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S P E A K E R S   N O T E S

(8)

THE WAR IN MALAYA

POPULATION

Total just over 6 million of which about 45% Chinese, 43% Malay, 10% Indian. The Chinese provide most of the workers and businessmen, the Malays are mostly peasants, but also include the old feudal rulers and their retinue. The Indians are mostly workers.

It is not true to regard the Chinese as immigrants entitled to less rights than the indigenous Malays. Many of the Chinese have been in Malaya for several generations and quite a number of the Malays are recent immigrants from Indonesia.

ECONOMICS

Based on the export of rubber and tin, both excellent dollar earners.

British investors are estimated at about £100 million, mainly in rubber and tin.

In 1950 Malayan exports to United States amounted to £122 million, in 1951 the figure was £166 million, in each case nicely balancing Britain's dollar deficit. W. Wyatt, Labour M.P., 21/3/52: "What would happen to our balance of payments if we had to take our troops out of Malaya?"

British rubber plantations in Malaya are known for their high profits. In 1950-51 cost of rubber production was 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d per lb, but the market price rose to 6s. 2d. a lb. Dividends of up to 100% have been declared.

Low cost of production are due to low wage levels of plantation workers, in 1947-48, £5 to £6. 10. 0. a month (including value of rations). Prices increased to five times pre-war levels, but wages only doubled. Between 1949 and 1951 prices rose by 500% again but wages by only 24%.

POLITICAL DEVELOPEMENTS BEFORE 1948

Note that in Malaya the working class is proportionately much larger than any other Asian country, except Japan. This fact has coloured political developments.

Labour unrest during the depression years culminated in a great strike wave in 1937 when close on half a million people were involved in strikes. During the early years of the war there was a very successful boycott which contributed to the easy Japanese victory in 1942.

During the Japanese occupation the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army, MPAJA, was formed. It was supplied with arms by British planes and many of its leaders were decorated after the war. It controlled large parts of the Country, and in August 1945 liberated many towns and villages before the arrival of British troops.

After the war the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions grew rapidly to reach a membership of 300,000.

British policy after the war sought to reestablish a colonial regime on the old pattern, with an autocratic High Commissioner and a "Legislative Council" without a single elected representative. Great power was given to the corrupt feudal Sultans, rulers of nine petty Malayan states. Political freedom was drastically curtailed by a series of regulations, such as the Sedition Ordinance, the Banishment Enactment and the Printing and Publishing Enactment.

## THE EVENTS OF 1948

From April 1948 onwards the Malayan trade union movement presented a series of demands to employers in an attempt to secure a more reasonable relationship between wages and prices. This was accompanied by a number of strikes on rubber plantations, tin mines and docks.

The government replied by police raids on trade union premises and by police attacks on strikers, resulting in beatings, imprisonment and even death. Eg. unarmed workers of Jementah Estate (Johore) were charged by armed police, eight of them being killed.

By June 13th there were 23 different strikes going on. On that date the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions was declared illegal. By June 16th over 600 people were officially said to have been arrested.

On June 17th it was announced that the rubber planters had formed themselves into self-defence corps and had been supplied by the authorities with sten guns.

This produced a rapid deterioration in the situation, the workers forming themselves into protection corps in turn and procuring arms that had been hidden during and after the Japanese occupation.

In August the American State Department announced that 50,000 Dollars worth of arms had been sent to Malaya, chiefly to representatives of American rubber and tin companies "for the protection of their properties".

Violence now increased in scale and scope. On July 8th, Tan Kan, head of the Johore Trade Union was shot dead by a raiding police party. On July 16th, Lau Yew, the leader of the old MPAJA was shot similarly. Between June 21st and July 19th over 2,300 persons were arrested under the new Emergency Regulations, according to official figures.

The Malayan Communist Party was not actually banned until July 23rd. By then most of the surviving labour leaders and militant workers had withdrawn into the jungle to escape arrest or death at the hands of the police. They were able to replenish the small stock of arms by raids on police posts.

The war in Malaya had begun.

## THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR

### (a) Size of forces engaged

The police force was increased to 66,000 men in 1951, from 9,000 men in 1948. The number of British Troops involved soon exceeded 50,000.

The strength of the Anti-British forces is variously estimated at 3,000 and 5,000 men (armed).

It has been pointed out in many quarters that this can only mean that the anti-British forces have the strong support of the population.

### (b) "Emergency" Regulations

This is borne out by the extreme "Emergency Measures" imposed on the civilian population: Death penalty for consorting with persons in possession of fire arms, death penalty for anyone collecting or donating food or any other form of assistance for the anti-British forces.

### (c) Head Hunting

Dyak Head Hunters have been introduced from Borneo to help the British forces. Authentic photographs have been published in the British Press showing soldiers (British) displaying the heads of decapitated Malaysians.

### (d) Fate of Labour Leaders

On May 4th, 1949, Mr. Ganapathy, the former President of the banned Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions was executed. Mr. P. Veerasenen, his successor in the past, had been executed on May 3rd. This was done in spite of strong protests by the Indian Prime Minister Mr. Nehru.

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Large rewards are offered for the individual members of the anti-British forces, ranging from £30,000 for the General Secretary of the Malayan Communist Party to £300 for an ordinary resistance fighter. The failure of these astronomical rewards is a commentary on the relationship between the resistance fighters and the population.

(e) Detentions and Banishments

According to official figures a total of 29,828 people had been detained by the British authorities between June 1948 and February 1953. Many of these have been banished to islands off the coast.

(f) Collective Punishment

The annihilation of villages and small towns in whose vicinity anti-British forces operated, has been a marked feature of the conduct of the war.

In August 1948 the small town of Pulai was bombed and entirely destroyed by British planes.

In February 1951, 1000 troops and 3 police companies destroyed the town of Tenderam, even removing its name from the map and auctioneering the remaining property of the inhabitants. The 1500 inhabitants were all sent to Concentration Camps.

The fate of Tenderam was shared by Tras (pop.2000) in November 1951, by Busut (pop.450) in June 1951, and by Batu Laut (pop.200) in August 1951.

In 1952 collective punishment was also inflicted on the town of Tanjong Malim and the villages of Permatang Tinggi and Pekan Tabi.

A special role has been played by the then British commander-in-chief, General Templar, who made a point of personally supervising these "collective punishments". He is guilty of many sadistic acts against the Malayan population. One one occasion he is reported to have told the stricken population of a village to "smile", on another he is reported to have walked into a school and torn down a photograph of Dr. Sun Yat Sen, promising to replace it with one of the Queen.

(g) Mass Removals

As these measures failed to produce the desired result, the British authorities embarked on a scheme involving the removal of half a million people from their homes and land and their settlement in special concentration camp villages surrounded by barbed wire and police posts. This is the notorious "Briggs Plan" which has since been carried out. These concentration camp villages are built on the most infertile ground, a strict curfew is imposed on them and there are constant police raids on the houses. Their inhabitants have of course no freedom of movement and their love for British rule has not been increased by these measures.

(h) Casualties

100 Europeans killed between June 1948-May 1954. In the same period Asian Civillians killed 2,197. 680 missing. Another 5,073 Asians killed are classified as "terrosists".

CONCLUSIONS

The peace movement everywhere is demanding the ending of the war in Malaya, (a) to releasr the Malayan people frām the terrible hardships that have been placed on them as a result of the war and (b) to prevent this local war from deteriorating into a general conflagration in South East Asia. The anti-British forces in Malaya have declared their readiness to bring about peace by negotiation, but so far the British colonial authorities have refused to sit down at the conference table. It will depend on the strength of the peace-loving forces in the world, and particularly in the British Commonwealth, whether the conflict in Malaya can be brought to a speedy conclusion.

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**TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961**

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