.

Malaya is a real melting pot of peoples, and for this reason, if for no other, independence must come cautiously, by a process of trial and error, with all communities working together.

Those connected with the University of Malaya say in regard to the country's progress towards nationhood:

"A great difficulty in our way is the lack of flexibility in each of the communities which make up our society and the tendency to cling to Malay, Indian, Chinese or Western culture as the case may be.

"Sooner or later we shall have to awake to the realisation that no human institution or order of society ever stands still.

"The fate of the Malayan people will turn on their ability to respond to this challenge by a successful search for a new pattern of social organisation in which all that was valid in the tributary traditions can be applied to the problems of the plural society in Malaya."

IV

SINGAPORE has made a fair start on the road to nationhood and there is no longer a political vacuum in Malaya.

On both the Singapore Legislative Council and Federation Council sit Europeans, Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Eurasians as Councillors.

If Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781-1826) were only alive today, the architect of Malaya would doubtless be astounded at many things—the strategic and economic importance of Singapore, the many races speaking various tongues living in harmony together.

When Raffles first set foot in Singapore in 1819 the island was little better than a mangrove swamp with a few native houses hugging the banks of the river. Today the importance of the "Lion City" has caught even the imagination of Hollywood's film tycoons who portray exaggerated versions of Singapore on the silver screen. The island is on all major air routes linking Malaya with the rest of the world and the flags of many nations fly from the ships berthed in Singapore harbor.

The founding of Singapore was the crowning point in Raffles' life. His devotion to the Malays and his anxiety for their welfare are shown in his desire to foster the growth of the island. "I think,"

Raffles wrote, "I shall be able to lay the foundation of a new order of things here." His dream has been more than realized.

Within the last few years a number of political parties has sprung up in Malaya.

Strongest and most active of these are the United Malays' National Organization and the Malayan-Chinese Association in the Federation, the Progressive Party in Singapore.

The "Big Three" in local politics are two Chinese leaders, and a Malay statesman. Mr. Tan Cheng Lock, Malacca Chinese Leader, heads the M.C.A. whilst Mr. C. C. Tan, a Chinese lawyer, is president of the Progressives. The Prime Minister of Johore state, Dato Onn bin Ja'afar, is the father of UMNO. Dato Onn visited America many years ago, when he took a party of Malays and native handicrafts to the Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco.

Since the beginning of the emergency in Malaya the British Government has banned the Malayan Communist Party and other kindred organisations, including many Red-inspired trade unions.

Two years ago Malaya had a new constitution and the Federation of Malaya came into being.

At the historic ceremony held at King's house, Kuala Lumpur, were gathered eight Malay rulers and the Governor of the Federation, the late Sir Edward Gent, to sign what was termed "the beginning of a new era in Malay history."

Indicative of the progressive trend among Malaya's womenfolk, a Malay woman, Che Puteh binte Ibrahim Rashid, who attended the inauguration ceremony of the new constitution, said: "We hope this will be a peaceful era which will lead to eventual self-government. The new Federation will give Malay women an opportunity to take a prominent and full part in State matters and this must lead to improved social and educational welfare among the Malays." Unfortunately, Che Puteh's reference to "a peaceful era" has yet to be realized.

We have in our midst Chinese bandits about 4,000 strong who have styled themselves "The Malayan Peoples Anti-British Army of Liberation." It is these

thugs, backed by Communist ideologies, who have got to be wiped out—and wiped out completely and ruthlessly before the affairs of this country can be straightened out and the reins of government given to the local-born.

Since the creation of the United States of Indonesia there has been a suggestion in Indonesia and Malay quarters that the territory of Greater Indonesia should include the Malay archipelago. This would mean that the Federation and Singapore would come under U.S.I.

Personally, I can not see the feasibility of such a plan nor its creation unless and until Malaya is completely severed from the British connection. And in that event the wishes of the local peoples will doubtless play a vital part in Malaya's future destiny.

IF Malaya is to continue to develop and prosper she can not afford to adopt an attitude of isolation. This country will still have need for the world's markets and her ties with the rest of the Commonwealth will grow stronger through increasing trade.

In this connection Canada's Minister for Trade and Commerce, the Rt. Hon. C. D. Howe, has said that although Canada's control in the foreign trade field is limited it would be wrong to assume that Canadians can do nothing to improve export prospects or assist foreign countries.

"The (Canadian) government recognizes that the world trade position has been drastically changed since the war," says Mr. Howe, "but is convinced that the interests of this country can best be served through the expansion of world trade on a healthy multilateral basis."

Having just returned from Canada, I can do no better than express the hope that Malaya and South-East Asia at large will look to Canada for increased trade. For Canada has much to offer us in the way of goods and material which we need and will pay for—food grains, steel and electrical goods, timber and pulp, agricultural machinery and automobiles. I am confident that much good and mutual benefit will result from an extension of commercial ties between your country and mine.

