

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MALAYAN CHINESE ASSOCIATION

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the dynamics of intra-community Chinese political development and the emergence of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) as a major political force at the multi-ethnic political centre during Malaya's transition from colony to independent nation state. During the pre-independence years of the MCA's existence, 1949-1957, the party was a hybrid institution which combined ideological and organisational elements of both Westernised and traditional political elites, represented by the Straits Chinese British Association (SBCA), the Kuomintang Malaya (KMTM), and the Chinese Chambers of Commerce-huay kuan establishment. Embodying both modern and traditional elements, the MCA proved a dynamic organisation capable of meeting changing Chinese needs arising from the Emergency, the growth of an assertive Malay nationalist movement, and the accelerating momentum towards decolonisation.

Following an internal reappraisal in the early 1950s of its initial character as a traditional mutual aid organisation involved mainly in Emergency-related welfare activities, the MCA became a catalyst for the development of a Malayan-centred Chinese political consciousness. Its leadership chose a communally-based political alliance with the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), rather than partnership with the multi-racial Independence of Malaya Party (IMP), as the best means of serving Chinese

interests. The party's pivotal role in mainstream Malayan politics is most clearly demonstrated by its cooperation with the UMNO in jointly leading the independence campaign, including the Alliance negotiations with the British and the Malay Rulers which resulted in the promulgation of a constitution that defined the economic, cultural and political rules for independent Malaya. Although the constitution enshrined Malay "special rights" and upheld Malay cultural and political dominance, the MCA achieved its crucial objective of citizenship based on jus soli, thus laying the basis for legitimate Chinese participation in the political life of independent Malaya.

PREFACE

My interest in embarking on an intensive study of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA)¹ was spurred by the scarcity of published materials on the development of Chinese politics in Peninsular Malaysia (i.e. the states of pre-1963 Malaya) in the period after the Second World War. Standard works on Malaysian politics, such as those by G.P. Means, K.J. Ratnam, R.S. Milne, R.K. Vasil and K. van Vorys, have tended to treat Chinese politics as one component part in the complex overall mosaic of multiracial politics in Malaysia. I wanted to give greater focus to the unique dimensions of Chinese political development within that mosaic.

This study would not have been possible without the generosity of Datuk Lee San Choon, MCA Party President from mid 1974 to April 1983. Datuk Lee granted me permission to consult the party's archives, thus giving me access to a large and rich body of hitherto unconsulted MCA as well as Alliance materials. Several other MCA leaders were equally cooperative and generous in facilitating my research. Their frank and stimulating discussions during interviews greatly broadened my understanding of the MCA and Chinese politics in general. I am particularly indebted to Dr. Neo Yee Pan, the present acting Party President, whose interest in my work made it possible for me to observe the workings of the party through direct access to party general assemblies, meetings and seminars at the national, state and local levels.

1. Known since the establishment of Malaysia in 1963 as the Malaysian Chinese Association.

Past MCA leaders were also most generous with their time. They provided invaluable information which supplemented that found in party documents. I am especially grateful to have had the opportunity to talk at length with Tun Tan Siew Sin, who gave me first-hand accounts of his father, the late Tun Tan Cheng Lock. I likewise gained immeasurably from the personal reminiscences of Tun H.S. Lee, Tun Omar Ong Yoke Lin, Dr. Lim Chong Eu, Tan Sri T.H. Tan, Ng Ee Teong and Douglas K.K. Lee.

The generosity and cooperation of leaders in the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) helped me place MCA politics in their proper context. I am particularly grateful to have had the opportunity to interview Tunku Abdul Rahman, whose role in Malaysian politics needs no elaboration. Other UMNO veterans such as Datuk Senu and Encik Khir Johari, and present day leaders such as Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Datuk Musa Hitam, Tengku Razaleigh and Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, likewise shared their wisdom and knowledge of the dynamics of Alliance and Barisan Nasional politics.

I am also grateful to Chinese leaders from the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia, Democratic Action Party (DAP) and other parties for having provided me with invaluable insights into the MCA and the broader spectrum of Chinese politics at large. I especially wish to thank Dr. Lim Kheng Yaik, Dr. Goh Cheng Teik, and Alex Lee of the Gerakan; Lim Kit Siang and Lee Lam Thye of the DAP; and Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chee Khoon, now retired from active politics but previously a major force in the Labour Party and Pekemas.

In addition, I want to thank the many helpful individuals in the MCA, UMNO, Gerakan, DAP and other parties whom I have not,

in the interest of space, been able to mention by name here. I am also indebted to the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, where I was given access to research facilities as a Research Associate. In particular, I would like to thank Mrs. Patricia Lim, the ISEAS Librarian, for making available to me the Institute's collection of the Tan Cheng Lock papers. The staff of Arkib Negara, Kuala Lumpur, likewise rendered me invaluable assistance when I consulted its records.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Ruth McVey, for her guidance, insistence on high academic standards and patience.

In presenting this thesis I hope to make a meaningful contribution to the study of Chinese politics in Peninsular Malaysia, a subject too long slighted by serious scholarship. I am acutely aware, however, of the limitations of my study. I especially regret that, despite my desire to present as much new data as possible, I have had to keep the discussion within manageable bounds and thus be selective both in time frame and scope of analysis. Nonetheless, I hope that my findings will suggest fruitful areas for possible future research and stimulate more thorough academic attention to the subject of Chinese politics in Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

This study of the development of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) from 1949 to 1957 seeks to provide a deeper understanding of both the dynamics of intra-community Chinese political evolution and also the emergence of the MCA as a major force at the multi-ethnic political centre during a watershed period; the transformation of Malaya from colony to independent nation state.

The discussion of MCA party organisation, function, policies and activities focuses mainly on the manner in which the party reflected and served the needs of the Chinese community. During the pre-independence years of the party's existence, which were undoubtedly its halcyon years, the MCA was a microcosm of mainstream Chinese political development in the sense that it mirrored the prevailing non-communist political culture in both form and content. It was in that period an unusual hybrid institution which combined the ideological and organisational characteristics, as well as the resources, of the elitist westernised and the mass-based political cultures of the Chinese community in Malaya. Embodying both modern and traditional elements, the MCA was a dynamic, effective organisation congruent with the fast-changing Chinese needs arising from the Emergency (1948-1960), the growth of an assertive Malay nationalism and the accelerating movement toward decolonisation.

This thesis argues that the MCA played a crucial role in nurturing the growth of a Malayan-centred Chinese political consciousness. It was the vehicle which expressed the will of conservative Malayan-centred Chinese nationalism, linking up the concerns of that community with mainstream Malay nationalist developments, particularly through its political alliance with the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). The party's pivotal role in Chinese politics is most clearly demonstrated by its achievement in the independence movement of obtaining constitutional safeguards that legitimised Chinese participation in the political process of independent Malaya.

The thesis is organised chronologically. The discussion begins with a background chapter on patterns of Chinese community organisation and political activity from the mid-nineteenth century up to the period when the MCA was formed in 1949. The chapter analyses the prevalent forms of Chinese political culture represented by the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA) and the Kuomintang Malaya (KMTM) as well as their relationship with the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), which represented the third prevalent Chinese political culture in the pre-World War II period.¹ The discussion then examines the changes brought about by the Japanese Occupation on leadership patterns, organisational and mobilising principles within the Chinese community. After the war the MCP emerged as a

1. The term political culture is used here to denote the political orientation, attitudes, beliefs, sentiments and style of both leaders and followers within the specific social and political groupings covered in this study.

powerful political force, but its position was quickly undermined by developments during the British Military Administration (BMA) and Malayan Union period. Soon after the inauguration of the Malayan Federation in February 1948, the MCP launched its armed insurrection, once again changing the balance of power within the Chinese community.

It was against the backdrop of a State of Emergency that the MCA was formed in February 1949. Chapter 2 begins with a brief discussion of the origins of the party, particularly the role played by Tan Cheng Lock. The focus of attention concentrates on an analysis of the ideological content as well as social and organisational structure of the party. From an examination of the social sources of leadership and membership recruitment, we can see that the MCA was ideologically wedded to the two conservative pre-war strands of political culture represented by the SCBA and KMTM. Its organisational and mobilisational principles, however, were founded upon the traditional associational network represented by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (CCC) and huay kuan (voluntary association) establishment. Despite its KMTM ideological cast and its CCC-huay kuan organisational base, the MCA was also at the same time, a recognisable modern day political party with strong Malayan-centred objectives, the foremost of which was to wean the Chinese community from China-oriented preoccupations and to integrate Chinese concerns into mainstream Malayan nationalist developments.

The remaining chapters trace the MCA's development chronologically. Chapter 3 looks at the party's earliest days,

when its activities consisted mainly of welfare work undertaken to alleviate hardships suffered by the Chinese community during the Emergency. The party performed extensive relief activities among the Chinese squatter population resettled in New Villages. Party leaders also liaised closely with the colonial authorities to deal with other urgent Emergency-related problems, most notably the issue of Chinese manpower recruitment and the plight of Chinese detainees.

The party's Emergency welfare work and its CCC-huay kuan organisational base made it resemble more a traditional mutual aid organisation than a modern day political party. With moves by the British Government to prepare Malaya for self-rule, the top party leadership was concerned to give the MCA a more efficient political machinery to take advantage of impending political reforms, principally the introduction of local level elections. In 1952-53 the top leadership implemented a reorganisation campaign, described in Chapter 4, to weaken the KMTM and CCC-huay kuan elements in the party in order to strengthen its Malayan-centred nationalist credentials as well as its election-participation machinery. While the reorganisation campaign was only partially successful - it did not rid the MCA of its KMTM and CCC-huay kuan links - it did help to dispel the party's image as a purely welfare organisation and embarked the MCA on an overtly political course of action.

Chapter 5 discusses the MCA's first experience with multi-ethnic politics when it was represented in the Communities Liaison Committee (CLC) together with leading figures of the Malay and Indian communities. The CLC discussions (1949-1951) were the

first of many subsequent negotiations between the UMNO and MCA leaders on socially salient issues, particularly citizenship and special rights, which culminated in the Alliance independence negotiations of 1956-57.

With the introduction of local level elections in Kuala Lumpur in 1952, the MCA initially experimented with two forms of inter-ethnic political accommodation, namely, multi-racial integration and communally-based cooperation. Party president Tan Cheng Lock led the party in the direction of multi-racial integrationist politics with the Independence Malayan Party (IMP), while H.S. Lee and Ong Yoke Lin, the party leaders in Kuala Lumpur, sought a communally-based alliance with the UMNO. The outcome of the Kuala Lumpur election showed the latter to be the more viable and acceptable means of political accommodation at the elite as well as electoral grassroots level. Consequently, the UMNO-MCA Alliance was expanded and strengthened, thus leading to the institutionalisation of communally-based politics in Malaya, and setting the MCA on its collaborationist political course.

Spurred by its electoral successes at the local and state level, the UMNO-MCA Alliance concentrated on seizing the initiative of the independence movement. Chapter 6 examines the means and process whereby the Alliance out manoeuvred its main rival, the IMP, for leadership of the nationalist movement, and successfully persuaded the British Government to speed up the timetable for independence.

The organisational and mobilisational principles of the MCA enabled it to tap the financial and manpower resources of the

CCC-huay kuan establishment and its mass-based Chinese-educated clientele. This, together with the political ability and sophistication of the party English-educated top leadership, underlay the MCA's usefulness to the UMNO. Although the UMNO felt uneasy about the continued pro-Kuomintang orientation in the party lower echelons, the Malayan-centred commitment and loyalty of the English-educated top leadership assuaged UMNO fears concerning the MCA's nationalist credentials.

The prominent role played by the MCA in the independence campaign generated for it a great measure of popularity within the Chinese community at large. This support, combined with the party's initiative on Chinese education exemplified by the campaign against the 1952 Educational Ordinance (which threatened the existence of Chinese schools) and the UMNO's accommodation of Chinese economic and cultural interests during the country's first Federal General Elections of 1955, produced a high point in the party's status and political fortunes.

Chapter 7 examines the complicated and protracted final stage of the independence campaign, when the MCA negotiated a constitutional deal with the UMNO and the MIC. The British Government had established the Reid Constitutional Commission to recommend the terms of Malayan independence, but the Federation of Malaya Constitution 1957 was based more on the Alliance independence blueprint, the Alliance Merdeka compact, than on the Reid proposals. The basic compromise reached between the MCA and the UMNO in the Alliance Merdeka compact was citizenship based on the principle of jus soli for non-Malays in exchange for privileged economic and

cultural treatment for Malays. In supporting the UMNO position on Malay special rights, the English-educated MCA top leadership lost the support of a group of second level Chinese-educated leadership, who in turn led a breakaway movement to seek a pro-Chinese constitutional deal from Whitehall.

The rest of the chapter analyses the process and means whereby the top leadership undercut the position of the breakaway leadership and reimposed control over the party and the Chinese community at large. Patronage of the UMNO and the British authorities, and the discrediting of the breakaway movement as a pro-Kuomintang force, were the main ingredients which accounted for the top leadership's success. The breakaway experience, however, marked the beginning of disillusionment of the Chinese-educated second echelon leadership and membership regarding the efficacy and desirability of the top leadership's collaborationist mode of political accommodation as a means of achieving Chinese goals.

The concluding chapter summarises the major themes and arguments of the thesis, illustrating how the MCA had evolved from its pre-World War II conservative political culture represented by the KMTM and SCBA; how it drew upon the organisational and mobilising resources of the CCC-huay kuan establishment to create a widespread support base; and how it developed into an effective modern day political machinery playing a prominent role in the independence movement through the medium of collaborationist politics within the Alliance. The study concludes with a brief appraisal of the continued viability of the MCA's collaborationist political philosophy as the most effective means of achieving

Chinese goals in the post-independence period, compared to the integrationist and confrontational approaches espoused by other present day Chinese-based political organisations.

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF THE MALAYAN CHINESE ASSOCIATION

This chapter introduces the historical forces which shaped the Chinese community in Malaya up to the formation of the Malayan Chinese Association in 1949. A broad understanding of the evolution of Chinese power structures, perceptions, and methods of mobilisation and control, and the interrelationship of contending power groups within the community prior to 1949, is necessary to appreciate the origins of the MCA as well as the manner in which the party itself manifested the interplay of socio-political forces in the Chinese community.

The historical forces are described from two perspectives: first, the organisational structures of the Chinese community; and second, the processes through which the community carried out and regulated its relations with the colonial and Malay authorities. The exposition of the first perspective centres on the socio-economic structures and political groupings which evolved within the community with the advent of mass Chinese immigration to Malaya from the early nineteenth century onwards: namely, secret societies, voluntary associations and political organisations such as the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA), the Kuomintang Malaya (KMTM) and Malayan Communist Party (MCP). The second perspective illustrates the manner in which the Chinese community

interacted with the authorities through their changing organisational structures and through institutions such as the Kapitan China system in the nineteenth century and the Chinese Chambers of Commerce, voluntary associations and political groupings after 1900.

Generally speaking, one can discern three distinct phases in the pattern of Chinese immigration and settlement in Malaya:

(1) the earliest period, from the beginning of the fifteenth century to the founding of the Straits Settlements by the British, which saw the establishment of the Baba (Straits Chinese) community; (2) after the advent of mass immigration from the 1820s onwards, when the Laukeh¹ community emerged and flourished; and (3) from the 1900s to the outbreak of World War Two, when political groupings took shape and political activities proliferated.²

1.1 Early Chinese Settlement in Malaya: the Babas

Chinese settlement in Malaya dates back to the founding of the Malacca Sultanate when traders, mainly Hokkiens from Fukien Province, began to settle in the thriving seaport of Malacca. The legacy of this early settlement was the emergence of the Baba (known also as Straits Chinese or Peranakan) community, which exists today

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1. "Laukehs" (literally, old guests) refers to established Chinese immigrants and to Malayan-born Chinese who were socialised within a completely Chinese milieu. Newly-arrived immigrants were commonly called "Sinkehs" (new guests).
 2. For a historical account of Chinese immigration to Malaya, see Purcell V., The Chinese in Malaya, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1967 (reprint), chs.1-5.

as a minority cultural group in the former Straits Settlements of Malacca, Penang and Singapore.¹ Baba culture is predominantly Chinese, but overlaid with Malay and European elements. While Babas have retained Chinese religious, cultural and familial practices, they have been socially, culturally and, to a lesser extent, biologically assimilated into Malay society. Most Babas speak Malay or patois Malay, eat Malay food and practice certain Malay customs, but few have converted to Islam. After the founding of the Straits Settlements (Penang in 1786, Singapore in 1819, and Malacca in 1824) and the commencement of British colonial rule, the Babas became fluent in English and proficient in western modes of transacting business. They also took to western styles of dressing and recreational habits, but retained most of their Chinese and Malay traits.

The Babas were the earliest mercantile and professional class within the Chinese community in Malaya. Being the first settlers and trading pioneers, they had accumulated capital which enabled them to set up business enterprises with the onset of British colonial rule. When Singapore was founded in 1819, wealthy Baba merchants from Malacca moved to the area and financed the

1. Studies on Baba society and culture include the following: Clammer, J.R., Straits Chinese Society: Studies in the Sociology of the Baba Communities of Malaysia and Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1980; Png Poh Seng, "The Straits Chinese in Singapore: A Case of Local Identity and Socio-cultural Assimilation", JSEAH, Vol.10, no.1, 1969; and Tan Chee Beng, "Baba and Nonya: A Study of the Ethnic Identity of the Chinese Peranakan in Malacca", Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1979, chs.4-10.

gambier and pepper agricultural industries of Singapore and Johore.¹ These Baba capitalists also acted as compradors between the European import-export agency houses and Chinese retailers and shopkeepers. In addition, the Babas were numerically strong in the professional classes of the Straits Settlements, joining the legal, medical and teaching professions, and serving as clerks in the colonial administration.²

The mass arrival of Chinese immigrants and their control of the tin and agricultural industries after the 1820s eclipsed Baba predominance of the economic life of the Straits Settlements. In addition, with the mass influx of immigrants the size of the Baba community was proportionately diminished. In 1911 the percentage of local-born Chinese stood at 23% in the Straits Settlements and 8% in the Federated Malay States.³ The Baba proportion was much smaller than these percentages indicate, since by 1911 many of the locally born were from the growing immigrant population, virtually none of whom took on attributes of the Baba culture. Surrounded and outnumbered by the immigrants, the Babas gradually became resinicised, especially in their increased use of the Chinese dialects. However, they did not completely assimilate into Chinese

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1. Lee Poh Ping's study of the early economic history of Singapore reveals that the Malacca Baba merchants dominated the Chinese commercial class in Singapore. Lee Poh Ping, Chinese Society in Nineteenth Century Singapore, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1978, pp.13-27.
 2. Png, p.103.
 3. Nathan, J.E., The Census of British Malaya, London, 1922, p.95.

culture, but still retained many Anglo-Malay socio-cultural traits that made it possible for them to become effective political and cultural brokers between the Malay, Chinese and colonial societies.

1.2 Mass Settlement in the 19th and 20th Centuries: the Laukehs

The free inflow of immigrants to Malaya continued unabated until the enactment of the Immigration Restriction Ordinance (1929) and Aliens Ordinance (1933) curbed the process. Bringing with them their way of life, their ethical systems and their socio-economic modes of organisation, the immigrants established community patterns in Malaya which were extensions of their life styles in their home villages and towns. This phenomenon resulted in the creation of an "encapsulated" China-oriented Laukeh community within a British colonial structure (after 1874) and an indigenous Malay population.¹ Before discussing the types of organisations developed by the immigrants in Malaya, it is necessary to describe the Chinese prototypes on which they were based.

1. The concept "encapsulated community" is based on M.J. Swartz's and F.G. Bailey's definition of the power relationship between the host society, the "encapsulating" system, and the local level "encapsulated" system. See Bailey, F.G., Stratagem and Spoils: A Social Anthropology of Politics, Blackwell, Oxford, 1969; and Swartz, M.J., Local Level Politics: Social and Cultural Perspectives, University of London Press, London, 1969. Judy Strauch applies the concept to the Malaysian context in her study, Chinese Village Politics in the Malaysian State, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1981, ch.1.

1.2.1 Southeast China Origins

Three principal types of socio-economic organisations existed in the south eastern provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien, the area where the majority of immigrants came from. The first, and by far the most important, was the lineage system; the second, the voluntary association; the third, the secret society.

The village in Southeast China was the outcome of lineage settlement,¹ and in the nineteenth century local government was managed largely by the leading branch families of lineages. Imperial officials delegated this local gentry the responsibility to oversee the progress of public works, to assure local defence, and to provide relief in times of floods and famines.² Local autonomy was even more pronounced in Kwangtung and Fukien, the two provinces which provided the great bulk of immigrants to Malaya. There, not only were whole villages populated by single lineages, but in certain

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1. Hsiao, K.C., Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1960, p.324. For a discussion of the organising principles, functions and size of Chinese lineages, see Feng, H.Y., The Chinese Kinship System, Harvard University Press, n.d.; Freedman, M., Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung, Athlone Press, London, 1966; Freedman, M. (ed.), Family and Kinship in Chinese Society, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1970; Freedman, M., Lineage Organisation in Southeastern China, Athlone Press, London, 1958. Hsu, F.L.K., Clan, Caste and Club, D.V. Nostrand Co. Inc., Princeton, 1963; Hu, H.C., The Common Descent Group in China and its Functions, Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, New York, 1948. Lang, O., Chinese Family and Society, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1946; Liu, Hui-Chen Wang, "An Analysis of Chinese Clan Rules: Confucian Theories in Action", in Nivison, D.S. and Wright, A.F. (eds.), Confucianism in Action, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1966.
 2. Hsiao, chs. 7, 8. See also Chu Tung Tsu, Local Government under the Ching, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1962, ch.10.

areas one single lineage settled over a few villages.¹ It can be seen, therefore, that immigrants came to Malaya from a region in China dominated by highly organised strong lineages which enjoyed a large degree of political autonomy. The lineage system of rural China, however, was not transplanted to Malaya, as lineages did not migrate in toto. Usually, only the more destitute or adventurous members of the lineage would leave their home villages in search of a better livelihood overseas.

The existence of the lineage as the basic unit of social organisation meant that when people moved out of their villages, they sought to combine in organisations which would perform similar mutual aid and mutual protection functions. These characteristics were common to the voluntary organisations (huay-kuans)² founded by groups of Chinese outside their home villages both in China and overseas. Voluntary associations in China proliferated in urban centres populated by different lineages and diverse dialect groups. Three major types of voluntary associations developed: the dialect/territorial association, the trade guild and the clan or surname association. The dialect/territorial association admitted members based on common dialect group and territorial origins; the trade guild admitted members from the same craft, trade or service; and

1. Potter, J.M., "Land and Lineage in Traditional China", in Freedman, M. (ed.), Family and Kinship..., p.136.

2. "Huay kuan" is used in this study to refer generally to an organisation or grouping of people, and does not refer only to the dialect/territorial association as is sometimes the case.

the clan association recruited members having the same surname.¹

The principal functions of these voluntary associations were the provision of worship for common ancestors and gods; the settlement of disputes among members; the extension of aid to poorer members; and the supervision of burials of members. The trade guild concentrated on protecting its de facto monopoly in each craft and regulated conditions of work for members. Other minor types of voluntary associations also existed which looked after the general cultural and recreational needs of members. These included literary, dramatic, musical, pugilistic and mutual aid/funerary clubs.

The third type of socio-economic grouping in China, apart from the lineage and voluntary association, was the secret society. The secret society was not based on common blood or trade interests, though membership was normally confined to the same dialect group.² It has been suggested that secret societies rose as an expression of protest by an oppressed peasantry which had been already organised into sects of shamanistic origins. The antiquity and long-standing political potential of these sects can be seen in the fact that they led the revolt which culminated in the founding of the Han dynasty in 200 B.C.³ Throughout the ages, bands of vagabonds and wanderers,

1. For an account of the historical origins and functions of these associations, see Morse, H.B., The Gilds of China, Longmans, Green and Co., New York, Bombay and Calcutta, 1909.

2. For an account of secret societies in China, see Chesneaux, J., Secret Societies in China in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1971; and Blythe, W., The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, pp.14-35.

3. Blythe, p.16.

usually victims of flood, famine, war or oppressive rule, gathered around charismatic leaders to harass the local authorities. They were united by secret rituals of initiation and oaths of loyalty to their society. The elaborate ceremonial rituals were based on precepts derived from popular Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, ancestor worship and belief in astral travel.

During the Ching dynasty, secret societies had developed into effective political organisations mobilising support against government and authority. They also constituted an extra-legal and alternative means of social mobility, allowing their members to achieve leadership status and to bypass the established hierarchical structure topped by the official and scholar.¹ The largest and most influential secret societies in Southeast China were a group known collectively as the Triad Brotherhood (or the Heaven and Earth League or the Hung Brotherhood). The Triad Brotherhood had far wider political, social and economic control over its members than any form of social grouping other than the lineage. It was widespread in both rural and urban areas and was also supported by the emerging proto-proletariat of the coastal ports. Its rigid hierarchical order, the quasi-patriarchical powers of its leaders, the juridical sway it exercised over members and the esoteric nature of its ceremonial rituals all served to augment the members' sense of absolute identification and loyalty, although they also may have belonged to voluntary associations and other groupings.

1. Blythe, p.18; Chesneaux, p.14.

1.2.2 Patterns of Organisation in Malaya

Mass Chinese immigration to Malaya was prompted as much by the economic opportunities created by the British mercantile and administrative presence in the Straits Settlements and encouragement by the Malay authorities of tin-rich states as by adverse social and political conditions in China. British merchants residing in the Straits Settlements and Malay sultans were quick to grasp the fact that great profits could be made in the agricultural and tin mining industries of the west coast Malay States, provided the necessary pioneering work and clearing of jungle land were undertaken by a regular and large supply of cheap coolie labour. The British Government encouraged the flow of emigrants leaving China by forcing a treaty upon the Manchu Government which lifted the long-standing and traditional ban on emigration.¹

The flow of immigrants to Malaya started in earnest after the 1820s. In 1824, the Chinese population in Singapore was 31% (3,317 people) of the total population. In 1860, it had jumped to 61% (50,043). In Penang, it stood at 28% (8,270) in 1820. By 1860, it had grown to 46% (28,018). In the Malay States, the Chinese presence prior to the 1850s was insignificant. After that date, it increased so rapidly that it exceeded the Malay population in the tin rich areas. In 1891, there were 50,844 Chinese to 26,578 Malays in Selangor; in the Kinta district there were 39,513 Chinese to

1. Chan Ta, Emigrant Communities in South China: A Study of Overseas migration and its Influence on Standards of Living and Social Change, Oxford University Press, London and New York, 1939, pp.49-53. The treaty was signed after China's defeat in the Arrow War.

14,472 Malays. By 1901, the overall Chinese population in the Federated Malay States (Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang) had exceeded the Malay population, the figures being 299,739 to 285,278.¹

1.2.2(a) Secret Societies and the Kapitan China System

Upon their arrival in Malaya, groups of immigrants combined in organisations drawn from prototypes with which they were familiar in China to meet organisational and functional needs occasioned by the harsh pioneering conditions of the new society. Of the three principal types of organisations in China - the lineage, the voluntary association and the secret society - the lineage, as we have seen, was not transplanted to Malaya.

However, political conditions in Malaya were conducive to the growth of secret societies and voluntary associations. The decentralised nature of Malay political power and the practice of indirect British rule after intervention in 1874 allowed the immigrants to exercise autonomy in the regulation of community affairs. Secret societies were the most prevalent organisational form throughout the nineteenth century, largely because they were more effective than voluntary associations in mobilising diverse Chinese masses in Malaya.

1. Taken from Report on the Census of the Straits Settlements taken on 5 April 1891, Government Printing Office, Singapore, 1892, p.31; Census of the State of Perak 1891, Perak Government Printing Office, Taiping, 1892, p.3; F.M.S. Census Papers 1901, Government Printer, Kuala Lumpur, 1902, p.30; and, Purcell, The Chinese in Malaya, p.68.

Recruitment into voluntary associations, as we have seen, was based on commonality of dialect and territorial origins, surname or craft affiliations, but in Malaya, the immigrants came from varied dialect and territorial backgrounds, and even fewer had common surname or craft affiliations. Secret societies, on the other hand, recruited across such barriers and members were bound together by the rituals of sworn brotherhood around a charismatic and semi-mystical head. Mak Lau Fong observes in his sociological study of secret societies in Peninsular Malaysia: "When sworn brotherhood binds Triad membership together, dialect differences are naturally de-emphasised, and the clan system is consigned to a secondary position."¹

A second, perhaps more important, reason why secret societies emerged as the dominant form of organisation stemmed from the class structure and sex ratio of the immigrant population in nineteenth century Malaya. These Chinese immigrants were largely young adult males drawn from the peasantry and working classes of China. The low female sex-ratio and working class structure of the immigrant population was particularly conducive to the tightly organised and male-oriented character of secret societies. However, as the female numbers increased and the population became sexually balanced, and as social mobility created an urban-based middle class mercantile population, voluntary associations assumed greater

1. Mak Lau Fong, The Sociology of Secret Societies: A Study of Chinese Secret Societies in Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1981, p.32.

organisational relevance within the community, particularly after secret societies were banned by the colonial authorities in 1890, as we shall soon see.

Secret societies in Malaya until the imposition of the 1890 ban were neither illegal or anti-government, as was the case in China. For example, though banned in China, the Triad Brotherhood was legal in Malaya and in fact comprised the predominant group of secret societies in the country. Instead of opposing the government, the Triads in Malaya worked to promote their members' livelihood through cooperative efforts of land clearing for agricultural and tin mining enterprises, and through fending off encroachments from rival secret societies. They became so powerful and influential that they controlled the recruitment process of new immigrants from China to work in the plantations and tin mines. They also governed the economic activities of the immigrants and maintained law and order in their respective territorial preserves.¹ In contrast to their outlawed status in China, secret societies in nineteenth century Malaya were the vehicles through which the British and Malay authorities conducted economic and political relations with the immigrant Chinese population, and the more influential secret society leaders were recognised as Kapitan Chinas by the authorities.

1. Blythe's study is the best historical account of secret societies in Malaya. Other works include: Comber, L., Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya, J.J. Augustin, New York, 1959; and Wynne, M.L., Triad and Tabut, Government Printing Office, Singapore, 1941.

The Kapitan China system, first introduced into Malacca by the Portuguese after 1511, underpinned the system of indirect rule used to govern the Chinese and other communities. The Portuguese appointed leaders of the various communities - Malay, Chinese, Arabs and Indians - as kapitans (captains) to act as political intermediaries between the colonial government and the indigenous population, and these kapitans were invested with certain executive, administrative and judicial powers. Upon replacing the Portuguese as the colonial power in Malacca after 1640, the Dutch continued the kapitan system. The British, who established their presence in Malaya after 1786, found it particularly useful in dealing with the Chinese in areas under their control, as did the Malay authorities faced with supervising the activities of the fast growing Chinese immigrant population in the Malay states.¹

The Kapitan China system existed in the Straits Settlements until 1826, when a Charter of Justice extended the jurisdiction of the Recorder's Court in Penang throughout the Straits Settlements, thus ending the formal role of the Kapitan Chinas as intermediaries between the colonial government and its Chinese subjects.² In the Malay states the system functioned officially until 1901. In both cases, however, unofficial Kapitan Chinas continued to be appointed long after the system had technically discontinued - until the 1880s in the Straits Settlements and as late as the 1930s in the Malay

1. Wong, C.S., A Gallery of Chinese Kapitans, Government Printing Office, Singapore, 1963, pp.1-2; Mak, pp.26-27.

2. Wong, p.28.

states.¹ The system survived its official abolition because the authorities still depended on the services of Chinese political intermediaries to develop and exploit the commercial potential of the Straits Settlements and the Malay states, but lacked the administrative capacity to govern the Chinese community directly. The intermediaries were required to collect revenue from taxes imposed on local goods (tin, gambier and pepper) produced by the immigrants and to operate revenue-generating excise farms related to gambling and pawnbroking activities and the sale of pork, spirits and opium. The unofficial Kapitan Chinas were also needed to maintain law and order and to attend to the general welfare within their local communities.

With the emergence of secret societies as the basic source of social order within the Chinese community in nineteenth century Malaya, secret society leaders were increasingly appointed as Kapitan Chinas. These Kapitan Chinas cum secret society leaders - the most famous of whom included Yap Ah Loy, a Kapitan China founder of Kuala Lumpur and leader of the local Hai San secret society, Kapitan Chung Keng Kwee of the Hai San in Larut and Kapitan Chin Ah Yam of the Ghee Hin also in Larut - were major actors in the economic as well as political life of the period.² Besides their role in organising Chinese labourers for tin mining, land development and other activities, they became embroiled in Malay internecine feuds and thus played a

1. Blythe, p.83; Purcell, p.103.

2. Wong, ch.3; and, Middlebrook, S.M., "Yap Ah Loy 1837-1885", JMBRAS, Vol.24, pt.2, 1951.

significant role in the events leading to British intervention in the Malay states.¹

C. Trocki's study on Johore and Singapore 1784-1885 shows that the colonial and Malay authorities utilised a variant of the Kapitan China system, the Kangchu (river chief or master) system, as a major means of developing the pepper and gambier economy of southern Malaya and regulating the activities of the immigrant Chinese labourers.² Under the Kangchu system, land, usually near the water front or waterways, was leased out to individuals or groups of Chinese for cultivation and development, and lessees were given the right to collect taxes, operate excise farms and exercise functions of government over the immigrant population under their charge. Secret societies were deeply involved in the operation of the Kangchu system as exemplified by Tan Kee Soon, who was the head of the Ngee Heng secret society and also the Kangchu of Tebrau.³

Once the authorities recognised secret society leaders as men of authority within their own communities, secret societies became a major channel of social mobility within Chinese society.

1. For a discussion of the historical factors behind British intervention, see Cowan C.D., Nineteenth-century Malaya: The Origins of British Political Control, Oxford University Press, London, 1961. Parkinson, C.N., British Intervention in Malaya 1867-1877, University of Malaya Press, Singapore, 1960. Khoo Kay Kim, "The Origins of British Administration in Malaya", JMBRAS, Vol.39, pt.1, 1966. McIntyre, W.D., "Britain's Intervention in Malaya", JSEAH, Vol.2, no.3, 1961.

2. Trocki, C.A., Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johore and Singapore 1784-1885, Singapore University Press, 1979, see especially ch.4.

3. *Ibid.*, pp.104-105.

As political office and positions of leadership could not be inherited or attained through other means such as educational achievement, as was the case in China, wealth became a major criterion of leadership status within the Chinese community in Malaya.¹ However, an individual who became a secret society leader through physical prowess and dexterity in the martial arts could also become a Kapitan China or a Kangchu. Heading a secret society was also an important source and preserver of wealth because of the economic opportunities offered by the position. Wealthy merchants naturally aspired to become patrons of secret societies, because the authorities were willing to deal with them as heads of secret societies and also because secret societies offered opportunities to amass greater wealth.

Although secret societies were useful to the colonial authorities as organisational vehicles of Chinese pioneering efforts in Malaya, their drawbacks eventually led to the imposition of a ban. The principal reason behind the colonial government's decision to make secret societies illegal was the frequent outbreaks of secret society feuding, most commonly caused by economic and dialect group rivalries, which disrupted the political and economic life of the Straits Settlements.² Between 1867 and 1889, the government vacillated between a policy of recognition and partial suppression

1. Wang Gungwu, "Traditional Leadership in a New Nation: the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya", in Alisjahbana, S.T. (ed.), The Cultural Problems of Malaysia in the Context of Southeast Asia, Malaysian Society of Orientalists, Kuala Lumpur, 1966, pp.172-175.

2. See Lee Poh Ping, ch.4; Blythe, pp.75-79, 94, 201-202.

of secret societies in its quest for a successful formula to regulate their activities.¹ It also established a Chinese Protectorate in 1877 to help curb abuses arising from secret society powers.² All these measures, however, failed to bring the secret societies to heel. With the gradual extension of the British administrative capacity, both in terms of taxation and security, the government finally decided that the convenience of having secret society leaders perform Kapitan China functions was far outweighed by the societies' anti-social behaviour and thus enacted the Societies Ordinance of 1889, which effectively caused secret societies to become illegal organisations.

With the imposition of the ban, secret societies lost their previous status and powers within the Chinese community, and degenerated into underworld gangs involved in organised crime, drug-pushing, extortion and prostitution rackets. Although secret society leaders were no longer accredited leaders of the community, they continued to exert influence through their position as bosses of the underworld. They maintained personal relations with the new leaders of the community - the leaders of voluntary associations, and political groupings - by offering "protection" for the business activities of these leaders, by serving as their personal bodyguards or by becoming their partners in business deals. Despite their

1. Purcell, pp.169-172.

2. For an account of the functions of the Chinese Protectorate, see Jackson, R.N., Pickering Protector of Chinese, and Ng Siew Yong, "The Chinese Protectorate in Singapore 1877-1900", JSEAH, Vol.2, no.1, March 1961.

illegal status, secret societies still possessed considerable organisational and financial muscle, and their support was covertly sought by the leaders of the Chinese community after 1900 (and up to the present).

1.2.2(b) Voluntary Associations: the Huay Kuans and Chinese Chambers of Commerce

Voluntary associations were formed in the period when secret societies dominated Chinese society in Malaya. While secret societies were concerned with facilitating the pioneering activities of the community, voluntary associations catered to general social and recreational needs of members such as the supervision of ancestor and deity worship, the overseeing of burials and maintenance of cemeteries, the settlement of disputes and the provision of mutual aid. The earliest huay kuans were dialect/territorial and clan associations, formed in the Straits Settlements as early as the 1810s and in the Malay States in the 1850s. These were commonly formed by secret society leaders and the membership of the huay kuans overlapped with that of secret societies.¹

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1. For an account of the origins and development of voluntary associations in Malaya, see Freedman, M., "Immigrants and Associations: Chinese in Nineteenth Century Singapore" in Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol.3, No.1, October 1960; Moese, W., Reinknect, G. and Schmitz-Seiber, E., "Chinese Regionalism in West Malaysia and Singapore", unpublished study, Hamburg University, 1979, pp.180-462; Wan Ming Sing, "The History of the Organisation of Chinese Community in Selangor with Particular Reference to the Problems of Leadership", M.A. thesis, University of Malaya, 1967; and the writer's M.A. dissertation, "Chinese Social Organisation in Malaya and Singapore: A Study of Chinese Associations with special reference to the Teochew Community" M.A. dissertation, University of Auckland, 1973.

Secret societies were eclipsed by voluntary associations in importance and influence after the Societies Ordinance of 1889 suppressed the former and allowed the latter to operate freely. Other factors also accounted for the growing importance of voluntary associations. As Chinese society had less of a frontier character and as law and order were increasingly supplied by the British, the community leaders became more and more capable of supporting voluntary associations. Rapid increases in the number of female immigrants after 1911 led to the establishment of a sexually balanced community, with a high percentage (63.5) of locally born persons by 1947.¹ The growth of the modern commercial sector based on wealth generated by the tin and rubber industries in the period 1900-1941 resulted in the development of urban centres and urban-based Chinese middle and working classes.

During the inter-war period, voluntary associations proliferated to meet the social, cultural and recreational needs of a consolidated and established Laukeh community in Malaya. Seven major types of voluntary associations existed: (1) the dialect/territorial association formed at the provincial, prefecture, county and village level; (2) the clan/surname association; (3) the trade guild and Chamber of Commerce; (4) the cultural, dramatic and/or musical society; (5) the social/recreational society; (6) the religious/moral uplifting society; and (7) the mutual/aid/funerary society. Of these, the huay kuan at the provincial level and the

1. del Tufo, M.V., Malaya: A Report on the 1947 Census of Population, London, H.M.S.O., pp.57, 84.

Chinese Chamber of Commerce (CCC) were the largest and most important types of organisation.

The provincial huay kuan was the paramount organisation within each dialect group and the CCC was the most important pan-dialect organisation. The CCC may be said to be a transitional form of organisation between a traditional association and a modern organisation. On the one hand, it derived from the ancient Chinese merchant guild and, on the other hand, it reflected a new Chinese organisational form. The CCC was promoted by the Ching government at the turn of the twentieth century as part of the Manchu reformist movement to generate nationalism and modernise China in the face of the western imperialist threat to China's sovereignty. In 1902, the Ching government encouraged trade guilds in each city in China to combine in chambers of commerce to promote commerce and national unity.¹

Chinese Chambers of Commerce were introduced in Malaya after 1905 by Manchu officials as part of the Chinese government's campaign to promote commerce and Chinese nationalism among the hua chiao (overseas Chinese) in Southeast Asia.² Their efforts resulted in the formation of the Singapore CCC in 1906, and other Chambers

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1. Garrett, S.S., "The Chambers of Commerce and the YMCA", in Elvin, M. and Skinner, G.W. (ed.), The Chinese City Between Two Worlds, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1974, p.217.
 2. Suyama, Taku, "Pang Societies and the Economy of Chinese Immigrants: A Study on Communalism in Southeast Asia" in Review of Southeast Asian Studies, 7, Singapore, 1977, p.16.

were subsequently formed throughout Malaya - in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Malacca, Ipoh, Seremban and other Chinese urban centres. In Malaya, the CCC served at least as a way of negotiating disagreements between dialect groups that would otherwise have been fought along sectional lines. They promoted a sense of unity that cut across dialect boundaries and were instrumental in engendering the spirit of Chinese nationalism within the Chinese community in Malaya. They were also instrumental in providing for a united front in dealing with the authorities in the absence of the Kapitan China system.

The day-to-day functions of the CCC centred primarily on the promotion of Chinese commerce, but they were concerned also with the regulation of community affairs which had previously been performed by the Kapitan Chinas. However, the CCC leaders' role was much more circumscribed, as the colonial government had greatly increased its administrative and judicial capability. With the reduced autonomy of the Chinese community, the powers of the CCC leaders were limited to the promotion of Chinese commerce and community welfare services.

CCC leaders formed a number of other inter-dialect organisations to promote Chinese unity and carry out social welfare and recreational activities within the community. These included the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall in Kuala Lumpur, the Perak Chinese Association in Ipoh, and the Johore Bahru Chinese Association. The pre-eminence of the CCC and their subsidiary pan-Chinese associations reflected the commercial importance and social dominance of merchants within Chinese society in Malaya.

1.3 Political Groupings, 1900-1941

The rise of the CCC, directly promoted by the Manchu Government as a pan-Chinese vehicle for generating Chinese nationalism ushered in the political awakening of the Laukeh community in Malaya. However, this increased political consciousness was not expressed through the CCC, which was not a political party, as much as through two overtly political groupings even more closely linked to parent bodies in China, the Kuomintang Malaya (KMTM) and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). A third major political actor during the period was the pro-British indigenous Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA).

In this section we will discuss these three political organisations from the standpoint of their origins, their sources of support and their inter-relationships with each other and the colonial government.

1.3.1 The Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA)

The SCBA was formed in Singapore and Malacca in 1900 to safeguard the political privileges enjoyed by Chinese who were Straits-born British subjects, as well as to promote their social and educational welfare.¹ Although the SCBA displayed a British-

1. Straits-born Chinese could acquire British nationality after 1867 in accordance with Section 8 of the Naturalisation Ordinance. Lee Yong Hock, "A History of the Straits Chinese British Association 1900-1959", BA Academic Exercise, University of Singapore, 1960, p.8. See also pp.10-16. The Penang SCBA was not formed until 1920. See Ooi, Diana, "A Study of the English-speaking Chinese of Penang 1900-1941", MA Thesis, University of Malaya, 1967, pp.94-100.

oriented political affiliation, it was also the first political organisation in Malaya to articulate the need to generate a common Malayan identity among the different communities in the country. However, it remained a small party even in its heyday - for example in 1931, it had only 1,060 members out of an estimated Straits Chinese population of 200,000.¹ Nonetheless, its political impact and significance was considerable, thanks in large measure to its highly capable leadership and the role the colonial government permitted it to play in the political life of the Straits Settlements.

SCBA leaders were English-educated professional men and wealthy merchants acculturated to British ways and ideas.² At the same time a considerable proportion of Babas had become resinicised as a result of prolonged economic and social contact with the Laukeh population. The process of resinification, encouraged by increasing inter-marriage between Laukehs and Babas, occurred mostly along cultural and social lines. Few Babas displayed political orientations towards China, but maintained instead an Anglophilic political identification as expressed by the SCBA. However, some of the resinicised Baba leaders were able to operate on both Baba and Laukeh planes, thus taking advantage of what both cultures offered in terms of social status and political power. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, a few wealthy Baba merchants were able to span

1. Ooi, p.105.

2. For a breakdown of the occupational and educational background of the office-holders of the Singapore SCBA from 1900-1941, see Yong Ching Fatt, "A Preliminary Study of Chinese Leadership in Singapore, 1900-1941", JSEAH, Vol.9, no.2, September 1968, p.264.

the two cultures and become secret society leaders.¹ A prominent example was Tan Kim Cheng, a Ghee Hin headman and unofficial Kapitan China in Singapore during the 1860s to 1880s. After 1900 a small group of Baba leaders, most notably Dr. Lim Boon Keng, were involved in China-oriented politics,² but their contribution to the development of Chinese nationalist politics in Malaya was insignificant compared to that of the Laukeh leaders.

The most prominent leaders in the SCBA was Tan Cheng Lock, Dr. Lim Boon Keng, Song Ong Siang, Han Hoe Lim and Lim Cheng Ean. These men were appointed by the colonial government to serve on the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, where they were active in pressing for political and educational reforms. Arguably, their most important achievement was their success in 1932 in persuading the government to open up the Straits Settlements Civil Service to non-European (i.e. Asian) British subjects.³

Of central relevance to this study are the ideas of Tan Cheng Lock, who headed the Malacca SCBA from 1928 to 1935, and who subsequently was instrumental in forming the MCA, which he led from 1949 to 1958.

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1. See Khoo Kay Kim, The Western Malay States 1850-1875: the Effects of Commercial Development on Malay Politics, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1972, pp.202-207.
 2. See Yen Ching-Hwang, "The Confucian Revival Movement in Singapore and Malaya 1899-1911", JSEAS, Vol.7, no.1, March 1976.
 3. Lee Yong Hock, pp.54-55.

Like other SCBA leaders in the early period, Cheng Lock emphasised that the local-born Straits Chinese were loyal only to the British Government and were proud of their status as British subjects. In a speech delivered on 3 November 1924 in the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, he said:¹

... I can assure you we are animated by a sense of loyalty and duty to serve this Empire and Throne to whom we owe allegiance, and inspired by an earnest and keen desire to make this country and the Empire our real and permanent home.

However, Cheng Lock's Anglophilism was overlaid with a Malayan-centred patriotism which questioned the continuation of colonial tutelage for the people of Malaya. He urged the government to grant self-rule to Malaya and advocated implementation of policies which would generate a common Malayan consciousness among the various races. For example, in 1926 he said:²

Our ultimate political goal should be a united self-governing British Malaya with a Federal Government and Parliament for the whole of it, functioning at a convenient centre, say, at Kuala Lumpur, and with as much autonomy in purely local affairs as possible for each of its constituent parts. I think that it is high time that we commence to take action towards forging the surest and strongest link of that United Malaya by fostering and creating a true Malayan spirit and consciousness amongst its people to the complete elimination of the racial or communal feeling.

Cheng Lock urged the government to introduce legislative reforms so that the Legislative Council would contain an elected majority. He argued that the introduction of franchise and an elected unofficial majority in the country's legislature would stir the people's

1. Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements, 3 November 1924, B120.

2. *Ibid.*, 1 November 1926, B161.

interest in political affairs and put an end to the prevalent mood of political apathy.¹

He also asked the government to introduce educational reforms to generate a spirit of Malayan consciousness and identity among the different races.²

I hope that the policy of the Government in the matter of education, as well as in other matters, is one of Malaya for the Malaysians and not only for one section of the people; and I also hope that the policy of Government will be one of Malaya for the people who have made Malaya, who are loyal to the country, to the Empire and to the King, so that thereby you will get a contented people, a people who from year to year will grow more contented and more and more loyal to our King, country and Empire.

Cheng Lock was against High Commissioner Sir Cecil Clementi's proposal to introduce free primary education in the Malay language as a means to Malayanise the children of the various races. Like some Baba and all the Laukeh leaders, he did not want the Chinese in Malaya to adopt Malay characteristics at the expense of shedding their Chinese heritage. Addressing the Legislative Council on 12 February 1934, he said he endorsed the government's intention to use education as a means to create a common sense of Malaya consciousness. He hoped, however, that the process of Malayanisation envisaged would not result in the non-Malays being assimilated into Malay culture:³

1. Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements, 3 November 1924, B160.

2. *Ibid.*, 8 December 1930, B174-175.

3. *Ibid.*, 12 February 1934, B18.

I hope and presume that the term "Malayanization" does not at all imply that the Government has the least intention in view, however remote, ultimately to attempt the mixing ethnologically of the various races living in Malaya, so that the product of this race mixture will be a homogenous amalgamation in whom the Malay characteristics will predominate, or to make non-Malays adopt the Malay language as their own.

He added that the Babas should not acquire more Malay traits, but should instead "be brought into harmony with their native Chinese ethos" in order that Chinese customs and traditions would be preserved in Malaya.¹

Cheng Lock's speeches reveal some important themes.

Firstly, his stress on the need for the creation of a common Malayan identity among the different races and his call for self-rule were ideas which were politically progressive in the 1920s and 1930s. Secondly, while the SCBA and the Straits Chinese vowed political loyalty to the British Government, they also wanted to retain their Chinese cultural roots. These dual objectives of the Babas reflect the extent to which they had been resinicised as a result of their being engulfed by the Laukeh masses and the revival of interest in China generated by the rise of Chinese nationalism. Cheng Lock himself, very much a resinicised Baba, demonstrated his concern for the preservation of Chinese language and culture many years later during his term of office as MCA President.

Basically an elitist organisation dominated by English-educated professionals and intellectuals, the SCBA's influence within

1. Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements, 12 February 1934, B22.

the Chinese community at large, compared to the mass based KMTM and MCP, was small. Nonetheless, its leaders were politically articulate and were the only voices of the Chinese community recognised by the colonial government. Thus, their backing was sought by the Chinese parties and by the CCC-huay kuan establishment.

Throughout the period from 1911 to 1941 the SCBA carefully avoided identifying itself with Laukeh nationalist activities organised by either the left or right wing. It goes without saying that the Anglophile capitalist leadership of the SCBA found the Communist movement highly objectionable. Speaking in the Straits Settlements Legislative Council in October 1932, Tan Cheng Lock described the MCP as a movement led by "a few misguided Hylams of the class of domestic servants to sow the seed of the poison of communism...."¹ In the same speech, he also endorsed the government's containment of the KMTM's activities. While Cheng Lock's unsympathetic attitude towards the MCP accurately reflected the general feeling of the Baba community, a small group of SCBA leaders, notably Dr. Lim Boon Keng, a founder member of the SCBA, openly identified with the KMTM and were actively involved in its inception and subsequent development. The SCBA, however, did not condone the open pursuit of KMT activities by its leaders and when it decided that Lim Boon Keng had gone too far in his identification with the KMT, he was no longer elected to any position in the Association.²

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1. Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements, 19 October 1932, B144.
 2. Pang Wing Seng, "The 'Double-Seventh' Incident 1937: Singapore Chinese Response to the Outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War", JSEAS, Vol.4, no.2, September 1973, p.294.

Baba identification with Chinese nationalism was strongest during the National Salvation Movement (NSM) 1937-1941 when the Chinese community in Malaya was deeply involved in fund-raising campaigns in support of China against the Japanese invasion.¹ The British Government sympathised with the anti-Japanese activities and allowed the Chinese in Malaya to mobilise support for China's war effort.² Many Baba leaders openly organised relief fund collections and concerts in aid of the NSM. On the whole, however, SCBA leaders who held office in government bodies such as the Legislative Council and Municipal Commissions refrained from participating in the NSM,³ probably because they were against any form of political loyalty except identification with the British and with Malaya.

While SCBA leaders generally stayed away from the KMTM, they maintained links with the CCC and huay kuans out of the need to have close economic and social ties with the wealthy and influential Laukeh associational leadership (and partly because the CCC and huay kuans, although allied to the KMTM, did not become a political wing of the KMTM, as we shall shortly see). Many Baba leaders had strong

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1. For a discussion of the National Salvation Movement, see Leong, Stephen, "The Kuomintang-Communist United Front in Malaya during the National Salvation Period 1937-1941", JSEAS, Vol. 8, no.1, March 1977; Akashi, Yoji, The Nanyang Chinese National Salvation Movement 1937-1941, Centre for East Asian Studies, University of Kansas, 1970.
 2. Leong, Stephen, M.Y., "Sources, Agencies and Manifestations of Overseas Chinese Nationalism in Malaya, 1937-1941", Ph.D. thesis, University of California, 1976, pp.597-598.
 3. Pang, pp.293, 295.

economic and professional links with Laukeh CCC and huay kuan leaders and several successful commercial enterprises were the result of joint business ventures by Baba and Laukeh merchants: e.g., the Ho Hong Bank, the Overseas Chinese Bank and the United Saw Mills in Singapore.¹ In addition, a number of SCBA leaders, including Tan Cheng Lock, held office in the CCC and dialect/territorial huay kuans.

Despite the social, business and limited political interaction between the Babas and Laukehs, the English education, pro-British orientation and strong attachment to western political concepts set most of them apart from the Chinese-educated, Sino-centric CCC and huay kuan leaders. The fundamental difference in political outlook was further demonstrated in the postwar period at the time of the formation of the MCA, when (as is discussed later) the Baba leaders, anxious to portray the new organisation as a Malayan-centred party, were highly concerned about the pro-KMT orientation of their Laukeh co-founders.

1.3.2 The Kuomintang Malaya (KMTM) and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP)

The KMTM and MCP represented in Malaya the two dominant and conflicting political movements of twentieth century China. Both drew on their parent organisations for ideology, cadres, and other support, and they competed vigorously for the backing of the Laukeh community in Malaya.

1. Yong, pp.280-283.

The Kuomintang Malaya was formed as a result of the efforts by Chinese republicans led by Sun Yat Sen to mobilise overseas Chinese support behind his nationalist, anti-Manchu movement which culminated in the Revolution of 1911. The predecessor of the KMTM, the Tung Meng Hui, was established in 1906 in Singapore. After the overthrow of the Ching Dynasty the Singapore lodge of the KMT was formed in 1912; a year later several KMTM branches were set up throughout Malaya and the party soon received the support of a considerable proportion of the Laukeh community.¹

Communism was first introduced to Malaya by radical elements within the KMT. In 1923 Sun Yat Sen decided to reorganise the KMT in China along the Soviet Communist cell system in the hope of making it strong enough to undertake the re-unification of China. Following the Sun-Joffe Pact of 1923 under which members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were permitted to join the KMT as individuals, many Communists came into the KMT between 1923 and 1927 (when the split between the KMT and CCP took place). In Malaya these Communists or left KMTM members were organised in the Malayan Revolutionary Committee of the KMTM. Following the break-up between the Nationalists and Communists in China, the MCP was formed in Malaya by 1930 by this group.²

1. For a discussion on the origins of the KMT in Malaya, see Png Poh Seng, "The Kuomintang in Malaya", JSEAH, Vol.2, no.1, March 1961.

2. Hanrahan, G.Z., The Communist Struggle in Malaya, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1971, ch.1; and Khoo Kay Kim, "The Beginnings of Political Extremism in Malaya, 1915-1935", Ph.D. thesis, University of Malaya, 1973, ch.5.

The KMTM and the MCP both concentrated their efforts on capturing the support of three main groups: the traditional associational network CCC and huay kuans, the Chinese schools and the trade unions. Generally speaking, the KMTM managed to win over the CCC and huay kuans, the MCP dominated the trade unions, and the two parties shared control of the Chinese schools.¹

Winning the allegiance of the CCC and huay kuans was extremely valuable to the KMTM, because it afforded access to the most established and widespread organisational base for mobilising the manpower and financial resources of the Laukeh community. The preference of the Chinese traditional leadership in Malaya for the Republican over the Communist cause is understandable in the light of their class interests.

Between 1920 and 1940, prominent CCC and huay kuan leaders who joined or supported the KMTM included Tan Kah Kee, Lee Kong Chian and Lim Keng Lian in Singapore; Ho Pao Jin in Malacca; Lau Pak Khuan and Ong Chin Seong in Perak; Lee Hau Shik (H.S. Lee) in Selangor; Wong Shee Fun in Johore; and Ong Keng Seng and Saw Seng Kiew in Penang.² These CCC leaders were responsible for organising

1. A fourth group, the shadowy and illegal secret societies, was not easily accessible to political recruitment but their support was nonetheless sought by the KMTM and MCP. On the whole, given their close ties with the CCC and huay kuans, it is not surprising that they supported the KMTM more than the MCP. See Means, G.P., Malayan Politics, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1976 (2nd ed.), pp.11-12, and Siaw, pp.164-165.

2. Leong, "Sources, Agencies...", pp.162-164, 256-257, 415-416.

and co-ordinating several pro-KMT campaigns in Malaya - mounting fund-raising efforts for various flood, famine and refugee relief activities in China, organising memorial services in honour of China's statesmen, and, after 1937, supervising NSM campaigns. The KMT Government assiduously wooed the CCC-huay kuan leaders and maintained close links by sending out high-ranking officials on diplomatic missions. However, despite these ties and despite membership by individual leaders in the KMTM, the organisations themselves did not become political arms of the KMT Government or allow themselves to fall under the domination of the KMT Consuls in Malaya.¹ Ever concerned that the British colonial administration might undertake reprisal action against them, the CCC-huay kuan leaders not only guarded their independence from the KMT but they also played a significant role in muting the KMTM's anti-imperialist ideology.

Chinese schools were a natural target for KMTM and MCP competition as they were important vehicles for the political and social indoctrination of Chinese youths. In Malaya, they were even more suitable as agents of politicisation by political parties as they did not come under the direct control and supervision of the colonial government. The British administration, which financed free Malay primary education and partially financed English education (usually carried out by missionary bodies), left the Chinese community to sponsor Chinese education.²

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1. The independence of the CCC from the KMT Consul in Singapore during the NSM is described by Pang Wing Seng, p.281; and Akashi, p.66.
 2. For a discussion of British educational policies, see Loh, Philip F.S., Seeds of Separatism: Educational Policy in Malaya 1874-1940, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1975.

The Chinese community continued to enjoy considerable autonomy in educational affairs despite attempts by the government to regulate the proliferation of Sino-centric activities in Chinese schools by requiring them to register with the Education Department after 1920. However, the government was unsuccessful in controlling the spread of Chinese nationalism in Chinese schools partly because it allotted most of its attention and financial resources to the financing of free Malay education and the subsidising of English education, and partly because Chinese nationalistic feelings took such a strong hold within the Laukeh community that they could not be easily suppressed by the colonial government.

Many more Chinese children and youths went to Chinese medium schools than to English medium schools. For example, in 1938, Chinese enrolment figures showed that 91,534 pupils attended Chinese schools, compared to 26,974 in English schools.¹ In 1947, an estimated 55% of all Chinese children between the ages of six to twelve attended Chinese schools, compared to 10% in English schools.² Clearly the great majority of Chinese students who became future grass-roots and community leaders in Malaya were exposed to schools inculcating Sino-centric values, whether Nationalist or Communist.

The major patrons of Chinese schools in the pre-independence period were the dialect/provincial huay kuans and, to a lesser extent,

1. Purcell, p.222.

2. "Annual Report Chinese Schools 1947", mimeo., Director of Education file, 699/47, part 2.

clan associations, which formed management committees to operate the schools.¹ In the nineteenth century the schools followed a traditional curriculum (based on Confucian and other Chinese classics) which had not changed for over a century in China. After 1911, the KMT government played a direct role in reforming the Chinese educational system in Malaya as part of its campaign to modernise China and to inculcate loyalty among Chinese (both in China and Southeast Asia) towards Republican China. School curricula were redesigned to emphasise the teaching of Sun Yat Sen's San Min Chu I (three principles of nationalism, democracy and people's livelihood) and to include modern scientific subjects. After 1917, Kuo yu (Mandarin) was introduced as the common medium of instruction in all modern Chinese schools. Hitherto all Chinese schools had taught in the dialects of sponsoring huay kuans or schoolmasters. The use of kuo yu in Chinese schools was one of the most important factors in breaking down traditional dialect group barriers in Malaya. It served as a unifying vehicle, paving the way for inter-dialect group cooperation in the management of community affairs, and generating a sense of pan-Chinese nationalism within Chinese society in Malaya.

Modern schools in Malaya continued to be financed and managed principally by the huay kuans. However, the KMT government,

1. For a discussion of the development of Chinese education in Malaya, see Lee Ah Chai, "Policies and Politics in Chinese Schools in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States 1786-1941", M.A. thesis, University of Malaya, 1958; and Yung Yuet Ling, "Contributions of the Chinese to Education in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States 1900-1941", M.A. thesis, University of Malaya, 1967.

which set up a number of committees within the Chinese Ministry of Education to plan for Overseas Chinese education, contributed educational grants and helped to train and recruit teachers for service in Malaya (as well as other Southeast Asian countries). The KMT government also directed overseas Chinese schools to register with the Ministry of Education in China, and teachers to register with the Chinese Consulate at their places of employment.¹

In the competition between the KMTM and MCP for the allegiance of Chinese schools in Malaya, the KMTM initially possessed a clear advantage, due to the role the KMT government played in the development of modern Chinese education in Malaya, and equally important, the fact that the majority of the patrons of Chinese schools were pro-KMT huay kuan leaders. However, there were two periods when the MCP was particularly successful in mobilising support from Chinese schools. These were the united front period of 1924-1927, and the Nationalist Salvation Movement of 1937-1941.

Operating within the KMTM before their expulsion after 1927, Communist organisers successfully propagated Marxist-Leninist teachings in Chinese schools. Communist doctrine was also disseminated among the Chinese student population through the establishment of several night schools opened by Hainanese teachers.² The early successes enjoyed by Communist activists in Chinese schools received a setback following their expulsion from the KMTM. However, during

1. Lee Ah Chai, pp.174-202; Yong, pp.91-100; and Leong, "Sources, Agencies....", pp.394-407.

2. Leong, "Sources, Agencies...", pp.223-224; Khoo, pp.198-212.

the NSM, when the MCP cooperated with the KMTM for a period of time in jointly organising China-relief campaigns, it was highly successful in mobilising the support of Chinese students. MCP-affiliated NSM bodies, such as the Anti-Enemy Backing Up Society, the Anti-Enemy Elimination of Traitors and Voluntary Corps, and the Chinese Anti-Enemy National Salvation Society, effectively appealed to nationalist as well as anti-imperialist sentiments to increase their support base within the student and worker population.¹ The KMTM was less successful in mobilising popular support, because its CCC-huay kuan allies restrained the KMTM-backed NSM bodies from preaching anti-imperialist doctrines popular with students and workers, for fear of incurring the displeasure of the British authorities. Also, the KMT Government did not wish the KMTM to pursue an anti-British line in Malaya for it wanted Britain as an ally in the Sino-Japanese conflict.² One can see, therefore, that although the KMTM was better placed to capture the support of Chinese schools and generally had the advantage, shortly before the outbreak of World War Two a great deal of the initiative had passed to the MCP.

Consistent with their ideological and class orientations, the MCP dominated the labour movement, while the KMTM found natural allies in the CCC and huay kuans. The origins and development of the labour movement in Malaya stemmed from the radicalisation of Hainanese society at the turn of the century, which led to the transformation of their traditional trade guilds into unions, and

1. See Leong, "Sources, Agencies...", ch.7.

2. Ibid., pp.436-437.

from the desire of the Comintern and CCP to organise Malayan labour.

The early Communist movement in Malaya was dominated by the Hainanese, a phenomenon which Khoo Kay Kim explains in terms of the early and pervasive hold which communism had on Hainan Island, and the particularly low social and economic status of Hainanese workers within the Chinese community in Malaya.¹ Traditional trade guilds of the Hainanese dialect group were the first to display pro-Communist sentiments, and the nascent modern trade union movement took shape in the late 1920s from a cluster of Hainanese-dominated unions of rubber tappers (centred especially in Negri Sembilan), house servants, shoemakers, carpenters, seamen and mechanics.²

Trade union activities were stepped up in Malaya when the Comintern, aided by the CCP, established the Nanyang General Labour Union in 1924 to undertake organisation of labour in Southeast Asia.³ Following the formation of the MCP in 1930 the Malayan General Labour Union (known subsequently as the Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions) was established, and it successfully organised labour in the fast-growing economic sectors based on tin and other mining activities, rubber, transportation, stevedoring, light manufacturing and other industries. Despite Communist ideological stress on inter-ethnic

1. Khoo, pp.200-202.

2. Ibid., pp.213-218.

3. Hanrahan, pp.35-36.

cooperation along class lines, MCP mobilisation of labour in Malaya was limited to the Chinese population; little attention was paid to the organisation of non-Chinese labour, especially Indian plantation workers, in the period before World War Two.¹ The overwhelming majority of MCP leaders and labour organisers, being China-born and Chinese-educated, were deeply imbued with a sense of Chinese chauvinism which tended to overshadow the multi-racial aspect of the party's class struggle objective.

While the MCP controlled the modern Chinese labour movement in Malaya, the KMTM generally had the support of the traditional trade guilds which comprised both employers and workers within their ranks. Many workers remained loyal to their employers, the wealthy leaders of the CCC and huay kuans, or were afraid to sympathise openly with the MCP, mainly out of fear of losing their sources of financial support, and partly because of fear of potential persecution by pro-KMTM secret societies as well as pressures from the government against the Communist-dominated trade unions.

The MCP's successful organisation of Chinese labour introduced new factors into the organisational fabric of Chinese society by offering alternative channels and principles of mobilisation and organisation to traditional ones based on the voluntary association. New routes to leadership positions were also opened, allowing for the emergence of populist labour leaders. The mobilising potential

1. See Stenson, M.R., Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948, Oxford University Press, London, 1970.

of the trade union was highlighted during 1936 and 1937 when the MCP successfully orchestrated a series of strikes in rubber estates, tin mines and other industries to demonstrate worker solidarity in opposition to low wages, long hours, poor working conditions and abuses arising from the Chinese contract system.¹ However, due to swift and effective police action, these strikes were quickly contained. More strikes were organised during the NSM period, but these were likewise suppressed by effective government action.

1.3.3 Attitudes of the British Authorities

The colonial government nurtured the SCBA leadership, giving Straits-born Chinese leaders a role in the administration of the Straits Settlements through participation in the Straits Settlements Legislative Council. In contrast, the government was rigidly hostile towards the MCP, and it vacillated between a policy of repression and tolerance of the KMTM.

The crucial factor which made it possible for Chinese agents to propagate Chinese nationalist ideas freely and successfully in Malaya at the turn of the century was the British policy of non-interference in the affairs of the community. After a period of relatively unhampered opportunity to mobilise support among the Chinese population in Malaya between 1912 and 1920, the KMTM faced increasing suppression by the colonial government, which was extremely concerned at the propagation of anti-imperialist and class struggle

1. Yeo Kim Wah, "Communist Involvement in Malayan Labour Strikes: 1936", JMBRAS, Vol. 49, pt. 2, 1976.

teachings by leftist and Communist elements of the party. The authorities attempted to contain the movement by arresting and/or deporting radical leaders, school teachers and other activists, and by imposing a ban on the organisation in the Straits Settlements in 1925 which was extended to the Federated Malay States in 1930.¹ However, these measures failed to check the growth of KMT influence in Malaya, partly because the effectiveness of the ban was undermined by an agreement between the British and KMT governments in late 1930 to allow direct membership of Malayan Chinese in the KMT in China,² and partly because individual CCC and huay kuan leaders helped to promote KMTM activities within the traditional associations. After 1937, the KMTM was allowed to operate openly within the context of the NSM in aid of China's anti-Japanese war effort, as the British Government was sympathetic to China's plight (although it officially professed a neutral stand in the Sino-Japanese conflict).³

The British authorities were consistently hostile towards the Communist movement. Following the first signs of Communist activities in Malaya, the police kept up close surveillance on the movement. Pro-Communist schools were closed, premises of trade unions sacked and Communist schoolteachers and strike leaders arrested or deported. Anti-Communist measures were implemented most harshly

1. Purcell, p.213; Leong, "Sources, Agencies...", pp.118-119, 212-221.

2. Leong, "Sources, Agencies...", p.218.

3. Ibid., pp.249-253.

whenever the Communist leadership made public showings of its strength, such as the Kreta Ayer demonstration of 1926, the country-wide labour strikes of 1936-1937 and the May Day Rally of 1940.¹ Arrests and deportations of leaders following the Kreta Ayer incident decimated the first flowering of the Communist movement. During the early 1930s, the MCP slowly rebuilt its support and, through the labour strikes of 1935-1936, demonstrated the success of its unionisation efforts. However, the movement's growth was once more temporarily halted by the arrests of several union leaders. It regained momentum following the inauguration of the NSM.

Because the British authorities had allowed the Chinese in Malaya to organise on behalf of China's anti-Japanese war effort, the MCP was able to capitalise on the opportunity through the establishment of several NSM-affiliated front organisations, such as the Anti-Enemy Backing Up Society and others mentioned earlier. For a short time the KMTM and the MCP jointly sponsored NSM activities, but the cooperation broke down when the KMTM realised that the Communists were gaining popular support at their expense. Despite the termination of the alliance, MCP support grew rapidly because of its strong organisation and the powerful appeal to the Chinese lower classes and students of its nationalist, anti-imperialist, and class struggle ideology.² Popular support for the MCP reached an all time pre-war

1. For a discussion of the Kreta Ayer Incident of 1924 and the May Day Rally of 1940, see Leong, "Sources, Agencies...", pp.224-229, 525-536; and Khoo, pp.218-226.

2. Leong, "The Kuomintang-Communist United Front...", pp.34-46.

high at the end of 1939 and early 1940, when its membership and that of affiliated labour and NSM organisations was estimated at between 80,000 and 105,000.¹ On May Day 1940, the MCP held a rally attended by 15,000-20,000 participants.² The highly successful rally was followed up by a series of strikes staged by the Singapore General Labour Union, marking the climax of MCP-organised activities during the period.

The open display of anti-British sentiments at the 1940 May Day rally produced an inevitable reaction by the colonial authorities, who undertook swift and effective police reprisals against MCP student leaders and trade union agitators. By July 1940, 229 Communist leaders had been arrested,³ and police raids on all MCP-connected organisations seriously undermined their activities. By early 1941, for example, membership in the Singapore General Labour Union had dropped 75%, to 4,120 from May 1940 to a total of some 20,000.⁴

British containment of the MCP counted more than any other single factor in curbing the growth of the Communist movement during

1. Leong gives the following breakdown: MCP membership 2,000, Malayan General Labour Union 40,000, AEBUS 30,000. Leong, "Sources, Agencies...", pp.495-6. J.B. Brimmell places MCP membership at 5,000, with the party controlling a base of some 100,000 workers and students. Brimmell, J.H., Communism in Southeast Asia: A Political Analysis, Oxford University Press, London, 1959, p.148.

2. Leong, "Sources, Agencies...", p.529.

3. Ibid., p.538.

4. Ibid., pp.792-793.

the inter-war period. With the removal of this constraint by the Japanese occupation of Malaya between December 1941 and August 1945, the MCP expanded rapidly and eventually emerged temporarily as the leading political force in Malaya.

1.4 Impact of the Japanese Occupation

The Japanese Occupation of Malaya produced radical changes in the power structure and leadership patterns of Chinese society in the country.¹ The CCC-huay kuans lost their leadership role when the Japanese military administration replaced them with the Japanese-sponsored Overseas Chinese Association (OCA) which had a branch in every town.² Hundreds of CCC-huay kuan leaders were arrested, interned or killed for their role in the National Salvation Movement. Those who were spared collaborated with the Japanese in enforcing the policies of the OCA, thus discrediting themselves and losing the support and respect of the Chinese population at large.

The prestige of the MCP, in contrast, grew by leaps and bounds. The party went underground with the arrival of the Japanese

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1. For an account of Japanese treatment of the Chinese community during the war, see Chin Kee Onn, Malaya Upside Down, Jitts & Co., Singapore, 1946; Akashi, Yoji, "Japanese Policy Towards the Malayan Chinese 1941-1945", JSEAS, Vol.1, no.2, September 1970.
 2. The principal functions of the OCA were the collection of the \$50 million "gift" from the Chinese community, the remittance of Chinese manpower for the Japanese war effort and the establishment of Chinese agricultural colonies to produce food. See "Japanese Administration in Malaya - a study of the Japanese Military Administration of Malaya including the organisation, policies, and controls of the Administration", mimeo., 8 June 1944, BMA file, ADM/9/1.

and established a military wing, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) to lead a highly effective underground resistance movement with the assistance of the British Force 136.¹ The Communist guerillas drew widespread clandestine support not only from rural and urban Chinese lower classes, but also from Chinese petty bourgeois and capitalist elements who almost universally identified with the anti-Japanese cause.

Although the KMTM likewise went underground, it failed to put together a cohesive or well trained fighting force, due largely to inept leadership as well as to the dissolution of the CCC-huay kuans which had been its previous mainstay and support base. Small bands of KMTM guerillas, estimated to total below 400, operated in the remoter parts of Kedah and northern Malaya, compared to the MPAJA's force of almost 7,000 operating throughout the country.²

1.5 Political Developments in the Immediate Post-War Period

1.5.1 MCP Ascendance

When the British re-occupied Malaya in September 1945, the arriving officers of the British Military Administration (BMA) which lasted till March 1946, had to deal with the reality of the MCP as the dominant political force in the country. The Deputy Chief of Civil Affairs of the BMA reported: "There is no doubt that in all the villages throughout the Malay States the Chinese Resistance Forces

1. See Chapman, F.S., The Jungle is Neutral, Chatto and Windus, 1949.

2. Purcell, pp.261-262.

are in command and it must be admitted that without their assistance in those places law and order could not be maintained...." He observed that the AJA [MPAJA] was made up of young Chinese who had little respect for the traditional community leaders: "... there is no doubt that the latter for the time being have lost their leadership of the various Chinese communities and that such leadership has passed to the Chinese Communists and Chinese youth movements".¹

During the early months of the BMA, the MCP operated alongside the BMA as an "alternative government"; People's Committees were set up in several small towns to collect funds (mainly enforced contributions from Chinese businessmen), hold courts and discipline offenders, provide jobs for the unemployed and distribute relief to the needy.²

In Kuala Lumpur, the party took over the premises of the Selangor Chinese Chambers of Commerce and the Chinese Assembly Hall, and set up a number of organisations to usurp the functions previously performed by the CCC and huay kuans; for example, the Selangor Commercial Union was set up to be the MCP's substitute for the CCC.³

The early post-war period provided ideal conditions for the radicalisation and organisation of labour, because of seriously

1. H.C. Willan, Brigadier, D.C.C.A.O., B.M.A., "Report on the Military Government of the Malay Peninsula for the period ending 12 September to 30 September", mimeo., p.3, BMA File C/1/1/4(3).

2. Stenson, p.67.

3. The objectives of the Selangor Commercial Union were: (1) to rehabilitate industry, commerce and the economy, and (2) to settle all business and commercial disputes among members. Min Sheng Pau, 9 September 1945.

depressed economic conditions, the ability to operate without legal restraint, and because the war time experience had eroded older forms of labour control and patronage. Not only did the MCP surpass all its previous successes in organising Chinese labour, it also, for the first time, brought vast numbers of Indian plantation workers into the labour movement.¹ By September 1947 the labour wing of the MCP, the Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU), controlled 214 out of 217 registered trade unions and claimed the allegiance of some 75% of all organised workers.²

1.5.2 The Non-Communist Revival

In early December 1945 the BMA neutralised the MCP as a potential military and political rival by successfully persuading the MPAJA to disband and getting some 6,800 guerillas to turn in their arms.³ It is not clear why the MCP chose to cooperate with the British, but its action was consistent with its moderate position as reflected in an eight-point program released just prior to the arrival of the British.⁴ The MCP leadership probably decided that British assurances of free and unhindered participation for Communist

1. See Stenson, ch. 6.

2. "Report on the Military Government of the Malay Peninsula for the period ending 12 September to 30 September", p.7, BMA file C/1/1/4(3).

3. Purcell, p.267.

4. McLane, C.B., Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia: An Exploration of Eastern Policy under Lenin and Stalin, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966, pp.306-307.

leaders in the political rehabilitation of post-war Malaya, in return for laying down arms, offered a means of gaining eventual political control of Malaya. The party, however, kept secret supplies of weapons and ammunitions in the jungle, and maintained a potential fighting force in the MPAJA Ex-Comrades Association, should the need for revolution arise.

Contrary to Communist expectations, its presence was progressively excluded from government bodies. In early 1946, when the BMA convened a number of Local and Regional Advisory Committees, Communist representatives were appointed to serve on them. Representation on these bodies, however, was heavily weighted in favour of conservative leaders. Sample lists containing the names and occupations of Chinese representatives reveal that the majority were well-known CCC and huay kuan personalities, who were literate in English. These included Khoo Teik Ee, Yong Shook Lin and H.S. Lee in Selangor, Khaw Seng Lee in Penang, and Ong Seong Tek in Pahang.¹ When the BMA was succeeded by the Malayan Union Government in April 1946, the policy of excluding Communist representatives on government bodies was more pronounced. The Secretary for Chinese Affairs noted in a correspondence that Chinese leaders invited to serve on official bodies should be drawn from "the long established and more conservative section of the community...." He added that leftist elements were, in his opinion, "not yet fitted to serve on any representative

1. See BMA file, MAL/4015; and Secretary for Chinese Affairs file, SCA/C/3/1 (12/46).

body".¹ No Communist representatives were appointed to the Malayan Union Advisory Councils when these were set up after April 1946.

British patronage of the traditional Chinese leadership was crucial in reviving the position of CCC and huay kuan leaders and their KMTM allies. Apart from appointing them to government bodies, the British authorities helped to rehabilitate their businesses. For example, a Loan Committee was set up in April 1946 to administer funds to re-establish Chinese tin mines.² In addition, a War Damage Claims Commission was set up to process claims for compensation of property destroyed during the war and several CCC leaders successfully applied to the Commission for such assistance.³

British political and economic promotion of Chinese conservative leaders restored their influence and power within the Chinese community. Colonial re-affirmation of the "middleman" role of the CCC-huay kuan leaders made the positions held by Communist leaders irrelevant, except when they related to working class unrest. The influence of the MCP waned among all but the disaffected proletariat and others who felt they had little stake in the colonial system.

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1. Letter from S.E. King, Secretary for Chinese Affairs, to J. Calder, Resident Commissioner, M.U., dated 10 April 1946, Secretary for Chinese Affairs file, SCA C/3/4(50/46).
 2. Proceedings of the Malayan Union Advisory Council, 9 June 1947, The Chinese Tin Mines (Rehabilitation Loans) (Amendment) Bill 194, B109.
 3. See, for example, letter from the Mersing (Johore) Chamber of Commerce to the Governor of the Malayan Union dated 11 July 1946, Federal Secretariat file, 11228/48.

The revival of CCC-huay kuan influence saw a corresponding rise in the position of the KMTM. Taking advantage of the opportunity for unrestricted political organisation and association in the immediate post-war period, the KMT Central Executive Committee in Nanking supervised the revival of KMT branches in Malaya and the launching of a nation-wide campaign to register old and new members.¹

Between early 1946 and mid-1948, rivalry between the KMTM and the MCP became intense, and taking up where it left off before the Japanese invasion of Malaya, the KMTM set out to woo the allegiance of Chinese youths, students and workers. The Acting Secretary for Chinese Affairs described the KMTM-MCP rivalry in Singapore in the following terms:²

At present it is only a tug of war with the school children and labour unions as the rope. In Singapore if the Youth Democratic League put up a school, the SMCY /San Min Chu Yi/ Youth Corps immediately start another one next door. How they can always get the premises beats me. I hear that the KMT are trying to start a GLU /General Labour Union/ here.

The youth wing of the KMTM, the SMCY, was particularly active and effective in mobilising Chinese students and youths, representing, in

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1. See, letter from Siew Kye Wai, Chinese Affairs Officer, to Secretary for Chinese Affairs, n.d., Secretary for Chinese Affairs file, SCA/218/48(2). The opening of new KMTM branches and San Min Chu Yi (the KMT Youth Wing) branches are reported in the following press reports: China Press, 26 April, 6 May, 31 July and 21 November 1946; Kwong Wah Jit Pao, 6 and 9 May 1947.
 2. Letter from the Acting Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Singapore, E.C.S. Arkins to W. Blythe, Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Malayan Union, dated 24 May 1946, Secretary for Chinese Affairs file, SCA 85/46(3).

an important sense, a "self-defence corps" for the CCC KMTM establishment against MCP pressure and thuggery. The KMTM's efforts at labour organisation were largely unsuccessful (as in the case of its pre-war attempts) except in the Kinta region, where it successfully organised a union of tin mine workers against the MCP-led Perak Mining Labourers' Union.¹

Prominent CCC figures who played leading roles in reviving the KMTM during this period included several individuals who were founder members of the MCA a few years later; these included Lau Pak Khuan, H.S. Lee and Lim Keng Lian. Lau Pak Khuan, the CCC strongman in Ipoh, was a member of the KMTM Central Supervisory Council who visited the KMT Government in January 1947 to observe the proceedings of the Chinese National Congress.² H.S. Lee, the CCC leader in Selangor, led a campaign requesting the Malayan Union Government to declare the October 10 anniversary (Double Ten) of the 1911 Revolution a public holiday in Malaya, a request which met with a negative response.³ Lim Keng Lian, a former president of the Singapore CCC, was appointed by the KMT government to serve as China's Vice-Minister of Overseas Affairs.⁴

Consular representatives of the KMT government likewise played active roles in reviving the KMTM. These officials helped to

1. Blythe, p.387.

2. China Press, 15 January 1947.

3. Letter from H.S. Lee to the Chief Secretary, Malayan Union, dated 3 March 1947, Secretary for Chinese Affairs file, SCA H/1/7/1(4).

4. Straits Times, 9 May 1947.

organise fund-raising campaigns, nationalist rallies and celebrations of the Double Ten¹ to generate moral and material support for the KMT government which was locked in the final stages of its bitter struggle with the CCP for supremacy in China. As during the NSM in 1937-1941, the colonial government allowed Chinese in Malaya to participate freely in China-oriented activities. The attitude of the government, until the outbreak of the Communist insurrection in June 1948, was to allow foreign political parties to organise legally in Malaya as long as they did not work against the "peace, good order and welfare" of Malaya.²

Unlike the authorities' tolerant treatment of the KMTM, the activities of the MCP were progressively suppressed. After October 1945, the PMFTU organised several strikes among rubber plantation, tin mine, light industry, transportation and manual workers, and were initially successful in getting employers to meet most of the strikers' economic demands due to the pressing need for labour to rehabilitate the war-ravaged plantations, mines and other industries. Employer and government resistance hardened after the end of 1946 and Communist-inspired strikes were met by harsh police and military action, and by mass arrests of strike activists. The activities of the PMFTU were increasingly curtailed, until it was proscribed in May 1948.³

1. For press reports on these KMTM activities, see, for example, Straits Times, 11 October 1945; China Press, 12 October 1946, 10 October 1947; Nanyang Siang Pau, 12 October 1948; Kwong Wah Jit Pau, 21 May 1948.

2. See Minutes by E.D. Fleming, Secretary for Chinese Affairs, dated 10 August 1948, Secretary for Chinese Affairs file, SCA (FM) 156/48.

3. See Stenson, chs. 8 and 9.

In contrast to the KMTM and the MCP, the SCBA commanded little attention after the war. It had become politically obsolete with the introduction of political reforms by the British government which aimed at creating a common citizenship and establishing eventual self-rule in Malaya. SCBA leaders no longer enjoyed official patronage because the Association was too small and inconsequential a force within Chinese community politics to be used as a counter to the MCP. Realising that the SCBA's political life had come to an end, leaders such as Tan Cheng Lock looked for an alternative political organisation to achieve their political ambitions. Meanwhile the SCBA itself increasingly became a social organisation promoting the cultural activities of the diminishing Baba community in Malaya.

1.6 The Malayan Union and Malayan Federation: the Chinese Response

During 1946-1948 the British government introduced major constitutional changes in Malaya. In April 1946 the transitional British Military Administration gave way to the Malayan Union scheme, which aimed at achieving two basic objectives related to the political reorganisation of post-war Malaya: (1) to centralise and rationalise the administration of the fragmented pre-war political units - the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States, and (2) to create a form of common citizenship to integrate the indigenous Malay and immigrant non-

Malay population and thus pave the way for eventual self-rule.¹

The Malayan Union scheme, however, was never fully implemented, because it met with determined and effective Malay opposition led by the newly formed United Malays National Organisation (UMNO; established in March 1946) and the Malay rulers (who had initially signed the MacMichael treaties which formed the constitutional basis for the implementation of the Malayan Union scheme). Malay opposition stemmed from a conviction that the scheme was an unacceptable infringement of Malay sovereignty and that the Sultans had been forced to sign the MacMichael treaties. Furthermore, the scheme contained citizenship provisions that were so liberal that the Malays feared that they would be politically and economically dominated by the Chinese, who made up 43% of the total population in Malaya and Singapore in 1941.² Malay fears of Chinese domination should be seen in the context of the very poor state of Sino-Malay race relations during the period. When the MCP had functioned as a de facto government before the consolidation of BMA rule, it summarily executed several Malay village ketua (headmen) for alleged

1. See Malayan Union and Singapore: Statement of Policy on Future Constitution, HMSO, London, 1946. For a discussion of the origins of the Malayan Union scheme, see Stockwell, A.J., British Policy and Malay Politics During the Malayan Union Experiment 1942-1948, The Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society, Monograph No.8, Kuala Lumpur, 1979, ch.2.

2. See Stockwell, ch.4 for a discussion of Malay opposition to the scheme. See also, Soviee, M.N., From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malaysian Region 1945-65, Penerbit Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1974, pp.21-29. The percentage of Chinese population is cited from Purcell, Appendix II. Malays formed 41% and Indians 14% of the population.

collaboration with the Japanese. Between September 1945 and April 1946, several Sino-Malay clashes occurred in the country - in Johore, Negri Sembilan, Perak, Penang, Pahang, Trengganu and Kelantan - as a result of Malay reprisals and Chinese counter-reprisals.¹

The lack of Malay cooperation stymied the full implementation of the Malayan Union scheme. Conceding to the inevitable, the British government renegotiated a new constitutional arrangement in consultation with the UMNO and the Malay rulers. The new constitution, the Malayan Federation Agreement, which became effective on February 1948, satisfied both British and Malay requirements. It met the basic British objectives of a strong central government and common citizenship. On the other hand, it safeguarded Malay sovereignty and the special position of Malays as well as providing for a restricted form of citizenship.²

While the Federation of Malaya Agreement satisfied the Malays, it was opposed by the Chinese and other non-Malays, who unsuccessfully attempted to block its implementation. Chinese objections, both those of the conservative and the radical leaderships, were directed principally at the stringent citizenship clauses

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1. Bamadhaj, H., "The Impact of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya on Malay Society and Politics 1941-1945", M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, 1975, part 3, and Goh, N., "Sino-Malay Relations in Malaya 1945-1955", B.A.(Hons.) Academic Exercise, University of Malaya, Singapore, 1960, ch.1.
 2. Summary of Constitutional Proposals for Malaya: Summary of the Report of the Working Committee Appointed by a Conference of His Excellency the Governor of the Malayan Union, Their Highnesses the Rulers of the Malay States and the Representatives of the United Malays National Organisation, Government Printer, Kuala Lumpur, 1946, pp.6-8. See also Stockwell, p.92.

and the lack of equal rights for Malays and non-Malays.¹ Having failed in the anti-Federation movement during 1947, the conservative Chinese leadership led by Tan Cheng Lock spent the following ten years fighting the citizenship provisions contained in the Federation Agreement, succeeding partially in 1952 and completely in 1957, as we shall see.

J. de V. Allen has suggested that the lack of Chinese response to the Malayan Union scheme was a major factor, together with Malay opposition, in the British decision to abandon the experiment.² To my mind, the significant point to consider is the British attitude towards the Malay reaction; the Chinese response, whether positive or negative, was secondary and possibly irrelevant. The British gave priority to Malay views because the legitimacy of their rule in the country had traditionally depended on recognition obtained from the Sultans, and in return the colonial government had safeguarded the sovereignty of the rulers. By abandoning this

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1. The conservative Chinese leadership also opposed the exclusion of Singapore from the Federation and the lack of an elected majority with equal Chinese and Malay representation in the Federal Legislative and executive Councils. See Constitutional Proposals for Malaya: Report of the Consultative Committee Together with Proceedings of Six Public Meetings. A Summary of Representations Made and Letters and Memoranda Considered by the Committee, Government Printer, Kuala Lumpur, 1947, Appendix G. The Chinese left-wing leaders wanted a fully elected Legislative and Federal Councils with a 55% Malay representation. Furthermore, they wanted Malay to be the National Language and the new citizenship to be termed "Melayu". See the AMCJA-PUTERA People's Constitution in the Straits Times, 11 September 1947.
 2. Allen, J. de V., The Malayan Union, Monograph Series No.10, Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University, 1967, pp.15, 16, 19.

protection of political sovereignty of the Sultans under the Malayan Union proposals, the British were losing Malay conservative support at a time when the Communist threat to their rule was becoming serious. Furthermore, opposition by the Malay aristocracy and UMNO leaders who served as key civil servants threatened to undermine the functioning of government. In contrast, the Chinese played no role in validating the legitimacy of British rule, nor did they contribute substantially to the bureaucracy.

While it was true that the Chinese conservative leadership was too busy rehabilitating itself both politically and economically, while restoring its authority over the Chinese community, to involve itself deeply in the Malayan Union debate, it nonetheless did not display the degree of apathy claimed by Allen and in some government statements of the time.¹ As Cheah Boon Kheng observed: "The Malayan Union proposals were favourable to the Chinese and had aroused sufficient interest among them. They were now eager to obtain further details of the scheme". He added that the Chinese press wholeheartedly welcomed the equal citizenship provisions, though questions were raised as to their implementation.² In addition, Chinese

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1. An official report on the Malayan Press response to the Malayan Union White Paper stated that Chinese press reaction was indifferent. However, the report contradicted itself by revealing that Chinese language and Chinese-controlled English newspapers had in fact discussed the pros and cons of the constitutional proposals at great length. Malayan Press Comment on the White Paper on Malayan Union, Press Intelligence Publication, B.M.A., n.d., pp.2, 5, 6.
 2. Cheah Boon Kheng, "Malayan Chinese and the Citizenship Issue, 1945-1948", Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs (University of Sydney), Vol.12, no.2, December 1978, pp.102-103.

representatives on the newly-convened Malayan Union Advisory Council (H.S. Lee, Dr. Ong Chong Keng, Tan Eng Chye, Dr. Soon Kim Lan and Dr. Tan Cheng Leng) welcomed the proposals and sought at the same time further clarification on the advantages and disadvantages of Malayan Union citizenship.¹

The only Chinese group that came out strongly against the Malayan Union was the MCP, which in February 1946 denounced the scheme as a ploy to retain control of Malaya, to convert Singapore into a permanent colony and military base, to weaken Communist control over workers, and to offer a meaningless grant of citizenship to non-Malays.²

When it became clear that the tripartite talks between the British Government, the UMNO and the Malay rulers (August–November 1946) would lead to the replacement of the Malayan Union by the Malayan Federation proposals, an anti-Federation movement emerged led by the All Malayan Council of Joint Action (AMCJA; known also as the Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action) formed on 14 December 1946.

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1. Official Statement on the Malayan Union Citizenship Proposals Issued by H.E. The Governor, Malayan Union, on 18 April 1946. Summary of Views on the Proposals Received from Persons, Organisations and other Sources, Government Printer, Kuala Lumpur, 1946, see headings of Correspondence No. W.L. 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 54 and 64.
 2. Min Sheng Pau, 5, 8, 19 and 22 February 1946.

The AMCJA was spearheaded by the small, centre-left Malayan Democratic Union (MDU)¹ and by MCP front organisations such as the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions, the Women's Federation, and the New Democratic Youth League.² It was expanded in February 1947 and renamed the AMCJA-PUTERA (Pusat Tenaga Rakyat, or Centre of People's Power) after the original organisation was joined by a group of radical Malay cultural and social organisations affiliated with the left wing Malayan Nationalist Party (MNP). The influential Baba leader Tan Cheng Lock, who strongly opposed the Federation citizenship proposals, served as the movement's chairman from its inception to its demise in late 1947, and succeeded for a brief period in getting the backing of the CCC-huay kuan establishment.

The AMCJA-PUTERA attempted to put pressure on the authorities through militant activities such as anti-Federation mass rallies and demonstrations,³ and boycotting the Cheeseman Consultative Committee, which had been set up to consult non-Malay opinion on the Federation proposals. The CCC-huay kuans initially avoided association

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1. The MDU which lasted from December 1945 to June 1948, was formed in Singapore with the backing of the MCP. It drew its leadership and support from a small group of English-educated intellectuals who sought political reforms and self-rule for Malaya. See Cheah Boon Kheng, The Masked Comrades: A Study of the Communists United Front in Malaya 1945-1948, Times Book International, Singapore, 1979, chs.7-10.
 2. The anti-Federation movement also received support from a few Indian organisations, such as the Indian Chambers of Commerce of Selangor and Singapore and the Singapore Ceylon Tamils' Association.
 3. Rallies were held on 27 January in Seremban, 8 February in Malacca, 31 March in Singapore, 20 May in Kuala Lumpur, 20 September in Singapore, 29 September in Kuala Lumpur, and 4 October in Penang. These rallies were reported in the Straits Times, Kwong Wah Jit Pau, Min Sheng Pau and other major newspapers.

with the movement, and attempted to work through official channels to articulate their opposition. H.S. Lee and Leong Yew Koh, the two appointed Chinese members on the Cheeseman Consultative Committee, presented the CCC-huay kuan views. These two leaders said in a session of the Malayan Union Advisory Council on 25 August 1947 that they had not endorsed the Federation citizenship proposals.¹ Other Chinese leaders on the Council likewise stated their opposition. Dr. Lee Tiang Keng, for example, said:²

The Revised Proposals are a flagrant injustice to the domiciled Chinese community. They spurn Chinese goodwill and co-operation, treat their past services to the country with contempt and deny the heritage of those who were born here. The implicit racial and religious discrimination is a cantankerous worm which will very likely gnaw the bowels of the Commonwealth.

When it had become clear that the colonial government was not heeding the protestations of the Chinese representatives in the Cheeseman Consultative Council or in the Malayan Union Advisory Council, the CCC-huay kuan leadership decided to cooperate with the AMCJA-PUTERA and helped to stage a nation-wide hartal on 20 October 1947.³ These leaders pulled out of the movement shortly thereafter,

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1. Proceedings of the Malayan Union Advisory Council, 25 August 1946, pp.24-25.
 2. Ibid., p.28.
 3. The Chinese press reported that the hartal was widely observed. The Straits Times, however, claimed it was only a partial success. See, Min Sheng Pau, 22 October 1947; Kwong Wah Jit Pau, 21 October 1947; and Straits Times, 21 October 1947. The Min Sheng Pau report contains an interesting racial breakdown of the participants of the hartal in the town of Alor Star. It claimed that 89.9% of the Chinese inhabitants took part, 67% of the Indian inhabitants and 5% of the Malay inhabitants.

however, because of concern at the perceived pro-Malay bias in the AMCJA-PUTERA's People's Constitution¹ and because of deep suspicions of the MCP role in the anti-Federation movement.

While the weaknesses of the movement were considerable, it failed not because of problems inherent in the campaign itself but because the colonial government had made it clear that it would consider only conservative Malay opinion in the new constitutional arrangement. In the face of unbending British resolve to proceed with the Federation, Chinese business and community declared their refusal to accept appointments to serve on the Federal Legislative Council and other government bodies.² This resolve was, however, embarrassingly shortlived. When the Federation was inaugurated on 1 February 1948, the Federal Legislative Council and State Councils were represented by familiar CCC stalwarts such as H.S. Lee, Dr. Lee Tiang Keng, Ee Yew Kim, Woo Ka Lim, Yong Shook Lin, Khoo Teck Ee, Leung Cheung Ling, Tan Siew Sin, Toh Eng Hoe, Leong Yew Koh and Ng Sui Cam.

The CCC "betrayal" of the anti-Federation cause could be interpreted as a move by these pragmatically minded businessmen to salvage what could still be saved from a seemingly lost cause. They apparently hoped that their representation on government bodies might

1. Tan Cheng Lock told Gerald de Cruz of the MDU and secretary of the AMCJA-PUTERA that the CCC-huay kuan leaders strongly opposed the AMCJA-PUTERA's demand that Malayan citizens be called "Melayu" for fear of losing their "racial individuality, culture and independence". Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Gerald de Cruz dated 7 October 1947, TCL Papers, TCL/1/15.

2. Straits Times, 20 January 1948.

well give them an opportunity to redeem the situation from within the system by manipulating the constitutional processes available to them as representatives on government bodies. More fundamentally, the "betrayal" by the CCC leaders lies in the *raison d'etre* of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and the whole system of Kapitän China-type leadership and patronage, where all effectiveness depended on the spokesmen having access to the authorities.

By February 1948, when the Federation of Malaya was inaugurated, the Chinese conservative leadership, due largely to the patronage of the colonial government, had made considerable progress in re-establishing its position within the community. The CCC-huay kuan leadership had by that time been permitted to have its representatives appointed to the newly-convened Federal Legislative Council as a reward for finally complying with the Federation proposals. In contrast, the MCP's position was fast deteriorating, especially in the first months of 1948, when its labour movement was being decimated by government measures in the form of police action, establishment of an officially-sponsored reformist labour movement, and introduction of restrictive legislation which forced the dissolution of the PMFTU on 12 June 1948.

Feeling that free and open channels of organisation and mobilisation were no longer available to it, the MCP under its hard-line new Secretary-General Chin Peng decided to prepare for armed insurrection to seize power.

The outbreak of the uprising inevitably brought about shifts in the balance of power within the Chinese community. Not only were

the MCP and its front organisations removed from the political arena, the KMTM was also proscribed in May 1949 following a government ban on operations by foreign political parties in Malaya.¹ With the MCP in the jungle and hoping to seize power through armed revolt, and with the KMTM banned, the traditional CCC-huay kuan leadership had to consolidate its resources and explore new mobilising and organising techniques to strengthen its support base and to aid the colonial government's anti-insurgency campaign. In this complex and turbulent milieu the MCA was born.

1. Straits Times, 10 May 1949.

CHAPTER 2

THE SOCIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE MCA

The MCA was formed on 27 February 1949.¹ A watershed in the development of Chinese politics in Malaya, the formation bridged the divide between traditional and modern modes of community organisation in both ideological and structural terms. At the same time, it also spanned the gap between the Laukeh (KMTM-CCC-huay kuan) and Baba (SCBA) political cultures to produce a synthesised Malayan-centred Chinese political culture. The interplay of diverse influences within the MCA created a Janus-like organisation which simultaneously displayed the characteristics of a modern political party and a traditional association in organisation, function and ideology.

2.1 The Formation of the MCA

The immediate impetus for the formation of the MCA was the outbreak of the Emergency. Faced with a militant Communist challenge, Chinese conservative leaders sought to consolidate their position within the community. Meanwhile, the colonial government actively encouraged them to centralise their resources through the formation of a political party in order to garner Chinese support behind its anti-insurgency campaign.

By early 1949, the government realised that a large proportion of the Chinese population, especially rural squatters,

1. Existing studies on the MCA discuss party activities with little analysis of party ideology, social sources of support and membership, relationship with the CCC-huay kuan establishment and the party's role in the independence movement. See Roff, M., "The Malayan Chinese Association 1948-1965", JSEAH, Vol.6, no.2, September 1965, and Chan Heng Chee, "The Malayan Chinese Association", M.A. thesis, University of Singapore, 1965.

supported the Communist cause, whether voluntarily or under intimidation from guerillas. It contemplated two alternatives to cut off this base of support from the MCP: either to bring the squatters under direct government scrutiny or to deport them. Deportation was thought to be an unviable solution on a long term basis, and squatter resettlement was taken up as the remedy to the problem.¹ To successfully implement a comprehensive squatter resettlement programme, the colonial government needed the back-up services of Chinese community middlemen, the CCC-huay kuan leaders. These influential leaders who had been accommodated within the KMTM were now organisationally diffused, as the KMTM had been banned following the proclamation of Emergency rule. The British High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, wanted a centralised pro-British Malayan Chinese party to fill the vacuum and provide effective leadership in the anti-insurgency campaign. Gurney urged H.S. Lee, president of the Selangor CCC and Federal Legislative Councillor, to help in the formation of such a party.² Addressing the Federal Legislative Council shortly before the MCA was inaugurated, Gurney said: "Such an Association can clearly be of very real help in many directions, including solution of the squatter problem, which will call for heavy expenditure, and the restoration of contact between isolated Chinese communities and the authorities".³

1. Short, A., The Communist Insurrection in Malaya 1948-1960, Frederick Muller Ltd., London, 1975, ch.7.

2. Interview, H.S. Lee, 22 July 1975.

3. Address by Henry Gurney, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 17 February 1949, B771.

The inaugural meeting of the MCA was held in Kuala Lumpur under the sponsorship of the 16 Chinese Federal Legislative Councillors, the majority of whom were prominent CCC-huay kuan figures.¹ The meeting was attended by 300 people, including 178 delegates from the organising committees of all the states except Kelantan.² Tan Cheng Lock (who became the first party president from 1949-1958)³ was appointed chairman of the Protem Committee. Yong Shook Lin and Leung Cheung Ling were appointed as joint secretaries and Khoo Teik Ee as treasurer.⁴ Cheng Lock's appointment as party president received the clear endorsement of the colonial authorities. Sir Henry Gurney's favourable assessment of Cheng Lock's leadership ability is reflected in the following:⁵

... he commands considerable respect among the Chinese. He is 66 years old; he has had experience in Malayan policies, he is sincere; and he is able to rise above the arguments of the different dialect groups in Chinese society. He is sincere in his efforts to do the best for the Chinese in Malaya. He has, therefore a strong influence with moderate Chinese opinion here. He is still independent and will support Government if he is convinced that Government desires to treat the Chinese fairly.

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1. These were Tan Siew Sin, Leong Yew Koh, H.S. Lee, Yong Shook Lin, Khoo Teik Ee, Dr. Lee Tiang Keng, Ee Yew Kim, Toh Eng Hoe, Khoo Khoon Huat, Leung Cheung Ling, Ng Sui Cam, Mrs. B.H. Oon, Woo Ka Lim, Lim Khye Seng, Lee Woon Mun and Liew Kwong Hon.
 2. Straits Times, 28 February 1949.
 3. Trengonning, K.G., "Tan Cheng Lock: A Malayan Nationalist", JSEAS, Vol.10, no.1, March 1979, and Soh Eng Lim, "Tan Cheng Lock: His Leadership of the Malayan Chinese", JSEAH, Vol.1, no.1, 1960, discuss Cheng Lock's leadership of the MCA.
 4. Malay Mail, 27 February 1949.
 5. Letter from Gurney to J.J. Paskin dated 4 April 1949, C0537/52849/48/49(14).

While the organising energy and momentum for the formation of the MCA came from the combined efforts of H.S. Lee, Leong Yew Koh, Yong Shook Lin, Khoo Teik Ee and Tan Siew Sin, the guiding light behind its inception was Tan Cheng Lock. Cheng Lock's role in the MCA's formation deserves further elaboration, for the concept of a Malayan-centred Chinese political party was his brainchild, as demonstrated in the following tribute made by Yong Shook Lin: "The idea of an Association or League in which all Malayan Chinese who intend to have their permanent homes in Malaya should be qualified to become members was conceived in the fertile brain of Mr. Tan Cheng Lock."¹ Furthermore, Cheng Lock's thinking on the ideological function of such a party subsequently formed the innovative element in MCA party philosophy.

As early as November 1943, Tan Cheng Lock propounded the need for Chinese living in Malaya to form a pan-Malayan political party. He conceived the idea while living in India, where he and his family had sought refuge from the Japanese Occupation. Cheng Lock wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Colonel Oliver Stanley, to inform him that overseas Chinese from Southeast Asia who had fled to India had organised themselves into an Overseas Chinese Association. Describing the Association's Malayan Chinese

1. Letter signed by Yong Shook Lin dated 8 March 1949 (addressee unknown), TCL Papers, SP13, Item 175. /The Tan Cheng Lock (TCL) Papers collection is found at both the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, and the Malaysian National Archives, Kuala Lumpur. Papers headed "SP" are in the Kuala Lumpur collection and those headed "TCL/" are found in Singapore.7

members as people with "a big stake and important and extensive interests in Malaya", Cheng Lock wrote: "On our return to Malaya, those of our members who are Malaysians will constitute themselves into a Malayan Chinese Association devoted to the interests of the country". Cheng Lock informed the Colonial Secretary that the proposed Malayan Chinese Association would aid the British Government upon reoccupation of Malaya to deal with problems "relating to reparations from war damage" and other "post-war problems affecting its Malaya's future".¹ The MCA was thus originally conceived as an organisation to protect Chinese capitalist interests in anticipation of a period of economic and political rehabilitation in Malaya. When the party was finally formed five and a half years later, the political circumstances which prompted Cheng Lock to propose the idea had changed, but one factor remained constant - it was formed to advance Chinese capitalist interests during a politically and socially turbulent period, in the event brought about by the Communist insurrection.

The formation of the MCA did not materialise when Cheng Lock first proposed it as no support for the idea was forthcoming from the colonial authorities or the CCC-huay kuan establishment. Cheng Lock himself did not possess the organisational resources and support base to successfully launch a pan-Malayan political party, as evidenced by his failure to set up the Malayan Chinese League.

1. Tan Cheng Lock, Malayan Problems: From a Chinese Point of View, Tannco, Singapore, 1947, pp.5, 7. The suggestion drew no response from the Colonial Office.

During the five year span, however, Cheng Lock continued to sow the idea of the need for a Chinese political party. His involvement in the anti-Federation movement (discussed in Chapter 1) gave him deeper and more sophisticated perceptions regarding the function and role of such a party. The anti-citizenship clauses of the Malayan Federation constitution made him realise as never before how vital it was for Chinese to acquire citizenship in order to safeguard their political liberties and economic interests. At the same time, witnessing the discord between Malays and non-Malays wrangling over the Malayan Federation proposals, Cheng Lock modified his initial idea to form a party to look after purely Chinese interests. Instead he began to favour political solutions aimed at promoting relations among the different races. These ideas were laid out in his proposals for a Malayan Chinese League and a National Unity Organisation.

In early May 1948, Cheng Lock announced his intention of forming the Malayan Chinese League with the following three major objectives: protection of Chinese political and economic interests; promotion of inter-racial harmony; and attainment of self-government for Malaya.¹ Of the three objectives, Cheng Lock laid the greatest stress on the first:²

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1. "Rules of the Malayan Chinese League", mimeo, n.d. The rules were essentially those drafted by Tan Siew Sin in 1946 for a proposed Malacca Chinese Union. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Haji Ibrahim Ma dated 17 February 1949, TCL Papers, TCL/111/90.
 2. "Rules of the Malayan Chinese League", Section 7.

It is unlikely in the ultimate shape of things to come in the New Malaya that those of its residents who do not share the burden of civic responsibilities will be permitted to enjoy civic rights, and that the non-citizens can continue in an unrestricted manner to own property, exploit the country and participate in all the privileges of carrying on trade, commerce and business etc. for the personal enrichment /sic/, while regarding the country as primarily a temporary place of residence for them to make money in.

It is merely a question of time that those people in Malaya who do not identify themselves with the interests of this country and enrol themselves in the ranks of its loyal citizens, making it their permanent home, will inevitably suffer from certain legal disabilities that will be imposed upon them to restrict their liberty to exploit the land....

Here, as in the argument he forwarded when proposing the Malayan Chinese Association in 1943, Cheng Lock's over-riding concern was that the economically privileged position of the Chinese mercantile class should be protected through political action. Realising that less than 10% of the Chinese population would receive Malayan citizenship under the existing Federation Constitution, Cheng Lock wrote that it was clearly a "matter of self-preservation" of Chinese interests that the Chinese organised themselves politically to acquire citizenship.¹

Aside from the advancement of Chinese economic interests, Cheng Lock wanted the Malayan Chinese League to serve as a vehicle to instil loyalty towards Malaya. He wrote: "My own idea is to wean the China-born from China and Chinese politics and encourage them to transfer their love, for the good of all concerned including themselves, to Malaya ... through the organisation of the Malayan

1. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Haji Ibrahim Ma dated 7 February 1949; MCA headquarters.

Chinese League...."¹ He saw the "Malayanisation" of Laukehs as the first and most crucial stage in his plan to propagate an all-embracing Malayan consciousness and identity among the various races.

Explaining how the proposed Malayan Chinese League could enhance racial harmony, Cheng Lock wrote:²

We have the ideal - a new Malayan consciousness among all who regard Malaya as their home and the object of their loyalty.

I have suggested the idea of a Malayan Chinese League in order to help develop among those Chinese who have decided to make Malaya their permanent home, a consciousness of Malayan unity and loyalty which will draw them closer to other Malayan communities.

This Malayan Chinese League ... together with other communal organisations should be branches of a central National Unity Organisation which would be based on the goodwill and co-operation of the domiciled communities in Malaya. Thus we shall move from present realities to our ideal of a common Malayan consciousness and Malayan unity.

Cheng Lock did not draw up a constitution and other specific details regarding the organisational and functional structure of the National Unity Organisation aside from indicating that it would embrace "all parties, races and classes" to promote unity, goodwill and cooperation among all Malaysians permanently resident in the country.³ Although Cheng Lock's ideas about the National Unity

1. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to C.L. Peet dated 30 September 1948, taken from Tan Cheng Lock, A Collection of Correspondence, Tiger Standard Press, Singapore, n.d., pp.18-19.

2. Tan Cheng Lock, "National Unity in Malaya", mimeo., c. August 1948, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 140.

3. Straits Times, 4 May 1948.

Organisation were not fully developed, the concept was significant because it was an early (perhaps the first) recognition by a Chinese leader of the value of coalition politics as potentially the best means of serving Chinese political interests in a multi-racial Malaya.

Cheng Lock's plans to establish the Malayan Chinese League did not materialise.¹ Lacking a support base outside his home state of Malacca, he failed in his efforts to get the patronage of the CCC-huay kuan establishment, especially in Chinese-dominated urban centres such as Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang, to give shape to his idea. However, with the outbreak of the Emergency, Cheng Lock's proposal for a Chinese political party became relevant to the interests of both the colonial government and the CCC-huay kuan establishment, thus setting in motion the events which culminated in the formation of the MCA.

A potentially serious obstacle to the formation of the party would have arisen if the Malay leaders in the UMNO had opposed the movement. Fortunately, the UMNO raised no objections. In July 1948 Datuk Onn, the leader of the UMNO, stated that "law-abiding Chinese should band together in a political party to help the government in the fight against Communism". He said; "I would appeal to the leaders of the Chinese community to organise themselves and to come

1. Tan Cheng Lock, "Progress of the Malayan Chinese League", mimeo., 11 April 1948, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 133. Nothing developed beyond plans to set up provisional working committees.

in together with us, and we can stamp this danger out".¹ Onn's endorsement allayed fears held by British officials and Chinese leaders, and paved the way for the founding of the MCA.

Sir Henry Gurney and Malcolm MacDonald, the Commissioner General for Southeast Asia, were also instrumental in obtaining the UMNO's support for the formation of the MCA. The High Commissioner assured the sponsors of the new party that there would be no Malay objection, an indication that he had worked behind the scenes to ensure a favourable UMNO reception of the MCA.² Malcolm MacDonald, for his part, used the newly convened Communities Liaison Committee (CLC) as a forum for Tan Cheng Lock to meet Onn to obtain the Malay leader's approval for the MCA. Onn's support was sought and obtained at the first meeting of the CLC held on 29 December 1948.³

2.2 The Social Background of Party Leadership and Membership

At this juncture it is useful to present some findings on the social background of the leadership and membership of the newly-formed MCA. It shows the way in which differences in social sources of recruitment and variations in social background affected the ideological and functional structure of the party.

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1. Speech by Onn bin Jaafar, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 5 and 6 July 1948, B315.
 2. Interview H.S. Lee, 22 July 1975. Gurney wrote to J.D. Higham to inform him that: "Neither Onn nor the politically minded Malays in general have expressed any opposition to the MCA". C0537/4790(18).
 3. Thio Chan Bee, Extraordinary Adventures of an Ordinary Man, Grovesnor Books, London, 1977, p.86.

In order to compare and contrast the varying degrees of control exerted by different groups of leaders at different levels of the party hierarchy, I examined a sample of party office holders at the national, state and grass-roots level for the period 1949-57. The sample consisted of 32 Central Working Committee (CWC) members, 198 Working Committee members of six State Branches and 648 office holders of 76 Area and District Branch Committees in Johore and Perak.¹ The social background of the office holders is examined in relation to: (a) place of birth, (b) education, (c) occupation, (d) appointments to government bodies, and (e) office holding in public organisations, both Chinese associations and multi-racial societies.

2.2.1 The National Leadership

The picture which emerges shows that the majority of MCA national leaders were Malayan-born, English-educated, wealthy businessmen and/or professionally qualified men who held positions in government bodies as well as Chinese associations and multi-racial organisations. A second and small definable group in the CWC consisted of Chinese-educated men who were essentially state representatives and not national leaders in that they did not play significant roles in the multi-ethnic political centre. These individuals had been elevated into the CWC to solidify the linkage between the English-educated westernised national leadership and the

1. The information was compiled from lists of particulars of party office-holders kept at the MCA headquarters.

Chinese-speaking Laukeh base at the party grass-roots level.

Between 1949 and 1957, the most prominent national MCA leaders in the CWC included the following: Tan Cheng Lock, Tan Siew Sin, Khoo Teik Ee, H.S. Lee, Leong Yew Koh, Yong Shook Lin, Ong Yoke Lin, T.H. Tan, Dr. Lim Chong Eu, Too Joon Hing, Ng Ee Teong and Yong Pung How. Of the state representatives, the better known individuals included Lau Pak Khuan from the state of Perak, Wong Shee Fun from Johore, Goh Chee Yan from Malacca, Lim Teng Kwang from Kedah, Foo See Moi from Kelantan and Wu Cheok Yee from Trengganu.

Twenty-six out of the 32 CWC members were Malayan-born. Of the remaining six, four were born in China (H.S. Lee, Lau Pak Khuan, Ng Sui Cam and Goh Chee Yan), one in Hong Kong (Leung Cheung Ling), and one in Burma (Dr. Lee Tiang Keng). Regarding their educational status, 23, a large majority, were educated up to the post secondary level: 10 went to universities and colleges in England, two to universities in both England and Hong Kong, two to Canada and Hong Kong, three to Hong Kong, one to China, and five were locally trained in Malaya and Singapore. Of the remaining nine, seven were educated up to the secondary school level. Only two men were not educated beyond the primary school level. The majority was educated in English medium institutions, but a large proportion could speak Mandarin since they either had attended Chinese schools up to the primary level or they had received private tuition. Central Committee meetings were held in English, and party minutes and documents were recorded in English. Chinese translations of these were then made for the benefit of CWC members not literate in English

such as Lau Pak Khuan, and for distribution to state branches. Most of these CWC leaders were also conversant in Malay; however, literacy in Malay was not a necessary precondition towards the attainment of leadership status in the Association till the early 1970s, when the language was widely used within government and bureaucratic circles.

All the 32 leaders were men of considerable wealth and some were certainly among the wealthiest in Malaya. The wealth of these men was mainly derived from tin mines, rubber and other agricultural estates, banking, shipping, real estate development, import-export agencies, wholesale and retail trading, and other miscellaneous commercial enterprises and small-scale manufacturing industries. The widespread network of Cheng Lock's business concerns illustrates the extent of his wealth. His main income came from several rubber estates in Malacca, but he also held directorships in several companies, including a bank (the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation), an insurance company (the Overseas Assurance Corporation Ltd.), a number of British-based import-export agencies (including Sime, Darby and Co. Ltd., and Cycle and Carriage Co. Ltd.), a newspaper company (the Malayan Tribune Press Ltd.) and an ice factory. H.S. Lee was another successful businessman. Among his extensive commercial undertakings were tin mining and banking concerns, and a newspaper company (the China Press).

Fifteen, or slightly under half of the 32 men were professionally qualified men: six advocates and solicitors (trained mainly in Britain), three doctors, two architects, two engineers, one chartered accountant and one journalist. These men also

engaged in commercial enterprises besides carrying out their professional practices. Leong Yew Koh, for example, had large tin mining interests in Perak in addition to his law practice in Ipoh. Khoo Teik Ee was one of the most successful lawyers in Kuala Lumpur and was also a prominent businessman. Ng Sui Cam in Penang was a mechanical engineer, a landed proprietor and real estate developer.

As we have seen earlier, wealth has traditionally been the most important criterion of social mobility within the Chinese community in Malaya. The fact that the CWC members were all wealthy men indicated that it still functioned as an effective criterion in the 1950s.¹ Although most leaders in the party would have the political contacts in government to bring development projects to benefit the local community, a wealthy party office holder could dispense financial patronage on a personal basis in addition to carrying out his political duties towards his supporters. The wealthy leader was expected to make donations from his private fortune towards all sorts of charitable causes within the local community. He was also well placed to advance the interests of his supporters by employing them in his business concerns or by giving them loans or preferential trading terms. At the very least, he could give them introductions for making the necessary business contacts to set up or widen their businesses. It is clear that the towkay leader in the party was (and is today) a much respected figure.

1. It remains the case to a considerable extent today, a point which was made by several MCA and other Chinese leaders.

All 32 CWC men held government appointments, ranging from Federal bodies to local boards. These bodies included the Federal Legislative Council, State Legislative Councils, Town and Municipal Boards, Chinese Advisory Boards, State War Executive Committees, Rubber Licensing and Replanting Boards and State Housing Boards. It was not unusual for a CWC member to hold several positions at once. H.S. Lee, for example, was a member of the Federal Legislative Council, the Selangor State Advisory Council, the Kuala Lumpur Town Board, and the Chinese Tin Mines Rehabilitation Loans Board. Tan Siew Sin served on the Federal Legislative Council, the Malacca Chinese Advisory Board, and the Central Advisory Council on Education.

Most of the 32 men held office on multi-racial bodies. These included community service organisations such as the Rotary Club, the Jaycees, and the Red Cross Society (renamed Red Crescent Society); recreational and sports clubs such as golf, tennis, badminton and shooting societies; and welfare institutions for the handicapped, blind and deaf. (The few state representatives in the CWC who had been educated in Chinese tended not to participate actively in these multi-racial bodies because of language barriers.) Office holding in multi-racial societies offered immense opportunities for Chinese leaders to forge personal contacts with senior British and Malay officials in government. In Malaya, as in most other plural societies, recreational activities such as playing golf constitute an effective informal channel for consolidating political and social ties between individuals coming from different socio-cultural and racial backgrounds. The English-educated CWC members were therefore able to advance their political careers more

easily than their Chinese-educated colleagues, since they could make the necessary personal contacts with English and Malay government officials through participation in the activities of multi-racial clubs and societies and thus gain appointments to serve on the highest government bodies.

Although the English-educated CWC leader achieved leadership status of national prominence through the forging of multi-racial contacts within the country's highest political circles, it appears that this process took place only after they had established strong reputations as respected and acceptable leaders within the Chinese community itself. Non-Chinese leaders quite naturally judged the political worth of their Chinese allies on the strength of the latter's standing within their own community and ability to influence Chinese public opinion. Leadership status within the community was measured by the degree of the individual's standing in the Chinese associational network, and office holding in Chinese associations was in turn seen as a manifestation of the individual's high social standing within the community. The wealth of the English-educated leaders enabled them to move up the Laukeh social ladder and hold high positions in the CCC-huay kuan establishment.

The CWC members held major positions in almost every type of Chinese association. The following table lists examples from different types of Chinese associations which came under the control of the MCA CWC for the years 1949-1957:¹

1. This information was obtained through cross references made between lists of MCA office holders and lists of office holders of Chinese associations submitted to the Registrar of Societies.

Office Holding of MCA CWC Members in Major Types of
Chinese Associations for the years 1949-1957

<u>Types of Chinese Associations</u>	<u>Office Holders</u>
1. <u>The Chinese Chamber of Commerce</u>	
The Malacca CCC	Tan Cheng Lock) Tan Siew Sin) Presidents Goh Chee Yan)
The Perak CCC	Lau Pak Khuan (president) Leong Yew Koh Y.C. Kang Too Joon Hing
The Selangor CCC	H.S. Lee (president) Leung Cheung Ling Ong Yoke Lin
The Negri Sembilan CCC	Lee Tee Siong (president)
The Johore CCC	Wong Shee Fun (president)
The Penang CCC	Ng Sui Cam (president)
The Kelantan CCC	Foo See Moi (president)
The Trengganu CCC	Wu Cheok Yee (president)
The Sungei Patani (Kedah) CCC	Lim Teng Kwang (president)
2. <u>The Chinese Assembly Hall/ Chinese Association</u>	
The Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall	H.S. Lee (president) Khoo Teik Ee Leung Cheung Ling Yong Shook Lin Y.T. Lee
The Perak Chinese Association	Lau Pak Khuan (president) Y.C. Kang Too Joon Hing
The Johor Bahru Chinese Association	Wong Shee Fun (president) Yap Kim Hock
The Penang Chinese Town Hall	Ng Sui Cam (president)
3. <u>The Dialect/Territorial Huay Kuan</u>	
The Federation of Kwangtung Huay Kuan (includes the Cantonese, Teochew and Hakka dialect groupings)	H.S. Lee) Lau Pak Khuan) Presidents Leung Cheung Ling Leong Yew Koh Yap Mau Tatt

Office Holders

The Federation of Hokkien Huay Kuan	Khoo Teik Ee Tan Cheng Lock
The Federation of Fui Chew Huay Kuan (Hakka)	Soon Cheng Sun
The Federation of Kheng Chew Huay Kuan (Hainanese)	Foo See Moi Too Joon Hing
The All-Malaya Ko Chow Huay Kuan (Cantonese)	H.S. Lee (president)
The Selangor Nam Hoi Huay Kuan (Cantonese)	Y.T. Lee
The Selangor Eng Choon Huay Kuan (Hokkien)	Gunn Chit Wah
The Selangor Kwong Siew Huay Kuan (Cantonese)	Leung Cheung Ling
The Penang Toi Sin Ning Yang Huay Kuan (Cantonese)	Lee Wun Moon
4. <u>The Clan/Surname Association</u>	
The Penang Lee Shi Ching Shing Lee Clansmen	Lee Wun Moon
The Kulim Soon Clan Association	Soon Cheng Sun
5. <u>The Trade Guild</u>	
The Federation of Chinese Guilds and Associations	Lau Pak Khuan (president)
The Combined Committees of 24 Chinese Labour Guilds, Penang	Lee Wun Moon (president)
The Perak Coffee Shopkeepers' Association	Too Joon Hing
The Chinese Hawkers' Association, Batu Pahat	Tan Suan Kok
6. <u>The Cultural, Social/Recreational Association</u>	
The Chin Woo Association	Lau Pak Khuan (president)

A number of points emerge from the above table: firstly, it can be seen that some CWC members had been presidents of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce, the most important type of Chinese association

in Malaya, in nine states. (These men were also the state chairman of the MCA branches.) All the CCC in Malaya came under the supervision of a pan-Malayan body, the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce (ACCC) formed in 1947 under the chairmanship of H.S. Lee, who was also chairman of the Selangor CCC. The ACCC throughout the 1950s came under the control of the MCA CWC since the chairmanship of that body was filled by the presidents of the CCC of the different states on a rotating basis.

Secondly, the MCA CWC exercised an extraordinary degree of control over the entire Chinese associational network through multiple office holding in the most important categories of associations. H.S. Lee, for example, had been the president of the Selangor Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, the Federation of Kwangtung Huay Kuan, and the All-Malaya Ko Chow Huay Kuan. Lau Pak Khuan had been the president of the Perak Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the Perak Chinese Association, the Federation of Kwangtung Huay Kuan, and the Federation of Chinese Guilds and Associations. Leadership within this CCC dialect/territorial huay kuan-trade guild nexus automatically made these MCA CWC members superior in social status over all other Chinese leaders who held office in minor mutual aid, cultural, sports, dramatic, social, and moral uplifting associations.

In addition to controlling the Chinese associational network, the MCA CWC also played a significant role in promoting Chinese education in Malaya. Chinese schools had traditionally depended for their survival on donations from wealthy community leaders. These rich patrons were invited to sit on the schools' Boards of Managers,

which controlled all the affairs of the schools, including decisions affecting the employment of teaching staff and text-book curricula. MCA CWC members who had been chairmen of the Boards of Managers of some of the biggest Chinese schools in the country included the following: H.S. Lee (the Kuen Cheng Girls' School in Kuala Lumpur), Y.T. Lee (The Confucian Chinese School in Kuala Lumpur), Wong Shee Fun (The Foon Yew School in Johore Bahru), Goh Chee Yan (the Pay Teck Girls' School in Malacca), and Lee Fong Yee (the Chin Hwa School in Seremban). Leung Cheung Ling was the vice-chairman of the United Chinese School Committees Association (UCSCA), the coordinating body of the Boards of Managers of Chinese Schools. The control exerted by MCA top ranking leaders over the Boards of Managers (and by second echelon leaders over Chinese school teachers' associations discussed in the following section) explained the major role played by the MCA in Chinese educational affairs, as evidenced by the discussion on the 1952 Education Ordinance in Chapter 6.

While the westernised national leaders played prominent roles in government bodies at the political centre and in multi-racial societies, the state representatives with their Laukeh social orientation dominated the activities of Chinese traditional associations and educational institutions. We shall see shortly that while the national leaders belonged to the multi-racial political elite of the country, the state representatives were the real power brokers within the Chinese community.

One final feature which emerges from the pattern of office holding of the MCA CWC is the disproportionately large role played by leaders from Baba backgrounds. Of the CWC members, only

four (Tan Cheng Lock, Tan Siew Sin, Lim Chong Eu and Lim Khye Seng) came from Baba families. These men had held office in the SCBA and in other Baba societies such as the Penang and Malacca Chinese Recreational Clubs. The number of leaders and members in the party who came from Baba backgrounds was minute compared to those with Laukeh backgrounds, reflecting accurately the tiny Baba population in the country. Though the number of Baba leaders in the MCA was extremely small, the first four presidents of the party from 1949 to 1974, Tan Cheng Lock, Lim Chong Eu, Cheah Toon Lock and Tan Siew Sin, were all Baba leaders who had held office in the SCBA prior to their joining the MCA. This phenomenon suggests that Baba leaders from the SCBA had one crucial political advantage over other English-educated leaders in the Association. Their westernised political and social background combined with their activities in the SCBA had given them greater and easier access to officials in the colonial government than most other Chinese leaders. It must be remembered that the SCBA had once played a far more important role in Malayan colonial affairs than any other Chinese organisation in the country. Ex-SCBA leaders in the MCA had gained intimate insight into the workings of government at the highest levels, and were perhaps regarded to be better equipped to lead the party than MCA leaders lacking their political experience and government contacts. During the period leading up to the formation of the MCA and immediately after, Cheng Lock was the Chinese leader best known to the highest government officials (such as Malcolm MacDonald and Henry Gurney), as he had established his reputation during his term of service in the Straits Settlements Legislative Council. His election to the presidency of the MCA may have been due to this

consideration as much as to the fact that the Association was his brainchild.

It appears, therefore, that the political mobility of a Baba leader within the party hierarchy was determined to a great extent by the degree of influence he had within the highest government circles. At the same time, no SCBA leader who had joined the MCA was likely to get far in the party hierarchy unless firstly, he had close social and economic ties with the Laukeh leaders in the party, and secondly, he held office in the most important Chinese associations,. The four presidents of the MCA with Baba backgrounds fulfilled all these requirements; they had all been resinicised to the extent of being able to fit well into the commercial and social world of the Laukeh leaders.

One final point to be made on the social background of the CWC members is the pattern of dialect groupings. Of the 32 men, 12 were Hokkiens, 11 Cantonese, 6 Hakkas, 2 Hainanese and 1 Teochew. Clearly there was no domination by a single dialect group at the top level of the MCA. The distribution of dialect grouping in the CWC broadly reflected that within the Chinese community at large. In 1957, the proportion of the different dialect groups in Malaya was: Hokkiens 31.7%, Hakkas 21.8%, Cantonese 21.7%, Teochews 12.7%, Hainanese 5.3%, Kwongsai 3.0%, Hokchiu 2.0%, Henghua 0.5%, Hokchia 0.4%, others (mainly from North China) 1.5%.¹ The predominance of Hokkiens in the CWC reflects the Hokkien proportion within the

1. Fell, H., 1957 Population Census of the Federation of Malaya, Department of Statistics, Kuala Lumpur, Report no.14, Table 3.3, p.14.

the community at large. Though the Hakka and Cantonese proportion within the community was almost equal, more Cantonese than Hakkas were to be found in the CWC. This might have been due to the fact that the party's central office was located in Kuala Lumpur, with its predominantly Cantonese population. Though the minor dialect groups such as the Kwongsais, Hokchius and Henghuas were not represented in the CWC, it will be shown that they were represented at the lower levels of the party hierarchy. The multiplicity of dialect groupings found in the CWC was a major reason why English was used as the common language of communication among the largely English-educated members.

In conclusion, from the above analysis of the social background of the CWC members, one can see that an individual could rise to the top level of the party hierarchy if he fulfilled two criteria: he had to be wealthy, and he had to be a recognised and respected leader within the Chinese associational network. If the individual aspired to be a national leader, he had to fulfill two further criteria: he had to be literate in English, and have close connections with British officials and Malay leaders in the highest circles of government.

2.2.2 The State Leadership

The second rung leadership in the MCA consisted of office holders in the Working Committees of the different state branches. In this section the office holders of the Working Committees for the state branches of Perak, Selangor, Johore, Negri Sembilan, Malacca and Penang are examined. The social background of these men

is analysed principally in terms of occupational and educational status, and office holding in government and other public bodies.

There were 49 men in the Perak Working Committee (for the term 1953-55) and 29 men in the Selangor Working Committee (for the term 1952-53). A large majority, 40 out of 49 in Perak and 26 out of 29 in Selangor, described their occupations as either businessmen or merchants. An examination of their business activities discloses that the majority were engaged in tin mining, rubber planting and processing, banking, insurance, shipping, real estate development, import-export agencies, and general wholesaling and retailing trading in items such as foodstuffs, hardware, clothing, cigarettes, petroleum and kerosene. The number of professionally qualified men in the two Working Committees was very small; 9 out of 49 in Perak, and only 3 out of 26 in Selangor. Of the 9 in Perak, there were 4 lawyers, 2 chartered accountants, 2 doctors and 1 engineer. Of the 3 in Selangor, there was 1 lawyer, 1 architect and 1 accountant.

The educational background of these men indicates that the majority were Chinese-educated. The number of English-educated was 15 (out of 49) in Perak; in Selangor the proportion was slightly higher, 12 out of 29. The low number of English-educated men explains the correspondingly small number of professionally trained men noted above.

The predominance of Chinese-educated leaders in the two Working Committees likewise accounts for the small proportion of men who held office in government bodies. Since it was necessary for an individual to be at least bilingual in order to be appointed to government bodies, Chinese-speaking wealthy towkays usually did

not qualify for those posts. In the Perak Working Committee, only 13 out of 49 held office in bodies such as the Federal Legislative Council, the State Legislative Council, the Chinese Advisory Board, and Town and Municipal Boards. The proportion of men in the Selangor Working Committee who held similar positions was slightly higher, 12 out of 29. This is probably due to the fact that MCA leaders living in Kuala Lumpur tended to have higher chances of getting appointments to government bodies than their colleagues who lived away from the country's political centre. This is also explained by the fact that the proportion of English-educated men in the Selangor Working Committee was higher.

The educational background of these men was also a determining factor in the low incidence of office holding in multi-racial societies. The Selangor Working Committee, with its slightly higher proportion of English-educated men, had a correspondingly higher proportion of men who participated in the activities of multi-racial organisations than the Perak Working Committee. Ten out of the 29 men in Selangor held office in community service organisations such as the Rotary Club, the Jaycees, the St. John's Ambulance Society, and social clubs such as the Royal Selangor Golf Club and the Lake Club. In Perak, only 9 out of 49 participated in the activities of similar multi-racial organisations.

Although the majority of these Working Committee members did not hold office in government bodies or multi-racial organisations, office holding in Chinese associations was almost universal. They were represented on the committees of every category of association, ranging from the CCC, the Chinese Assembly Hall/Chinese Association,

the dialect/territorial huay kuan, the clan/surname association, and the trade guild to the recreational, cultural, and mutual aid society. The Perak and Selangor CCC were controlled by men from the MCA Working Committees of the two states. The positions of president, vice-president and secretary were filled by men such as Ang Keh Tho, Chong Khoon Lin, Cho Yew Fai, and Chin Chee Meow in Selangor, and by men such as Cheong Chee, Foong Seong, Chin Swee Onn and Wong Kin Sun in Perak. Major trade guilds came under the leadership of the following men: the Selangor Chinese Guilds and Associations was led by Leong Chee Cheong and Chong Shih Guan; the Selangor Chinese Hardware Dealers' Association by Chong Shih Guan; the Selangor Shopkeepers' Association by Leong Chee Cheong; the Assembly of Perak Chinese Associations and Commercial Guilds by Cheong Chee; and the Perak Gold Merchants' Association by Ho Sau Sau. Both Perak and Selangor were rich tin mining states; the Chinese Mining Association in the two states was therefore a key organisation. This body also came under the control of the MCA state leaders: the Selangor Chinese Mining Association was led by men such as Moe Pak Kion and Chan Kwong Hon, and the Perak Chinese Mining Association by men such as Ng Yin Fong, Ong Chin Seong and Foong Seong.

The dialect/territorial huay kuans which were led by these MCA state leaders spanned a variety of dialect groups. These included the Kwangtung, Hokkien, Kwong Siew, Teochew Pooi Ip, Koo Kong Chau (Cantonese), Nam Hoi (Cantonese) and Char Yong (Hakka) Huay Kuan in Selangor. In Perak, they included the Kwangtung, Hokkien, Ka Yin Chiu and Fiu Chiu (Hakka), Teochew Pooi Ip and

Kheng Chew (Hainanese) Huay Kuan. This pattern indicates that the second echelon leadership in the MCA comprised men from the major dialect groups in the country. However, there were more Cantonese and Hakkas than any other dialect groups in the Working Committees of Perak and Selangor. This is largely because Cantonese and Hakkas formed the majority of the Chinese population in the two states.

The Chinese educational system in Perak and Selangor came under the control and influence of the two MCA Working Committees. It has been shown that control was exerted by the financial leverage which these men had over Chinese schools through their representation on the schools' Boards of Managers. The following Working Committee members sat on the Boards of Managers of the following schools: Woo Saik Hong in the San Min Middle School in Teluk Anson, Ng Yin Fong in the Chung Hwa School in Kampar, Yeoh Kim Tian in the Pooy Lam High School and Yuk Choy High School in Ipoh, Chong Khoon Lin in the Confucian Chinese School in Kuala Lumpur, and Moe Pak Kion in the Kuen Cheng Girls' School and the Chung Hwa School in Kuala Lumpur. Besides being patrons and managers of Chinese schools, MCA leaders also exerted immediate control over the activities of Chinese school teachers. This was done through control of the highest coordinating body of Chinese school teachers, the United Chinese School Teachers' Association (UCSTA). Between 1953-1955, the UCSTA was under the chairmanship of Lim Lian Geok of the MCA Malacca Working Committee.

Before we proceed to make a comprehensive comparison of the differences and similarities in the social background of the top and second echelon leadership of the MCA, we should briefly consider

the social background of the members of the Working Committees of Johore, Negri Sembilan, Malacca and Penang.

The Johore Working Committee for the years 1953-1955 comprised 29 men. Of the 29, an overwhelming majority of 27 listed their occupation simply under the all-encompassing category of "merchant". Based on the economic activities of the Perak and Selangor Working Committee members, one may assume that the Johore state leaders were also successful towkays engaged in fairly large scale business enterprises. Only two out of the 29 men had received professional training (they were both doctors). It follows that the majority of the Johore Working Committee members were Chinese-educated or non-educated towkays who in turn dominated the Chinese associational network in Johore, especially the CCC and dialect/territorial huay kuans, and played influential roles in the Chinese schools. Finally, because of language obstacles, only the handful of English-educated leaders in the state were represented on government bodies and multi-racial organisations.

The overwhelming majority of the 45 men in the Negri Sembilan Working Committee (for the years 1951-52) appeared to have been Chinese-educated or non-educated towkays. This can be seen from the fact that 43 out of the 45 described their occupations either as businessmen or property owners. The remaining three men were a retired civil servant, a secretary, and a Chinese school teacher. The occupational pattern of the Negri Sembilan Working Committee reinforces the picture which has emerged: that the second echelon leadership of the MCA was dominated by Chinese-speaking successful towkays.

The occupational backgrounds of the Malacca and Penang Working Committees (for the years 1952-53) display an interesting variation to that found in the other states. It has been seen that only 9 out of 49 men in Perak were English-educated professional men; in Selangor there were 3 out of 28; in Johore 2 out of 29; in Negri Sembilan 3 out of 45. In Malacca, the proportion was noticeably higher: 8 out of 28. In Penang it was even higher: 14 out of 18. The deviation seen here does not, however, fundamentally alter the pattern of the argument so far. This deviation stemmed from the fact that Malacca and Penang had the largest concentration of Baba Chinese in the country. Thus one would expect to find a larger proportion of westernised English-educated Chinese in the Working Committees of the two states than in any other state. This variation in educational status does not mean that the state leaders in Malacca and Penang came from a different social class than leaders from other states. Like Cheng Lock and Siew Sin in the CWC, Baba state leaders in Malacca and Penang had to be accepted by the Chinese community at large before they could rise up the party hierarchy. In other words, they came from the same social and commercial circles as the Chinese-speaking towkay leaders, and actively participated in the affairs of Chinese associations, especially the CCC.

What then were the differences and similarities in the social background of the top and second run leadership of the Association? The most significant difference between the two groups was that the top leadership had a predominantly larger proportion with a westernised English-educated background. The larger proportion of

professionally-trained men at the top also suggests that they were educated up to higher levels than the second rung leaders.

The larger proportion of English-educated men at the top resulted in a higher proportion holding office in government bodies and multi-racial organisations. Thus, many more CWC members participated in the multi-ethnic political activities at the centre than members of the State Working Committees from Laukeh backgrounds, who were severely handicapped by language considerations. Essentially, however, the English-educated professional men and Chinese-educated or non-educated Laukeh towkays in the MCA at the top and second rung level came from the same social class in the country despite differences in educational and occupational status. They comprised the Chinese mercantile, capitalist elite of Malaya.

The multiplicity of dialect groupings in the CWC and State Working Committees indicates that the top and second rung leadership was not monopolised by any particular dialect group. It also indicates that dialect group origins need not necessarily impede an individual's political mobility at that level of the party hierarchy. (This, however, was not the case at the grass-roots level as will be shortly seen.) The language of communication in the State Working Committees tended to be the predominant dialect of the locality or Mandarin, and rarely English as in the case of CWC.¹

1. For example, the predominant dialect in Kuala Lumpur was, and still is, Cantonese; Cantonese and Hakka are used in Ipoh; Hokkien in Malacca and Penang; and Teochew and Hokkien in Johore Bahru.

2.2.3 The Grass-Roots Leadership

The social background of the MCA grass-roots leadership is examined through the results of a survey of the occupational status of a total number of 648 office holders in the Working Committees of 43 Area Branches in Johore and 33 Area Branches in Perak.¹ The term of office of these men spanned the years 1950-52.

Out of the total 489 office holders in Johore, 399 (81.7%) engaged in commercial enterprises. The majority were small scale retail traders dealing in foodstuffs, clothing, medical supplies, hardware and other miscellaneous merchandise. A few were coffee-shop owners, and some others were rubber dealers engaged in the rubber trade of the countryside and in the processing of latex into smoked rubber sheets. These traders in the small towns and villages constituted the bulk of the economic middlemen who have traditionally provided a range of commercial services for the Malay peasantry, often exploitatively.²

Only 30 (6.1%) of the Johore grass-roots leaders dealt in businesses which approximated in scale the commercial holdings of the top and second echelon leadership in the Association. These included mining, plantation, real estate, banking, insurance and

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1. The Johore Area Branches were grouped under the District Branches of Johore Bahru, Segamat, Muar, Pontian, Kluang, Kota Tinggi, Batu Pahat and Mersing. The Perak Area Branches came under the District Branches of Kinta, Kuala Kangsar, Taiping, Batang Padang, Lower Perak and Dindings.
 2. See, for example, Ungku Abdul Aziz, "Facts and Fallacies on the Malay Economy", Straits Times, 28 February-5 March 1957.

wholesale trading interests. Another 44 (8.9%) of these office holders were not self-employed traders or businessmen but belonged to the lower income wage earning, working class: they were mostly shop assistants, clerks, craftsmen and manual labourers. A few of them were farmers and fishermen. Finally, only 16 (3.3%) out of the 489 men in Johore belonged to the professional class. Here again, as with the case of the merchants, a qualitative difference existed between the types of professions these were engaged in compared to the men higher up the party hierarchy. Most of the grass-roots leaders were poorly paid school teachers in Chinese schools. Some others were Chinese physicians (sinsehs) and dentists who were either trained in China or were self-taught in the rudimentary skills of these disciplines. Unlike the largely western trained professional men found in the upper level of the party hierarchy who had lucrative practices in the bigger towns, these men were modestly remunerated for their professional services in the smaller towns and villages.

The occupational pattern of the 159 grass-roots leaders in Perak reveals a similar trend to that found in Johore. 138 (88.8%) of these men described their occupations either as merchants or rubber dealers. They were mostly small scale retailers and traders. Fifteen out of the total 159 men in Perak (9.4%) were fairly wealthy men engaged mainly in the tin mining industry (which is located principally in Perak.) Four out of the 159 were wage earners; 2 were shop assistants and the other 2 were clerks. Finally, only 2 men were professionally trained: a school teacher in a Chinese school and an accountant.

The dearth of western trained professional men and the predominance of petty traders among the grass-roots leaders of the MCA indicates that they were mostly Chinese-educated or non-educated men belonging to the lower middle and lower income groups within the Chinese community. They were also either first generation immigrants or were local-born Chinese who had preserved the social, cultural and traditional values of their forefathers from China.

During the early 1950s, a number of village councils and squatter committees were set up in the small towns and New Villages as part of the government's anti-insurgency campaign to win the loyalty of the rural Chinese population. These MCA grass-roots leaders were selected to represent the interests of their local communities on these councils and committees. Aside from holding office in these government consultative bodies, the MCA grass-roots leaders also monopolised office holding in the Chinese associations in the small towns. They were also the chairmen and managers of the local Chinese schools. This last office was significant, especially in villages, since the chairman of the local school committee was responsible for the smooth running of village affairs and was entrusted with informal power to settle disputes between villagers.¹ Therefore, one can see that MCA village leaders who controlled the local Chinese schools had the highest-ranking social status within the village community.

1. For a discussion on the role played by School Committees in village affairs, see, Newell, W.H., Treacherous River: A Study of Rural Chinese in North Malaya, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1962, p.38. Maeda, Kiyoshige, Alor Janggus: A Chinese Community in Malaya, The Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1967, pp.35-36.

The small number of the grass-roots MCA office holders who belonged to the rural proletariat (for example, rubber tappers and labourers) and the peasantry - 3.2% of the total in Johore, and none in Perak - clearly shows that the MCA was a party led by merchants, from the CWC right down to the lowest level. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the MCA has been commonly referred to as a "towkay party". Most people have believed that the towkay leaders of the party, be they wealthy capitalists or small traders, were self-seeking opportunists who put personal business interests before those of the party's, an image which has impaired the Association's ability to gain the support of the lower income and working classes within the Chinese community.

The fact that the party was dominated by the towkay class emerged in a government report on the party's work in the New Villages. The report stated that the common villager was not keen to join the MCA, since that would make him a target for reprisals from the Communist terrorists, but it added that the elitist composition of the party also acted as a deterrent. The report read: "The work of the MCA is more useful and important than many people suppose, but unfortunately its leaders are mostly from the towkay class. The common man regards it as an association of capitalists...."¹

A similar observation was made by Victor Purcell when he was invited out to Malaya by the party to advise it on its Emergency activities and to evaluate the political position of the Chinese

1 "Report No.5 in Lab. M. Conf. 1/52", Appendix, mimeo., n.d., c.1952, TCL Papers, Sp13, Item 175, Kuala Lumpur.

community under the Templer Administration. Purcell immediately noticed the elitist make up of the party leadership and warned the party of the inherent danger of such a situation. He wrote:¹

The economic interests of the MCA leaders may ultimately be found to be incompatible with those of the mass of the Chinese. It would be disastrous if the MCA, because of its middle-class composition at the higher levels, came to be regarded as a "reactionary" right wing bourgeoisie of bankers, businessmen, and lawyers intent merely on safeguarding their own economic interests. This would be to repeat in Malaya the mistakes of the KMT in China.

Almost as if prompted by Purcell's warning, the MCA party organ, the Malayan Mirror, carried an article which sought to reassure the Chinese population that the party was not a towkay organisation. It stated that several men from the "labouring and working classes" were represented on the Working Committees on all MCA branches, and went on to proclaim: "Let it be understood that the MCA is not a rich man's Association, pandering to the wants of the well-to-do. It bears the standard of Democracy today, and rich and poor alike have equal say in its management."² This piece of party propaganda did not tally with the real situation; it was no wonder that the self-projected image of the party failed to take hold. During the mid-1960s, the party president, Tan Siew Sin was still attempting to dispell the party's towkay image. Addressing

1. "Report on a Visit to Malaya from 10 August to 20 September at the invitation of the Malayan Chinese Association by Victor Purcell and Francis Carnell", mimeo., pp.73-74, TCL Papers, TCL/VI/1.

2. Malayan Mirror, Vol.1, No.10, 30 October 1953.

the party General Assembly, he said:¹

Our opponents and our detractors have always stated that the MCA is an association which exists for the rich and the well-to-do, or for those who want to become rich through politics. It may not be true, it may not be fair, but if this belief becomes increasingly accepted by wide sections of the Chinese public, then the MCA is doomed.

2.2.4 Relationships within the Party Hierarchy

The differences in the social backgrounds of the MCA leadership at different levels of the party hierarchy led to the development of a power linkage system between the different groups in the party. The three groups of party leaders - the national leaders, the state leaders and the grass-roots leaders - interacted with each other through a patron-client relationship based on reciprocal political and economic ties and services. I shall examine this relationship, starting from the bottom of the party hierarchy, by looking at the services the grass-roots leaders provided for leaders higher up the party, and at the services they expected in return from the leaders.

The MCA grass-roots leaders were the power brokers of the Chinese population located in small towns and New Villages. Being office-holders of the local associations and the local school committees, they were responsible for the smooth running of community affairs and the settlement of domestic disputes between local residents. These MCA grass-roots leaders were commonly regarded as

1. Speech by Tan Siew Sin at the MCA Central General Assembly on 9 November 1963. (Party documents, unless otherwise indicated, are found at the MCA headquarters).

community headmen and had the highest ranking social status within the local Chinese population. The Chinese settlements where MCA grass-roots leaders exercised influence were Laukeh communities which had remained encapsulated from the multi-ethnic superstructure and the Malay host environment.¹ The MCA grass-roots leaders needed the political linkage services of the English-educated national leaders to obtain government funds for development projects and other services for their communities.

While the dependency of the MCA grass-roots leaders on the top leaders was dictated by political concerns, their dependency on the second rung leaders was economically motivated. Petty bourgeois traders and retailers of small Chinese communities servicing rural areas depended on urban towkays, the wealthier tradesmen and wholesalers, to obtain credit and supplies to run their businesses, and to provide transportation and marketing facilities for their rubber, rice and other merchandise. In exchange for these economic services, MCA grass-roots leaders pledged political support and the popular backing of their local communities for the party's state leaders.

Backed by the political support of the grass-roots leaders, the second rung leaders constituted the power brokers between the

1. Examples of such communities are Sanchun New Village described by J. Strauch in Chinese Village Politics..., chs.3-6, and Titi in Negri Sembilan discussed by Laurence Siaw in Chinese Society in Rural Malaysia, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Oxford University Press, 1983.

English-speaking national echelon and the Laukeh base of the party. The party national leadership needed the influence which the state leaders could bring to bear on local level leaders to attract mass support for the MCA. The state leaders were happy to provide this service for the top leaders because they in turn sought favours from the latter. The membership of the top leaders in the multi-ethnic political elite of Malaya put them in a position to dispense political and economic patronage to their clients in the state branches of the party. The personal ties of certain MCA national leaders such as Tan Cheng Lock and Tan Siew Sin with UMNO leaders rendered them particularly useful to the Laukeh second rung leaders, as it was common knowledge that the UMNO would be the key political force in independent Malaya. The state leaders wanted to have access to the new Malay political elite for public political and private economic gain. Publicly, they wanted to play a role in the movement for independence and to influence the course of post-independence politics with a view to safeguarding and promoting Chinese interests. This public involvement in the national politics of the country would further enhance their prestige and status within the Chinese community. Privately, they hoped to further their commercial interests through making contact with key members of the future government of independent Malaya. The MCA top leaders were the much sought after middlemen who could provide the intermediary services linking up the Malay centre and the Laukeh periphery.

The party's top echelon looked to the Laukeh lower echelon leaders as the foundation for building the MCA into a

mass-based party. Westernised Chinese leaders by themselves were in no position to set up a widely-based party because their social sources of party recruitment would be confined to the English-speaking section of the Chinese community, which constituted a mere 7.6% of the total Chinese population in Malaya in 1957. In contrast, the Chinese-speaking and Chinese-educated proportion of the Chinese population stood at 90.6% of the total number.¹

2.2.5 Membership and Party Recruitment

The social background of party membership and the social sources of party recruitment also underline the extent to which the westernised national leaders had to depend on the linkage services provided by lower echelon Laukeh leaders to attract support for the party. MCA members were recruited mainly from the widespread network of traditional associations and the New Villages, and to a lesser extent, from the secret societies.

The party membership statistics for the years 1949-1957 indicate that it was a fairly widely-based organisation.² In

1. Population Census of the Federation of Malaya 1957, Report no.14, Tables 5.3 and 9b(1), pp.23, 94.

2. Though it is known that political parties tend to inflate their membership figures, it is nevertheless useful to use official party membership figures for they may indicate an overall pattern of growth over a period of time. The membership figures cited here were obtained from the MCA headquarters.

November 1949, a mere eight months after the Association's inauguration, the party boasted an impressive membership of 103,000. The support given to the new party by Chinese association and business leaders, who became office holders in the party, immediately drew a large proportion of the membership of Chinese associations to the MCA. When the party embarked on its Emergency welfare work, its membership increased dramatically. In May 1950, there were 145,000 members. The introduction of the party sweepstake (discussed in the following chapter) gained it several thousand more members attracted by the generous financial inducements contained in the lottery. In February 1953, the party membership reached the quarter million mark. By 1957, on the eve of Malaya's independence, the MCA had well over 300,000 members, and it was by far the most widely based party in the country.¹

The Chinese associational network was easily the most important source of membership recruitment for the MCA. It has been shown that the bulk of the party leadership at all levels were made up of leaders from the whole range of Chinese associations in the country. When an association leader joined the MCA, those Chinese who belonged to the associations in which he held office likewise joined the party in the hope that their patron would dispense generous patronage in return for their political support. The proportion of Chinese association membership in the MCA was so great that when elections were introduced in Malaya on a Federal basis in

1. By 1954, the membership of the MCA had exceeded that of the UMNO. The figures were 300,000 and 200,000 respectively. "Statement by UMNO/MCA Alliance released in London 17 May 1954", mimeo., TCL Papers, TCL/8/52a. At present the UMNO's membership is far larger than the MCA's.

1955, the state branches informed the party headquarters that the Chinese association in each state should select candidates on behalf of the party. The Penang MCA, for instance, claimed that this action was wholly justified since the 16,000 odd members of the Penang State Branch were all members of various Chinese guilds and associations in Penang.¹

The New Villages formed the second major source of membership recruitment. The Association's welfare work on behalf of the squatter population which were resettled in New Villages reaped rich harvests for the party, and its membership grew by leaps and bounds. Several party branches reported large increases in their membership due to the recruitment of New Villages. The chairman of the Kedah/Perlis State Branch, for example, noted that party membership in the two states had trebled within two years because of the party's Emergency welfare work among the New Villages there.² The importance of recruitment of New Villagers and squatters to the party is evident in the following speech regarding efforts to get the government to lift the curfew imposed on the village of Tanjong Malim:³

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1. Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Working Committee of the MCA Penang and Province Wellesley Branch to discuss Settlement Elections and to take necessary action, held at the premises of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce on 20 December 1954.
 2. Address by Soon Cheng Sun at the special meeting of the MCA Kedah/Perlis Branch on 3 May 1952.
 3. Notes for the President on the Conduct of the Meeting of the Working Committee on 22 June 1952.

There have been many expressions of a appreciation by the local inhabitants of HQ's work in this affair, which gave us a chance to help and serve and made known to remote villages the name of MCA. In proof of this, let it be known that the membership in Tanjong Malim in the MCA jumped, almost overnight, from a pre-curfew 200 to a post-curfew 2,000.

The party also reported that several branches were being established in New Villages throughout the early 1950s. The Annual Report of the Perak State Branch for 1954 revealed that several MCA officials had visited the New Villages in Perak in the course of carrying out their Emergency welfare work. As a result of this, "they were able to establish branches in Kampong Tawas, Bukit Merah, Kanthan Bahru, Pasir Pinji, and several other New Villages".¹ Party leaders reported the same happening elsewhere in the country.²

The party's concerted campaign to establish branches in New Villages resulted in the creation of a widespread branch network in the rural areas. This fact may be established by comparing statistics compiled on the New Villages and on MCA branches and membership.³ Out of the 444 New Villages created during the period 1949-1960, 314 New Villages (70.7%) had MCA area branches. The

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1. Report of the MCA Perak State Committee for the year ended 30 June 1954 to be submitted to the Sixth Annual General Meeting on 28 December 1954, p.4. Leong Yew Koh (LYK) Papers, SP3, no.61.
 2. See, for example, Minutes of the MCA General Committee and Area Representatives Muar, held on 22 August 1954.
 3. The list of party branches is obtained from the MCA headquarters. The information on the New Villages is taken from: Fernandez, D.Z., "New Villages in Peninsula Malaysia Created During the Emergency 1948-1960" Department of Statistics, Kuala Lumpur, n.d. (c.1975), Appendix A and D.

importance of the New Village population as a source of membership recruitment can be seen in a comparison of the size of party membership of the different state branches and the New Village population in each state. By 1957, the Perak State Branch had the highest membership figures - 84,197 or 28% of the national membership. Perak was also the state with the highest Chinese New Village population - 236,961 or 30.7% of the total - and the greatest number of New Villages - 134 or 30% of the total number of New Villages created between 1949 and 1960. The next two state branches in terms of membership, Selangor and Johore, were also the states with the second and third largest Chinese New Village population. The party membership of the Selangor State Branch stood at 18.3% of the national total in 1957, and the New Village population in the state was 22.4% of the total. Johore had 12.2% of the national party membership and 24.9% of the total New Village population.

Having access to this large rural source of membership recruitment, the MCA rapidly became well entrenched in the rural areas. The geographical distribution of membership in Malacca indicates that the party was basically a rural-based organisation. In 1951, the Malacca State Branch reported that out of a total state membership of 8,690, slightly over half (4,909) came from small towns and villages, while the rest came from Malacca town. By 1957, the rural-urban disparity had increased: out of a total number of 12,350 members, 7,352 or 59.6% came from the countryside,

while 4,998 or 40.4% came from the town of Malacca.¹ The picture of the MCA as more rural than urban based is reinforced by the occupational breakdown of party membership to be discussed shortly.

The MCA also recruited from secret societies, but little data exists on this source of recruitment as MCA leaders are reluctant to acknowledge the links they had (and still have) with illegal organisations and bosses of the underground world. Secret society heads did not usually hold office at the higher ranks of the party hierarchy and remained grass-roots leaders.² As we have seen in Chapter 1, secret society members comprised a considerable proportion of the membership of voluntary associations and naturally were recruited by the MCA to become the rank and file of the new party. Furthermore, it may be safely assumed that when a Laukeh association leader cum secret society boss joined the MCA, he would have recruited members of his secret society for the MCA in order to secure his political base in the party.

MCA party leaders tended to call upon the services of secret societies to perform "bully boy" tasks, especially in

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1. Report of the MCA Malacca State Working Committee for the year ended 30 June 1952 to be submitted to the Second Annual General Meeting of the Malacca Branch to be held on 31 December 1952; p.2; and Report of the MCA Malacca State Working Committee to be submitted to the Fifth Ordinary Annual General Meeting held on 17 March 1957, p.2.
 2. Laurence Siaw observed that in the town of Titi where he conducted his field work, there were several Wah Kee secret society members in the local MCA branch, Chinese Society in Rural Malaya, p.122.

conjunction with those undertaken by the party youth wing to mobilise support for the party in local election campaigns following the introduction of electoral politics in Malaya after 1952. Leaders of opposition parties were highly critical of the MCA ties with secret societies which were especially evident at election times. Opposition leaders accused MCA youth members who were also secret society members of harassing, intimidating and beating up the supporters of opposition parties during election campaigns. For example, V. David of the Labour Party said that the MCA Youth Section accommodated "most of the 'number one' thugs and gangsters" in the towns and villages.¹ On another occasion, D.K. Seenivasagam, the leader of the Peoples' Progressive Party (PPP), accused the chairman of the MCA Youth Section in Chendong Village (near Ipoh) of being the leader of the Wah Kee secret society in the village. Seenivasagam added that the MCA Youth Section was in fact a Wah Kee organisation: "Wah Kee is Mah Ching /MCA Youth/ and Mah Ching is Wah Kee".² On yet another occasion, the chairman of the Labour Party based in the village of Pajam (near Seremban) accused the MCA Pajam Youth Section of being the local cover for secret society

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1. Speech by V. David, Dewan Ra'ayat Debates, 21 April 1961, Col.210.
 2. Speech by D.K. Seenivasagam, Dewan Ra'ayat Debates, 21 April 1961, Col.183. Laurence Siaw stated that a number of Wah Kee youths organised themselves as the "MCA Youth Group" to support MCA candidates in the annual local council elections held in Titi. Siaw, p.149.

thuggery in the area. He apparently supplied enough evidence to back up his accusation, as the Special Branch opened an investigation into the matter.¹

The overwhelming majority of the MCA membership was, and is, male. The female proportion of the total membership has been so insignificant that in 1973, 24 years after the Women Sub-Committee was originally set up, Chinese women formed a mere 7.9% of the total membership.² The leading female figures in the party were the English-educated wives of national leaders. They tended not to participate in the mainstream of party activities, but preoccupied themselves by organising traditional women's activities such as cooking, sewing and child-care classes for the benefit of the less educated Chinese women members and wives of party members.

The dearth of female membership in the party was a reflection of the general lack of participation by females in the activities of Chinese associations and organisations, and also a reflection of the traditional role played by females in Chinese society where the female has traditionally been regarded as inferior in social status to the male and has little role in the public

1. See letter from the Hon. Secretary, Pajam MCA Youth Section, to the Chairman, MCA National Youth Section, dated 11 October 1966.

2. Figure supplied by MCA headquarters.

affairs of the community.¹

2.2.6 The Social Background of Party Membership

The social background of party membership is examined in relation to occupational and educational status, income and dialect groupings. Broadly speaking, one can say that the most substantial portion of MCA members belonged to the lower income group: the working proletariat, the craftsmen, the white collar wage earners, farmers and fishermen. A smaller though considerable section belonged to the middle-income group: merchants and professional men.

The earliest information on the occupations of the total membership of the party was compiled in 1962.² In that year, there were 67,700 members. Of these, 23,603 (34.9%) were listed as "businessmen" and 1,865 (2.8%) as "shopkeepers". Thus the capitalist/petty bourgeois element in the party stood at 37.7% of

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1. Since the early 1970s, the MCA leadership, realising that female Malay voting power is a significant factor in UMNO politics, has made a concerted attempt to recruit more female members and to give them a more responsible role in party affairs. The female proportion of party membership has increased from 7.9% in 1973 to approximately 15% today.
 2. Broad trends in occupational breakdown of party membership between the early 1950s and 1960s are not significantly different. This fact emerged after conversations with some MCA members who have been in the party since the early 1950s, and from an interview with the official in charge of the national membership section, Mr. Shu Soo Neng (on 27 February 1976), who has been a party member since the late 1950s.

the total membership. The professional class - listed as teachers, students, technicians, engineers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, accountants and civil servants - formed an insignificant 1.7% (1,183) of the total. The working proletariat class - listed as rubber tappers, mine workers, construction workers, hawkers, miscellaneous labourers, blacksmiths, masons, carpenters, dhobies, barbers and tailors - formed 48.3% (32,705), which was the biggest proportion of the total membership. The white collar working class - clerks and shop assistants - constituted 1.9% (1,277) of the total. The remaining 10.4% (7,067) were listed as farmers and fishermen.

The occupational background of the party membership indicates the rural-urban distribution of party members. Generally speaking, the capitalist/petty bourgeois and professional section of the party membership were spread over the major urban centres and smaller towns. White collar workers, craftsmen, domestic workers and construction workers were found in the same areas. These occupation categories add up to 50.7% of the total membership figures in 1957. At a conservative estimate, one may say that at least half of this 50.7% (25%) were found in the smaller towns. The rural section of the party - the farmers, fishermen, rubber tappers, mining and manual labourers - stood at 49.3% of the total membership. One may conclude, therefore, that approximately three-quarters (25% plus 49.3%) of the MCA party membership was drawn from outside the major urban centres in Malaya. The low farmer/fishermen proportion (10.4%) of the party membership

reflects the low number of Chinese in the country engaged in these occupations which are the traditional preserves of the Malay population.¹

Census statistics on the rate of literacy within the Chinese community bear out the observation made earlier that the bulk of the MCA grass-roots leadership and membership were mainly Chinese-educated or non-educated. In 1957, 70.1% of the Chinese male population over 10 years old was literate in any language. Of these only 14.4% was literate in English and 3.9% in Malay.² Thus, at least 52.1% of the Chinese male population over 10 years old was literate in Chinese (Mandarin) and 29.9% was illiterate.

While the upper levels of the party leadership were not monopolised by a particular dialect group, this was not the case at the grass-roots level. The historical settlement of dialect groups in Malaya resulted in the predominance of certain groups in certain areas in the country.³ The Hokkiens, for example, were generally concentrated in coastal areas, particularly in the former Straits Settlements, while the Hakkas and Cantonese were mainly found inland, especially in old tin-mining towns such as Ipoh and Kula Lumpur.

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1. In 1957, e.g., the Chinese percentage of the total population in Malaya engaged in rice growing was 2.3% compared to the Malay percentage of 95.5%. Chinese fishermen made up 31.6% of the total fishing population while the Malay percentage was 67.4%. Taken from Population Census of the Federation of Malaya 1957, Report No.14, Table 11.
 2. Population Census of the Federation of Malaya 1957, figures compiled from Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 in Report No.14.
 3. For an account of this phenomenon, see Moese et al., pp.163-176.

Teochews were concentrated generally in areas adjacent to Province Wellesley and in West Johore. Some small towns were peopled almost entirely by a single dialect group. Sitiawan in Perak has a large Hokchiu population, while Raub and Bentong in Pahang have a predominantly Kwongsai population. Given this situation, it was usually difficult for a party member who did not belong to the predominant dialect group of the locality to be voted into the local Working Committee. The importance of dialect group origins as a criterion of political mobility at the party grass-roots level is borne out by the fact that leaders in the CWC usually made it to the top if they originally came from local bases in the party where their dialect group was predominant. Tan Siew Sin and Lim Chong Eu are Hokkiens from the predominantly Hokkien towns of Malacca and Penang; H.S. Lee is a Cantonese from Kuala Lumpur which has a large Cantonese population. Usually a leader had to be a Kwongsai to be acceptable to the party rank and file in Raub and Bentong and he had to be a Hokchiu to be accepted by the rank and file in Sitiawan.

The information on the occupational and educational status of the party rank and file shows that the large majority were either China-born or locally born Laukeh Chinese. Since the party constitution (from 1949-1959) stipulated that any Chinese over 18 years old who had lived in Malaya for at least a period of five years were eligible for membership¹ the bulk of the party membership in the early 1950s could not have been Malayan citizens

1. Rules of the Malayan Chinese Association, Ling Wah Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1949.

since the Malayan Federation Constitution of 1948 rendered the overwhelming majority of the Chinese population ineligible for Federal citizenship. By the end of 1950, only about 24% of the Chinese population in Malaya had become citizens.¹ In 1954, two years after the liberalisation of certain citizenship requirements in 1952, the non-citizen proportion of the Chinese population still remained as high as 50%.²

2.3 Development of an MCA Ideology

The MCA embraced three world views, reflecting different priorities on issues of primary concern to the conservative Chinese leadership of Malaya. The three perspectives - the westernised outlook (which incorporated the Baba outlook), the traditional CCC-huay kuan outlook and the KMT outlook - were not held by exclusive groups of leaders within the party. Many leaders had more than one ideological perspective and they all had certain goals in common. For example, all the leaders wanted the MCA to be protective of Chinese interests and supportive of the anti-Communist cause, as well as to be effective within the wider framework of multi-racial Malayan politics. In addition, they all believed in objectives published in the party's first constitution in 1949, which were:³

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1. 500,000 persons out of a total Chinese population of 2,100,000. Ratnam, K.J., Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya, University of Malay Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1965, p.84.
 2. 1,210,227 were citizens out of a total Chinese population of 2,334,000. Figures taken from Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 4 May 1955, Col.234.
 3. Rules of the Malayan Chinese Association. (These rules were passed at a general meeting held on 12 June 1949).

- (a) To promote and maintain inter-racial goodwill and harmony in Malaya.
- (b) To foster and safeguard the social, political, cultural and economic welfare of the Malayan Chinese by legitimate or constitutional means.
- (c) To promote and assist in the maintenance of peace and good order for the attainment of peaceful and orderly progress in Malaya.
- (d) Generally to do all such acts and things as may be incidental to or connected with or conducive to the attainment of any of the above-mentioned objects.

However, there were different priorities among the three major groups regarding issues of primary concern.

The world view of the Laukeh leaders was moulded by their bourgeois capitalist mentality and their positions of leadership in voluntary associations. These towkay leaders saw accumulation of wealth as the primary path to power and status. Voluntary associations offered the organisational structure by which this status could be developed and recognised, while at the same time providing contacts and opportunities for advancing their economic objectives. A primary function of leadership in voluntary associations was the dispensation of material assistance for social welfare, educational and other mutual aid purposes required by the local community. Office holding in the MCA was thus regarded by many Laukeh leaders as mirroring that of voluntary associations. To them, the MCA appeared another institutionalised means to acquire status and prestige, to advance their business activities and to distribute largesse through community oriented welfare work.

The KMT world view was held by party leaders who had been active in the KMTM before it became defunct after 1949. Indeed, in the early 1950s the list of prominent MCA state office holders

read like a "Who's Who" of the pre-war KMTM leadership. These men included Lau Pak Khuan, Leong Yew Koh, Ong Chin Seong, Peh Seng Khoon, Cheong Chee and Foong Seong in Perak; H.S. Lee, Ang Keh Tho, Cho Yew Fah, Leong Chee Cheong and Chong Shih Guan in Selangor; Ong Keng Seng, Saw Seng Kiew and Ng Sui Cam in Penang; Goh Chee Yan and Ho Pao Jin in Malacca; Wong Shee Fun in Johore; Yap Mau Tatt and Lee Tee Siong in Negri Sembilan; and Lim Keng Lian, Chuang Hui Tsuan and Chua Ho Ann in Singapore.¹

The ideological perspective of these ex-KMTM leaders was coloured by the political objectives of Chiang Kai Chek's government, which emphasised, in its relations with overseas Chinese, the propagation of a pan-Chinese nationalism and the mobilisation of overseas Chinese support and loyalty behind the KMT anti-Communist cause. Following its defeat by the CCP in late 1949, the Taiwan-based KMT government courted overseas Chinese leaders in the hope of obtaining moral and financial backing behind its campaign to regain China. Pro-KMT leaders in Malaya publicly championed the KMT cause within the Chinese community in Malaya.

The world views of Laukeh and ex-KMTM leaders in Malaya were essentially the same as those found in other overseas Chinese communities. Leaders of Chinese voluntary associations in South-east Asia and elsewhere, like Laukeh leaders in Malaya, concerned themselves with the pursuit of status-orientated and local-level community service goals. Leaders of pro-KMT organisations outside

1. These names have been compiled from reports in Chinese newspapers, namely Nanyang Siang Pau and China Press, describing KMT functions held by Chinese leaders in Malaya for the period 1948-1956.

Malaya, like their counterparts in the KMTM, likewise involved themselves in pro-KMT overseas Chinese politics.¹ In contrast, the westernised MCA leadership defined new ideological and organisational functions for the MCA aimed at making the new party specifically pertinent to Malayan-centred needs created by the rise of strident Malay nationalism, the stringent citizenship clauses of the Federation of Malaya constitution, and the outbreak of the Communist insurrection. The westernised leaders explicitly did not want the MCA to merely copy traditional functions carried out by the CCC-huay kuan nor to be embroiled in pro-KMT overseas Chinese politics.

These English-educated leaders (a few of whom were British-trained lawyers) understood the political and constitutional processes which defined the political game in colonial Malaya, and possessed the political sophistication and experience to use the MCA as an effective bargaining counter when dealing with the British. In contrast, Laukeh party leaders, both from the CCC-huay kuans and KMTM, not only lacked the skills but also the motivation to play such an innovative role.

In the early 1950s, the MCA manifested all three ideological approaches, leading to confusion and uncertainty over the party's exact identity. The English-educated leadership insisted that the party was the first Malayan-centred Chinese political party; on the other hand, the CCC-huay kuan element led

1. See Skinner, G.W., Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand, Cornell University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1958, and Purcell, V., The Chinese in Southeast Asia, Oxford University Press, London, 1965 (2nd.ed.).

many to regard it as merely another traditional association. And finally, the activities of pro-KMT leaders made others believe that the new party was in fact the KMTM in a different guise.

Arguing the views of the modernist leadership, party president Tan Cheng Lock constantly emphasised the Malayan-centred political objectives of the party. He stressed the point that the MCA was formed principally to educate Chinese in Malaya to regard Malaya as the sole object of their loyalty. Speaking on this theme at a public meeting in 1951 Cheng Lock said that the MCA would politically educate the Chinese "to become genuine Malaysians" who would cooperate with the other races so that the ideal of "one Malayan Nationality animated by Malayan consciousness and Malayan patriotism" would be realised in the near future.¹ At the annual assembly of the Central General Committee in 1951, Cheng Lock emphasised that the MCA had been formed to "foster and to engender a truly Malayan outlook, consciousness and patriotism among the domiciled Malayan Chinese in order to forge and fortify their ties with this country and unity as an integral part and parcel of the Malayan people, and to help develop their sense of civil responsibility, duty and obligation to their country of adoption".²

Cheng Lock argued that the political metamorphosis of the Chinese into true Malaysians could only come about if they were accorded constitutional rights and privileges equal to the Malay

1. Speech by Tan Cheng Lock at Port Dickson Road Resettlement Area, Seremban, on 18 January 1951, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 172.

2. Speech by Tan Cheng Lock at the MCA Annual Central General Committee meeting held on 21 April 1951.

community. The citizenship clauses of the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement had reduced the Chinese to a position which Cheng Lock described as "helots and pariahs without rights and responsibilities of citizenship".¹ He emphasised that the MCA would be dedicated to obtaining "a full measure of justice in all things" for the Chinese community.²

The MCA's role as initiator of political action to protect Chinese interests was likewise articulated by other English-educated party leaders. Tan Siew Sin, for example, pointed out: "In the context of present-day events, the necessity for a strong political organisation to protect the rights and interests of the Chinese needs no argument. Today it is clear that the Chinese must either unite or perish. They are already political pariahs and should remember that it is easier to go downhill than uphill".³ The westernised leadership was immediately concerned to achieve their political objectives, as is evidenced by their participation in the Communities Liaison Committee and overtures to UMNO leaders to form an electoral pact and political alliance during the 1952 Kuala Lumpur municipal elections.

The pro-KMT ideological manifestation of the MCA ran counter to the claims of the English-educated leadership that the MCA would act as midwife to the birth of a Malayan-centred loyalty

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1. Address by Tan Cheng Lock at Taiping and Ipoh on 10 April 1949 entitled "The Chinese in Malaya", in Tan Cheng Lock, A Collection of Speeches, Ih Shih Press Ltd., Singapore, n.d., p.19.
 2. Speech by Tan Cheng Lock at Port Dickson Road Resettlement Area on 18 January 1951.
 3. Speech by Tan Siew Sin entitled "Why the Malayan Chinese Association is Necessary", c. April 1953.

and consciousness among Chinese in Malaya. The activities of pro-KMT party leaders, which often included public showings of support for Chiang Kai Shek's regime, raised fears that the MCA was a tool of the Taiwan government out to propagate pan-Chinese nationalism and a foreign loyalty within the community. As this posed a serious problem for the party, we shall examine in some detail the role of the KMT in the early development of the MCA.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the KMTM successfully re-organised itself during the period of the British Military Administration. By the outbreak of the Communist insurrection in June 1948, the KMTM had re-established its pre-war influence over the associations. Although the KMTM officially ceased to function with the prohibition on foreign political party activity in May 1949, party branches all over the country remained open till mid September 1949.¹ The welfare of the KMT was thereafter kept alive by the presence of Nationalist Chinese consular representatives stationed in the major towns of Malaya. The KMT consuls departed from Malaya after June 1950, when Britain, upon its recognition of the People's Republic of China, cut off diplomatic ties with Chiang Kai Shek's government in Taiwan.

The closure of KMTM branches and the withdrawal of KMT diplomats left the party members without an organisational structure and formal leadership. The formation of the MCA must have appeared a well-timed solution to the quandary in which the disbanded KMTM found itself. The MCA was established before the KMT consuls left the country, and knowing the fall of Peking to be imminent, Chiang's

1. Nanyang Siang Pau, 9 and 15 September 1949.

representatives in Malaya used the little time remaining to them to mobilise support for the proposed MCA which they hoped would take the place of the KMTM as a vehicle for propagating the Nationalist cause within the Chinese community.

The role played by the KMT consul based in Ipoh bears testimony to the deep interest which the KMT had in the founding of the MCA. A few weeks before the inaugural meeting of the MCA was held, the Ipoh KMT consul, Haji Ibrahim Ma, started to prepare the groundwork in Perak to harness support from the Chinese associations for the proposed party. He convened a series of public meetings of CCC-huay kuan leaders in Ipoh to discuss the possibility of forming a society which would become the Perak Branch of the MCA.¹ Although the society was not formed, the occasion gave Ma the opportunity to spread pro-MCA feelings among the most powerful community leaders in Perak. Ma urged all community leaders under his consular jurisdiction to attend the inaugural meeting of the Association held in Kuala Lumpur. He also instructed Chinese leaders in Penang, Kelantan and Trengganu to do likewise. In addition, he advised those leaders to cast their presidential vote for Cheng Lock, whom he believed to be the most suitable candidate for the office.²

Although Cheng Lock had not supported the KMTM in the pre-war years, even endorsing the government ban on the party in 1925,

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1. Letter from Haji Ibrahim Ma to Tan Cheng Lock dated 24 February 1949, TCL Papers, TCL/3/84. To my knowledge, Ma was the only Muslim KMT consul to have served in Malaya.
 2. Letter from Haji Ibrahim Ma to Tan Cheng Lock dated 15 February 1949, TCL Papers, TCL/3/94.

he became more favourably disposed towards the party after the war as a result of the Communist threat. Cheng Lock regarded the KMTM as a useful counter measure to the MCP and responded favourably to overtures made to him by KMT consuls, becoming a good friend of Haji Ibrahim Ma. He was regularly invited to address functions organised by pro-KMT leaders to celebrate events such as the Double Ten anniversary and the birthdays of Sun Yat Sen and Chiang Kai Shek. The speeches he delivered on those occasions contained a pronounced degree of racial chauvinism. For instance, he concluded his address to the Double Ten celebration held in Malacca in October 1950 with a resounding salute to China's greatness: "China is unbreakable and indestructable like her Great Wall. She cannot fail, China will last forever, for her roots touch the earth and her spirits is continually in the heavens. China for ever. God save China!"¹ Cheng Lock's endorsement of KMT celebrations appeared to have been motivated by a great sense of pride in his Chinese heritage; he did not at any stage advocate political support for the KMT.

Not only did the KMT consuls advise huay kuan leaders to elect Cheng Lock as party president but they also directed leaders of the KMTM to help organise the setting up of MCA branches throughout the country.² When the MCA was formed, the KMTM branches had

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1. Address by Tan Cheng Lock at the Malacca Chinese Chamber of Commerce on the occasion of the Double Ten celebration, 10 October 1950, TCL Papers, SP13, Ucapan Tan Cheng Lock, Item 34.
 2. Nanyang Siang Pau, 31 March 1949, reported that the Trengganu KMTM Branch was instrumental in forming the MCA State Branch.

not ceased to function (they were closed seven months after the formation of the MCA), and KMTM members rallied to set the new organisation on its feet. H.S. Lee, a leading KMT figure in the country, and chairman of the Selangor Chinese Chambers of Commerce, helped to convene the MCA inaugural meeting, aided by five KMTM branches in Selangor.¹

British intelligence reports of the period noted the prominent role played by the KMTM in the formation of the MCA.² In Johore, it was reported that the MCA enrolled members through the assistance of local Shu Pao She (libraries or reading rooms) which functioned as KMTM organisations in disguise.³ Intelligence reports also noted that known KMT leaders, H.S. Lee and Lau Pak Khuan, were instrumental in bringing in the support of the KMTM apparatus in Malaya for the new party.⁴

The involvement of the KMTM in the MCA's formation led some observers to regard the two organisations as synonymous.⁵ Likewise,

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1. Nanyang Siang Pau, 20 February 1949. H.S. Lee made a bid for control of the MCA, but the Chinese leaders behind the party's formation decided that Tan Cheng Lock was the more suitable candidate as party president, mainly because they feared H.S. Lee's pro-KMT alignment would create problems for the new party. Moreover, Cheng Lock was highly regarded by the colonial authorities.
 2. See, for example, extract from Singapore Political Report, No.2, February 1949, C0537/52849/48/49(4).
 3. Extract from Review of Chinese Affairs for October 1949, C0537/4761/52849/48(35).
 4. Extract from Pan-Malayan Review, No.6, 16 March 1949, C0537/52849/48/49(16).
 5. See, for example, extract from Singapore Political Report for November 1950, C0537/52849/48/50(17).

the colonial authorities noted that MCA assistance to the government in the anti-insurgency campaign was in reality KMTM assistance. Although the government welcomed the role played by the MCA in the Emergency, it was afraid that the KMTM would use the new party as a cover for its activities after it became illegal. The authorities were apprehensive about the potentially negative political consequences of the KMTM tie-up with the MCA as indicated by the following intelligence report: "There is a risk that the Malayan Chinese Association will be one of the covers of the KMTM, and this, coupled with events in China, will continue to keep Chinese eyes focussed either on their ancestral homes, or on the communal aspect of their problems in Malaya".¹

The KMT affiliation of prominent MCA office holders manifested itself in several ways. For instance, during the Emergency when the recruitment of manpower within the Chinese community fell abysmally short of the target needed to fight the Communists (discussed in the following chapter), Leong Yew Koh, who later served as the secretary-general of the MCA, proposed an alternative means of securing manpower. He suggested to Sir Henry Gurney that the latter recruit 10,000 soldiers from the Kuomintang forces based in Taiwan, or the Kuomintang 26th Army then interned in North Vietnam. (Leong Yew Koh himself had served as a Liaison Officer with the 26th Army during the war.) He proposed that when the Emergency was over the Kuomintang soldiers could either be repatriated to Taiwan or resettled

1. Extract from Federation of Malaya Political Report for July 1949, C0537/4761/52849/48/49 (30).

in Malaya.¹ Another well-known MCA leader, Yap Mau Tatt, advised Cheng Lock: "It is absolutely necessary to rally KMT personnel to come in with the MCA under the MCA banner".²

Many Chinese soon came to regard the MCA as a revived KMTM, as is evident in the following editorial comment:³

It is undeniable that the office bearers of the Singapore Branch after its election, such as the Vice-Chairman, Chua Ho Ann and Dr. Ho Pau Jin, the Hon. Secretary, So Hau Siang, and the Executive Secretary, Lee Leng Keng, are all utterly powerful ones of a foreign political party, the KMT. How can the powerful ones of the KMT be able to occupy the important posts of the MCA and to manipulate the MCA?.... Broadly speaking, the MCA is a political organisation of the Malayan Chinese while the KMT is a party of the Overseas Chinese in Malaya. There seems to be no particular divergence between these two political parties. It is not even strange to see these two organisations amalgamated into one body.

The openly pro-KMT activities of the Singapore leadership aroused the anger of the English-educated national leadership in Kuala Lumpur, and one particular incident led the party headquarters to censure the behaviour of the Singapore leadership. The vice-chairman of the Branch, Chua Ho Ann, led a delegation to visit Taiwan on the occasion of Chiang Kai Shek's birthday. While in Taiwan, Chua was reported to have said that he officially represented

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1. Letter from Leong Yew Koh to the Officer Administering the Government dated 15 November 1950, TCL Papers, TCL/15/64c. The suggestion drew a negative response.
 2. Letter from Yap Mau Tatt to Tan Cheng Lock dated 29 September 1951, TCL Papers, TCL/15/54.
 3. Sin Pao, 18 August 1953, MCA headquarters.

the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore who wished to pay their respects to President Chiang. A Taiwan-based paper carried the following account of Chua's visit:¹

The leader of the Singapore and Malaya Team, Mr. Chua Ho Ann, in his speech reported that the overseas Chinese in Singapore and Malaya had a strong affection for their free fatherland and a high respect for the national saviour, President Chiang. He mentioned that spiritually they were one hundred percent behind the free fatherland, and materially they were so willing to contribute money and manpower in aid of the military expenses /in the campaign to regain mainland China/, if it had not been for the various inconveniences caused by the local legal restrictions.

The UMNO leadership was particularly galled by the incident.

It informed the MCA that such actions on the part of KMT leaders in the Association were bound to undermine current negotiations between the two parties to consolidate the coalition arrangement. In its letter of protest to Cheng Lock, Dr. Ismail bin Abdul Rahman noted: "The statement has naturally caused misgivings among the Malay community, and we in UMNO expect to be severely attacked by Malays for allying ourselves with people who owe allegiance to a foreign, albeit friendly, country."² An emergency meeting convened by Cheng Lock decided to ask Chua to resign his post in the MCA.³

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1. China Press (Taipeh), 16 November 1953. Quoted from a translation from the minutes of a Special Meeting of the MCA held on 2 December 1953.
 2. Quoted from the minutes of a Special Meeting of the MCA held on 2 December 1953.
 3. The decision was not imposed, as Chua Ho Ann insisted that the Taiwanese press had misreported his speeches given during his visit. He said he went to Taiwan purely as a representative of several Chinese associations in Singapore and the visit had nothing to do with the MCA. Minutes of the Working Committee Meeting on 24 February 1954.

From 1949 to 1956, all the pro-KMT leaders in the MCA organised and participated in celebrations such as the Double Ten. These activities often made front page headlines in the Chinese press, and though some MCA leaders made it a point to explain that they participated in these celebrations in their capacity as leaders of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and huay kuans and not as MCA office bearers, this distinction was often lost on the general public.

The Acting Secretary for Chinese Affairs, R.H. Oakeley, felt it necessary to advise Cheng Lock of the harmful consequences of the pro-KMT activities carried out by leaders within the party. He pointed out that the efforts of the Department for Chinese Affairs to improve political relations between the Malays and Chinese were "being continually hindered by publicity given to Missions to Formosa by 'Malayan' Chinese, and by publicity given to celebrations of political anniversaries such as that of the Double Tenth".¹ He pointed out that these factors would undermine any demand made by the MCA for better citizenship rights for the Chinese community. In October 1952, a month after the receipt of Oakeley's letter, the MCA headquarters took an official stand on the subject for the first time. The party headquarters asked all branches to inform party members not to attend future KMT celebrations nor to send congratulatory despatches to President Chiang. In addition, it directed all MCA leaders to discourage Chinese in Malaya from involving themselves in Taiwan-oriented activities: "The Chinese in Malaya, in

1. Letter from R.K. Oakeley to Tan Cheng Lock dated 19 September 1952, MCA headquarters.

demanding for equal rights in Malaya, should not attend the Double Tenth National Day Celebration and to call themselves Overseas Chinese thereby losing the right of such a demand".¹

The party headquarters was deluged by angry letters from party leaders and members objecting to the official line on the matter. Heading the pro-KMT counter-attack, Tan Kee Gak of Malacca replied that the party had no right to dictate to the Chinese on the matter. He said that if the party were foolhardy enough to try and impose its ruling, there would be mass resignations from it.² Another pro-KMT stalwart, Ong Chin Seong of Perak told the party headquarters that it had no power to act on the subject since in his opinion the Chinese in Malaya had not severed their emotional links with Free China.³ In addition, the Communist insurrection in Malaya had heightened support from the capitalist elements in the MCA for Chiang's government in Taiwan. The celebration of KMT anniversaries was, therefore, regarded by them as a necessary demonstration of their belief in a non-Communist Malaya and a non-Communist China.

Double Ten celebrations continued to be held till the eve of Malaya's independence, to the consternation of the MCA national leadership which could not control such activities and was acutely aware that the KMT presence in the party threatened its very

1. Quoted from Sin Lit Pau, 15 October 1952, MCA headquarters.

2. China Press, 10 October 1952.

3. Letter from Ong Chin Seong to T.H. Tan dated 30 November 1953, MCA headquarters.

existence. A party document described the predicament:¹

If the KMT elements among our members are allowed to assert themselves, we may expect real trouble from the Government because the KMT has been outlawed by the Emergency Regulations. If the KMT should again rise to the surface through the MCA, our Association will be outlawed one of these days. Any tendency by the KMT to take control of the MCA must be arrested without hesitation.... It was never intended that the MCA should concern itself with China politics; nor should China politics be allowed to influence MCA policies.

The memorandum further stated that a remedy must be sought to counter the KMT hold over the MCA in the states of Singapore, Johore, Negri Sembilan, Perak, Penang and Malacca. It suggested that the party headquarters embark on a massive membership drive aimed at recruiting the Malayan-born Chinese within the community.

However, this measure could not be fully implemented, since the most important source of membership recruitment for the Association was the pro-KMT Laukeh Chinese associational network. If the party were to purge itself of its KMT elements, it would have to reduce its leadership to the non-Laukeh section of the Chinese community - i.e. the small Baba and English-educated population of the Chinese community. The party leadership was not attracted by the idea, and thus the KMT problem was quietly overlooked until the issue regained prominence during the independence constitutional negotiations.

1. Unsigned memorandum entitled "The problems facing the Association are growing in seriousness", mimeo., c.late 1953.

While manifestations of the MCA as a Malayan-centred party as well as a revived KMTM were discernible in the first two to three years of its existence, it behaved most consistently and conspicuously as a CCC-huay kuan prototype, performing social welfare activities within the community. This phenomenon stemmed from the exigencies of the Emergency and the involvement of the party in the government's counter-insurgency campaign, as we shall see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

THE MCA'S ROLE IN THE EMERGENCY

The Communist insurrection which broke out in June 1948 was essentially a Chinese problem. The Malayan Communist Party, apart from a thin sprinkling of Malay and Indian sympathisers, was a solidly Chinese organisation drawing its sources of social support, manpower, supplies and intelligence from the Chinese population, especially the rural squatter population which totalled close to half a million.¹ Soon after the outbreak of hostilities, the colonial authorities realised that the successful suppression of the insurgency depended not merely upon an effective military strategy but also upon cutting the guerillas off from the major source of their life support system - the squatter population. The Briggs plan, which envisaged the resettlement of squatters in New Villages, was conceived to isolate the squatter population from the guerillas - in Maoist analogy, to separate the fish from the water.

1. A. Short's study, The Communist Insurrection in Malaya 1948-1960, Frederick Muller Ltd., London, 1975, is the most comprehensive account of the Emergency. Other studies on the subject include O'Ballance, E., Malaya: The Communist Insurgent War, 1948-1960, Faber & Faber Ltd., London, 1966; Clutterbuck, R., The Long, Long War: The Emergency in Malaya 1948-1960, Cassell & Co. Ltd., London, 2nd ed., 1967; Henniker, M.C.A., Red Shadow Over Malaya, William Blackwood & Sons Ltd., Edinburgh and London, 1955; Barber, N., Malaya 1948-1960: The War of the Running Dogs, Fontana Paperback, London, 1971.

Lacking administrative resources and experience in dealing with the Chinese community directly, the colonial authorities had to rely on the MCA to help implement the New Village programme and other counter-insurgency measures affecting the Chinese.

The MCA's officially designated role as hand maiden of counter-insurgency shaped the nature of party functions and activities during its first years of existence. The exigencies of the Emergency and the squatter resettlement programme resulted in the MCA carrying out social welfare and mutual aid work traditionally performed by voluntary associations. The MCA increasingly gained a reputation more as an umbrella CCC-huay kuan organisation than a political party, an outcome which the westernised leadership attempted to rectify in a campaign to reorganise the party.

3.1 The Fundamental Issue: the Squatter Problem

The squatter problem was a central issue in the government's counter-insurgency effort and thus of critical concern to the MCA. The problem emerged in the early 1930s when mass unemployment drove thousands of workers and their families from tin mines, estates and factories to live off the land. These migrants to the countryside had difficulty in obtaining legal titles to the land they cultivated, as the colonial administration had attached stringent terms to non-Malay land ownership as reflected in the 1933 Amendment of the Malay

Reservations Act.¹ By 1940, it was estimated that farmers illegally squatting on Malay Reservations, Forest Reserves, State Mining and Agricultural Land as well as privately-owned estates had reached 150,000.²

The squatter population increased dramatically during the Japanese Occupation. Many urban dwellers, joined also by rubber tappers and tin mine workers moved to the countryside to cultivate food and seek refuge from the excesses of the Japanese Military Administration. The Japanese administration, for its part, encouraged cultivation of agricultural land by non-Malays to meet its objectives of self-sufficiency in food production. By the end of the war, the squatter population, which was largely Chinese in composition, had grown to close to half a million.

The surrender of the Japanese and the establishment of the British Military Administration (BMA) introduced no changes in the squatter situation. A communication from the BMA to the Colonial Office stated that in view of the post-war food crisis, the BMA

1. P. Kratoska argues that contrary to a belief which has gained general currency in Malaysian historical writings, the colonial government had encouraged non-Malay cultivation of rice land until the onset of the Depression, when it gave in to Malay desire to restrict non-Malay land usage. Kratoska, P.H., "Rice Cultivation and the Ethnic Division of Labour in British Malaya", Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol.24, no.2, April 1982, pp.280-314. Studies which discuss the squatter problem include, Nyce, R., Chinese New Villages in Malaysia: A Community Study, Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, Singapore, 1973; Francis Loh Kok Wah, "Beyond the Tin Mines: The Political Economy of Chinese Squatter Farmers in the Kinta New Villages, Malaysia", Ph.D. thesis, University of Cornell 1980; and Short, The Communist Insurrection....

2. Nyce, p.xxx.

found it essential that all government forest lands which had been cleared and cultivated during the Japanese Occupation must continue to be used, rent free, by squatters. In addition the BMA wanted the Colonial Office to authorise the granting of free concessions for squatters to cultivate cleared rubber lands.¹ With the easing of the food crisis, the Malayan Union government was pressed to review its squatter policy. In late 1946, the Department of Forestry decided to reclaim the 150,000 acres of forest reserves which had been felled during the Occupation and the BMA period.² The strongest lobby which put pressure on the government to change its squatter policy was the United Planting Association of Malaya (UPAM). The UPAM wanted to have back 70,000 acres of rubber land occupied by squatters, for the new planting and replanting of rubber; it urged the government to change existing land legislation to facilitate an immediate and simplified method of evicting squatters from rubber plantations.³

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1. Communication from the BMA to the Colonial Office, no signature, c. December 1945, Malayan Union File, 5706/46(A).
 2. See communication from the Acting Resident Commissioner, Negri Sembilan, to the Chief Secretary of the Malayan Union, 10 September 1946, M.U. File, 5705/46(1), and circular entitled "Removal of Illegal Occupants of State Land", mimeo., n.d., M.U. File, 5705/46(3).
 3. See letter from H.K. Dimoline, Secretary of UPAM to the Chief Secretary of the Malayan Union, 6 December 1947, M.U. File, 4949/47(10). Dimoline pointed out that under the existing laws, the issuing of court orders for eviction were "slow, cumbersome and expensive". See also letter from the President of UPAM to Sir Edward Gent, 24 May 1948; M.U. File, 4949/47(25).

Confronted by these demands, the government found itself in a quandary. When the BMA issued free temporary occupation licenses to squatters for a period of two years, starting from January 1946, it made no provisions for looking after the welfare of squatters in the event of their being evicted from rubber estates and forest reserves. During the immediate post-war years, squatters had opened up huge tracts of land miles away from government administrative centres, and the Malayan Union Government found it lacked manpower in the District Offices and Agricultural Department to control and administer them. Its unease over the problem is reflected in an exchange of minutes between the Deputy Chief Secretary and the Assistant Economic Secretary, the former confessing that he had not known "that this problem was so vast and complicated".¹ At a loss for a solution, the government procrastinated until it was forced to take action with the outbreak of the Emergency, when it became apparent that Chinese squatters were providing food, supplies, intelligence and recruits to the MCP.

During the Occupation the MCP and its military wing, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), had built up a sense of solidarity with the squatter population through its anti-Japanese campaign. Immediately after the war, the MCP established itself as the de facto government in the rural areas before British rule was properly re-established; thus, when the MCP began its militant campaign to liberate Malaya from British imperialistic rule, it had

1. Minutes sheet addressed to the Deputy Chief Secretary from the Acting Economic Secretary dated 10 May 1948, including comments by the Deputy Chief Secretary dated 18 May 1948, Federal Secretariat File, 2318/38.

little difficulty in re-asserting its previous power over the squatter population. Many squatters were enrolled as part-time workers in the Min Yuen (People's Organisation) when it was formed in early 1949 by the MCP as an auxiliary fighting and propaganda unit.¹

Faced with this threat, the government finally stated a definitive policy on the squatter problem. During a meeting between the High Commissioner, the Acting Solicitor-General and officials of the UPAM, the government declared that eviction of squatters could be made only when alternative land was obtained, and that the resettled squatters be given security of tenure initially in the form of temporary occupation licenses which could subsequently be converted to permanent titles. It directed the state and settlement governments to examine the availability of state land which could be alienated for squatter resettlement.² A Squatter Committee was set up in January 1949 to advise the government on measures to be taken to bring squatters under its direct administrative control. The Committee's recommendations were:³

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1. For more information on the Min Yuen, see Short, pp.24, 111-112, 213.
 2. "Note on a meeting held at King's House on 15 June 1948 to discuss the eviction of squatters on estates", mimeo., M.U. File, 4949/1947. See also "Note of a meeting held in the Committee Room of the Federal Legislative Council Chamber to discuss the Squatter Problem", mimeo., M.U. File, 4949/47(40a).
 3. Report of Committee appointed by His Excellency the High Commissioner to Investigate the Squatter Problem, Council Paper no.3 of 1949, Government Press, Kuala Lumpur.

- (a) that wherever possible squatters should be settled in areas already occupied by them;
- (b) that where such settlement of existing areas is impossible, an alternative suitable area should be made available for resettlement;
- (c) that squatters who refused settlement or resettlement on the terms offered should be liable to compulsory deportation;
- (d) that the T.O.L. (temporary occupation licensing) system under which most squatters secured titles to their land be modified to afford a greater security of terms to encourage acceptance of re-settlement and to establish confidence in the bonafides of the government.

The initial implementation of squatter resettlement was complicated by differences of opinion between the Federal government and state authorities over the issue of land rights. Since the jurisdiction of land matters lay with state authorities, they asserted their prerogative by insisting that the eviction and resettlement of squatters be left to them without any interference from the Federal government. The state governments were initially reluctant to act on squatter resettlement because they preferred to deport squatters. One Mentri Besar (Chief Minister of the state government) considered an even more drastic way of solving the squatter problem. He suggested "burning out squatters and leaving them to work out their own salvation, i.e. by going into settled areas, towns and so on, or into other and temporarily less objectionable squatter areas, or best of all, slipping over the Siamese border."¹ Deportation to China as a solution to the squatter problem was rendered untenable by the Communist victory in China. By

1. Quoted from Short, p.180.

November 1949, the CCP had taken over all the southern ports in that country. Shipping services were dislocated and the repatriation process which the Malayan authorities had entered into with the Nationalist Government came to an end.¹ As a result of this, the state governments were forced to regard the squatters as part of the permanent population in Malaya, and to accept the need for their long-term settlement or resettlement.

In consequence, when Lt.-General Sir Harold Briggs arrived in Malaya on 22 March 1950 as the Director of Operations, to plan, co-ordinate and direct anti-insurgency measures, he encountered little of the initial recalcitrance shown by the state governments on the subject of resettlement. He was able to concentrate the resources of both Federal and state governments on a comprehensive programme of resettling squatters in New Villages, known as the Briggs Plan. By the end of 1952, most of the resettlement had been completed: 470,509 squatters had been resettled in 440 New Villages.²

3.2 Government-MCA Liaison

The colonial administration relied heavily upon the middle-man services of the MCA to implement the New Village programme, for

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1. Federation of Malaya, Detention and Deportation during the Emergency in the Federation of Malaya, Council Paper No.24 of 1953, Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, p.14. By November 1950, however, new arrangements were made with the People's Republic of China and the repatriation programme was resumed on a much diminished scale.
 2. Reply from the Chief Secretary to question raised by Leung Cheung Ling, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 10 September 1952, p.355. Existing villages which were enlarged under the Briggs Plan were also termed "New Villages".

the government's acute lack of individuals expert in Chinese matters resulted in a "wholly inadequate liaison" between government, the villages and the resettlement areas.¹ In May 1950, Gurney informed the Colonial Secretary that the slowness in implementing the resettlement programme was due more to the shortage of officers having the administrative capacity to carry out their duties than to political unwillingness by the state governments to excise land from Malay reservations, or reluctance of Chinese to be resettled, or shortage of funds.² MCA office-holders were therefore appointed to serve on the government bodies which were formed to administer Emergency affairs and to implement counter-insurgency programmes. The most important of these was the Federal War Council created by Briggs, the Director of Operations, on 16 April 1950 to replace the Federal Legislative Council as the supreme emergency decision-making body. Briggs also set up a chain of State and Settlement War Executive Committees (SWEC) which took over the duties of State governments.³ A corresponding chain of Advisory Committees to the Federal War Council and the SWECs was established to keep "unofficials" informed about government policy and to obtain their advice on Emergency matters affecting the public. MCA representatives were invited to sit on the Federal War Council, a few of the SWECs

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1. See Appendix A to the Agenda dated 10 November 1951 for the Federal War Council Emergency Meeting, LYK Papers, SP3, Box 8.
 2. Telegram from Gurney to the Secretary of State of the Colonies dated 3 May 1950, C0717/201/52849/41(20).
 3. For more information on the composition and functions of the Federal War Council and the SWECs, see, Short, pp.239-240; O'Ballance, p.107; Clutterbuck, pp.57-60.

(Perak, for example) and on all the Advisory Committees.¹ The inclusion of MCA office holders on these committees built up an effective linkage and communication system between the Association and Government from the grass-roots to the national level.

Deliberations between the two parties in the Emergency Chinese Advisory Committee (chaired by the Secretary for Chinese Affairs) resulted in the institutionalisation of cooperation between the MCA and the local authorities in charge of squatter areas. The MCA was encouraged to form branches in all squatter areas where Communist activities were discernable, and local squatter representatives were appointed as MCA office holders. These squatter representatives held regular fortnightly meetings with MCA officials from the state and settlement branches as well as the Chief Police Officers of their areas to discuss matters of mutual concern. The MCA squatter representatives also furnished regular security reports on conditions in their villages to their respective District Officers.² Through this system, the government obtained a regular flow of intelligence at the grass-roots level concerning the movements of the Min Yuen and the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA, the military wing of the MCP). The squatter representatives were

1. Note of a meeting held at King's House on 29 November 1951, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 164.

2. See "A Scheme for Promoting Liaison and Co-operation between Squatter Areas and Local Authorities prepared by a Sub-Committee of the Emergency Chinese Advisory Committee on 10 May 1949, and subsequently approved by the Members of the Advisory Committee", mimeo., n.d., and "A Scheme for Promoting Liaison and Co-operation between Squatter Areas and Local Authorities prepared and recommended by the Emergency Chinese Advisory Committee", mimeo., 7 July 1949, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 144, No.3.

entrusted with the responsibility of keeping the local population informed about government emergency policies. They were required, for instance, to disseminate information regarding the consequences of paying protection money and supplying goods to terrorists, the ways available for squatters to pass on to the government any intelligence on the activities of terrorists, and the rewards offered for such information.¹ The MCA headquarters and the state branches prepared and distributed Emergency publicity in the form of written propaganda, and MCA spokesmen and interpreters accompanied Government Mobile Units during tours of squatter areas.²

In early 1951, MCA representatives from various branches ranging from state down to village levels were invited to sit on "Consultative Liaison Committees" which comprised representatives from the Police, the Special Branch and the Department of Chinese Affairs. The main functions of the MCA representatives in these committees were to assist Government in the screening, classification, release, rehabilitation and resettlement of detainees and Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEPs). MCA representatives were also present while police carried out the searching or screening of squatters.³

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1. "A Scheme for Promoting Liaison...", 7 July 1949, p.2.
 2. Minutes of the first meeting of the Emergency Chinese Advisory Committee on 5 April 1949, p.4, TCL Papers, SP3, Item 144.
 3. See circular issued by the Acting Commissioner of Police, W.D. Robinson, to all Chief Police Officers on the subject of co-operation with the MCA, 19 February 1951; and memorandum by the Director of Operations entitled "Chinese Co-operation — MCA Resolutions", mimeo., 1 February 1951, MCA headquarters.

Cooperation between the MCA and government was further strengthened through the appointment of more Chinese Affairs Officers at the state level under the control of the Federal and State Secretary for Chinese Affairs, and at the district level responsible to the State Secretary for Chinese Affairs and the District Officer. These Chinese Affairs Officers, a number of whom were Malayan Chinese, formed an important link between the government, the police and the Chinese community. At the lowest level, they dealt with all matters arising from squatter village committees.¹ It was in this grass-roots interaction between the Chinese Affairs Department, the MCA and the squatter committees, that the most vigorous and fruitful exchange between the government and the Chinese community occurred.

Relations between the MCA and government over Emergency affairs were not consistently cordial. Although MCA leaders were loyal government supporters, they often criticised the government for its heavy-handedness and insensitivity in the implementation of the New Village programme and other counter-insurgency measures directed at the squatter population. For example, in a widely publicised speech given a few months after the party's formation, party president Tan Cheng Lock stated that the insensitive handling of anti-insurgency measures by the authorities had caused much resentment and frustration among the Chinese. He stressed that such official reprisals against squatters for allegedly helping the guerillas as burning their villages and crops would drive them over

1. Appendix A to the Agenda dated 10 November 1951 for the Federal War Council Emergency Meeting,. See also, Short, p.240.

to the Communist camp.¹ On another occasion, Cheng Lock confided to an old friend, Sir George Maxwell, that the government must be blamed for the abuses and gross negligence arising from its re-settlement policy; the evacuation of resettlement areas in Mawai, Changang, Jenderam and Tras showed conclusively that "something was radically wrong" with the government's handling of resettlement.² The MCA Annual Report for 1954 concluded on a note which showed that party leaders were generally critical of the manner in which the government was implementing the counter-insurgency campaign:³

Certain actions taken by the Government had the effect of embittering some sections of the masses rather than of winning their hearts and minds. For example, there was the destruction recently of Nanong Sebrang New Village, and the removal of its Chinese inhabitants to another area 50 miles away. This latter village has long been known as a complete resettlement failure and yet the Chinese of Nanong Sebrang New Village were moved there, much against their will.

Another source of irritation is the continued detention of people. Prolonged detention and often unjustifiable on security grounds without recourse to the Court of Law is bound to create resentment and this can hardly be regarded as a means for winning the hearts and minds of the people.

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1. Address by Tan Cheng Lock at Taiping and Ipoh on 10 April 1949 on "The Chinese in Malaya", in Tan Cheng Lock, A Collection of Speeches, Ih Shih Press, Singapore, n.d., p.16.
 2. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Sir George Maxwell dated 18 December 1951, TCL Papers, TCL/V/232.
 3. Report of the Hon. Secretary General of the MCA to be submitted to the Seventh Annual Meeting of the General Committee on 1955, p.10.

These criticisms, however, did not aggravate relations between the MCA and Government, as the latter tolerated the "watch-dog" role the party took to protect the welfare of squatters. The one occasion when official anger was aroused was when the party invited Victor Purcell and Francis Carnell to prepare a report for the party concerning the impact of the Emergency on the Chinese community. At that time, Purcell was the Honorary Political Adviser to the MCA, a post which he held till April 1958.¹ During the course of his fieldwork in Malaya, Purcell had an interview with Templer, the outcome of which was recorded in his report to the MCA. Purcell observed that the High Commissioner made concessions to the MCA and the Chinese "purely as a matter of political expediency in order to assist in the ending of the Emergency", and that Templer was not interested in long-term objectives related to Chinese welfare, and showed a complete lack of sympathy with Chinese aspirations. Purcell also stated that Templer said that the Federal Constitution was "undoubtedly as bad as it could be" from the Chinese viewpoint, but he would not change it since it might offend the Malays, who were bearing 98% of the brunt of fighting the Communists; and he added: "If you give the Chinese an inch they will take an ell."²

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1. Letter from Purcell to T.H. Tan dated 8 April 1958, MCA headquarters. Purcell asked the MCA to accept his resignation as Hon. Adviser to the party since the position had been dormant for some years.
 2. Victor Purcell, "Report on a visit to Malaya from 20 August to 20 September 1952 at the invitation of the Malayan Chinese Association by Victor Purcell and Francis Carnell", mimeo., pp.2-3; TCL Papers, TCL/VI/V. In a letter to Cheng Lock written after his departure from Malaya, Purcell said that Templer had "insulted and intimidated" him and Carnell. He added that Templer made known his "hatred of the Chinese" to him, never dreaming that Purcell would dare to reveal what he said. Purcell to Cheng Lock, 13 February 1953; TCL Papers, TCL/10/21a.

Purcell's report, like his book on the Emergency, was strongly pro-Chinese and acutely critical of the government, particularly Templer.¹ Needless to say, Purcell's highly-charged criticisms of the High Commissioner placed the MCA, his sponsor, in an embarrassing position. For the most part, the MCA maintained a discreet silence on the subject, but Cheng Lock tried to reduce tension by manoeuvring diplomatically between the contenders. In October 1953, Cheng Lock wrote to Purcell informing him of a recent meeting he had with Templer: "... he Templer told me that he was certainly not anti-Chinese.... He was extremely friendly to me and his idea was to clear up whatever misunderstanding there might be between him and the Chinese here". At the same time, Cheng Lock tactfully assured Purcell: "As far as I am personally concerned I would always like to be guided by your advice and views in matters affecting the Malayan Chinese community".² Fortunately, no discernible damage was done to the MCA's relationship with Templer by the Purcell incident.

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1. Purcell, V., Malaya Communist or Free, Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1954. Some writers do not agree with Purcell's disparaging evaluation of Templer's administration of the Chinese during the Emergency. They point out that though Templer's collective punishment of the squatters of Tanjong Malim, Permatang Tinggi and Pekan Jabi was regarded by many as an unduly harsh method of forcing the Chinese to cooperate with the authorities, it was nevertheless his overall handling of counter-insurgency measures which succeeded in driving the MCP to retreat to the Malayan-Thai border. See, Short, pp.379-387; O'Ballance, Ch.6; Henniker, Ch.9; Clutterbuck, pp.79-85.
 2. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Victor Purcell dated 23 October 1953, LYK Papers, SP3, Box 18.

3.3 Party Activities During the Emergency

When Tan Cheng Lock addressed the inaugural meeting of the MCA in February 1949, he said: "In some quarters there is an inclination to blame the Chinese as a whole for the existence or continuation of terrorism in Malaya, from which they have suffered most atrociously and the greatest amount of injury".¹ In July of the previous year, Cheng Lock had written to Lord Listowel, Minister of State for Colonial Affairs, arguing that allegations about the Chinese refusing to cooperate with the government of Malaya were untrue. He stressed that the "overwhelming majority of the victims of the forces of terrorism" were Chinese, and pointed out: "... the Chinese community as a whole ... (is) in the most unenviable situation of being placed between two millstone /sic/ between which they stand to be crushed, or, to put it bluntly, between the devil and the deep sea. Should they give information or actively cooperate with the Government against the Malayan Communist Party, they or/and their families would simply be slaughtered by the guerrillas, whilst Government would be unable to protect them by reasonably preventive /sic/ measures".² Returning to the same theme a few years later, the MCA party president observed: "The Emergency was not only imperilling the lives of many Chinese and jeopardising the vital interests of our community, but there was also a tendency

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1. Speech by Tan Cheng Lock on 27 February 1959 at the MCA inaugural meeting, Kuala Lumpur. Tan Cheng Lock, A Collection of Speeches, Ih Shih Press, Singapore, n.d. p.4.
 2. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Lord Listowel dated 24 July 1948, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 133.

to call into question our traditional sense of loyalty to this land which we have made our permanent home".¹

MCA leaders were concerned to establish the Chinese community's loyalty to the government by taking the lead in mobilising Chinese support for the government counter-insurgency campaign. Once the party was established, the MCA top leadership began to look for many ways to raise party funds to undertake welfare work in the squatter resettlement schemes and to carry out other counter-insurgency work. The party raised money initially by asking for donations from Chinese business concerns and the community in general,² a method used traditionally by voluntary associations to raise funds for public welfare. By the end of 1949, it devised an innovative method of fund raising in the form of a party sweepstake (lottery).

In December 1949, the party's Honorary Treasurer, Khoo Teik Ee, instructed the state and settlement branches to set up sub-committees to promote the sale of lottery tickets among MCA members. Each ticket would cost Malayan \$1; 60% of gross sales would be distributed in prizes and the balance of 40% would be retained by the party for its welfare fund and for defraying administrative expenses.³ The first lottery, drawn at the end of February 1950,

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1. Speech by Tan Cheng Lock at the Annual Meeting of the MCA Central General Committee, 21 April 1951, TCL Papers, SP13, Ucapan Tan Cheng Lock, Item 35.
 2. Circular issued by the MCA Hon. Treasurer, Khoo Teik Ee, addressed to the general public, mimeo., July 1949.
 3. Circular issued by Khoo Teik Ee entitled "Unlimited Sweep for Members Only", mimeo., 17 December 1949; and, memorandum by Khoo Teik Ee entitled "MCA Sweepstake", mimeo., 20 June 1950.

increased party membership by almost 50%; total sales amounted to \$346,656 of which \$138,663 was retained for squatter resettlement work.¹ From January 1951, the sweepstake was renamed the "Million Dollar Lottery", with prizes amounting to \$600,000.

The MCA sweepstake was so popular that it was believed that lottery tickets were used as "unofficial" currency by some traders. Tan Siew Sin observed: "I understand that ... our lottery tickets are being used to finance trade between Malaya and neighbouring territories and hence are practically being accepted as legal tender in such countries...."² While Siew Sin's claim appears somewhat extravagant, it is clear that the party lottery was an uncommonly successful method of raising party funds and attracting new members.

Between the holding of its first lottery in February 1950 to the time when the government banned it in mid-1953 (for reasons discussed in Chapter 4), the MCA raised several million Malayan dollars, of which four million was spent on Emergency work.³ The

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1. Extract from Federation of Malaya Political Report for February 1950, CO537/52849/48/50(2).
 2. Letter from Tan Siew Sin to Lau Pak Khuan dated 24 April 1952, MCA headquarters.
 3. The MCA headquarters compiled an inventory entitled "List of Welfare Expenditure approved by the Standing Finance Sub-Committee of the Malayan Chinese Association on Settlement, Re-settlement and regrouping of Squatters". The inventory listed every item of expenditure incurred during the period when the lottery was held, i.e. early 1950 to mid 1953. The nature of each item of expenditure, the amount spent and the date it was paid out were all noted.

major areas of Emergency-related expenditure were: (a) squatter resettlement, (b) adult education, (c) detainee welfare, (d) manpower recruitment and (e) miscellaneous services.

3.3.1 Squatter Welfare

The resettlement of nearly half a million people who were forcibly moved to fenced-in areas with no infrastructure to support economic and social livelihood was an extremely painful experience for the evacuees. These squatters were also subjected to strict and often harsh police and military surveillance made possible by the promulgation of a series of Emergency Regulations. These legislations proscribed almost all civil rights; provided for detention without trial; allowed collective punishment of whole villages; imposed curfews, food control and gate searches; and severely restricted the movement of the squatters.¹

It must be said, however, that the authorities attempted to make life tolerable in the New Villages by providing a measure of social amenities in the form of schools, clinics, community halls and recreational centres. Electricity (necessary for the lighting of perimeter fences) and piped water were also brought to these areas,² and

1. For more information on the control of the squatter population, See Short, chs. 7, 9 and 15.

2. These facilities rarely existed in Malay villages during this period. Fearing that Malay hostility might be aroused, the Attorney-General cautioned the government not to over-concentrate its activities in the New Villages at the expense of the Malay villages. See Minutes of the Federal War Council Meeting on 8 February 1952 (item 6), TCL Papers, SP13, Item 170.

financial assistance was given to squatters to build homes, grow food and raise livestock. Most important, the Federal government worked hard to persuade the state authorities to alienate land to New Villages and grant land titles to squatters in order to strengthen their allegiance to the government. However, the state government moved slowly in alienating land to the New Villages. By the end of 1954, only about 50,000 acres of state lands in the immediate vicinity of the New Villages had been alienated for squatters to grow food.¹ Furthermore, the state government attached stringent time periods to the land titles. Penang, for example, granted temporary occupation licenses lasting 33 years for house, shop and agricultural lots. Malacca and Kedah made an allowance of 30 years, while Perak issued titles for a maximum period of only two years, though this time limit was later extended to 33 years.²

Government expenditure on squatter resettlement and welfare - which amounted up to \$2,500,000 on land acquisition and over \$100,000,000 on general resettlement by March 1954³ - was

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1. Speech by Templer, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 25 November 1953, p.756, and speech by Dr. Ismail, Member for Natural Resources, 31 March 1954, p.17.
 2. See the following circular: "Land Tenure Policy in Regard to New Villages and Associated Agricultural Land", issued by the government of the Settlement of Penang and Province Wellesley, mimeo., n.d., and "Land Titles for Re-settled Squatters", issued by the Perak State Secretariat, mimeo., 5 November 1952. See also: letters from the Hon. Secretaries of the Malacca and Kedah/Perlis Settlement and State Branches to the MCA Hon. Secretary General on the subject of land leases, dated 29 July 1952 and 16 July 1952 respectively. MCA headquarters.
 3. Speech by Dr. Ismail, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 31 March 1954, p.17.

augmented by MCA funds derived from its lottery. Although the MCA share of squatter expenditure - a total of \$4,000,000 by the time the lottery was terminated in mid-1953 - was modest in comparison to the official outlay, its contribution was sometimes crucial in the implementation of a few key resettlement programs. For example, the first organised, large scale resettlement scheme at Mawai undertaken by the Johore government was made possible by the sum of \$400,000 advanced from MCA funds.¹ The government acknowledged that the MCA had "played an important part in resettlement schemes" and had "assisted with funds, materials and personal exhortation".²

The bulk of MCA funds was spent on subsidising the government's education program in the New Villages. In 1952, for example, the government spent a total of \$2,126,700 on the construction and equipment of 228 schools in the New Villages, nearly all using Chinese as the medium of instruction, with a total enrolment of 46,745 pupils and 1,262 teachers.³ The MCA contributed a total sum of nearly \$1,000,000 during that year towards the New Village education program thus making it possible for nearly

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1. Federation of Malaya, The Squatter Problem in the Federation of Malaya in 1950, Council Paper No.14 of 1950, Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, Appendix 'D'.
 2. Federation of Malaya, Resettlement and the Development of New Villages in the Federation of Malaya, 1952, Council Paper No.33 of 1952, Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, p.17.
 3. Appendix to Templer's Annual Address, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 19 November 1952, p.495.

three quarters of the New Villages to have schools by the end of 1952.¹

The MCA also assisted squatters financially in the building of houses and fences, and the purchase of livestock and agricultural products and other particulars to promote self-sufficiency. Finally, sums of money were spent in conjunction with government projects to provide social and recreational facilities in the New Villages. These included the construction of community centres, medical dispensaries and clinics, children's creches, youth clubs, basketball courts, and the establishment of boy scout and girl guide movements.

MCA assistance towards squatter welfare was not solely financial. The party also played a major role in bringing to light problems and abuses arising from resettlement, to ensure that the process was carried out in as humane a manner as possible. The MCA employed Y.C. Kang as Agent-General with special duties to enquire into the report on living conditions in newly set-up resettlement projects. Kang and other MCA leaders submitted several reports to the government recommending measures to mitigate the trauma of resettlement. These included: giving adequate notice (i.e. more than the usual notice of three days) on dates of removals; steps to minimise squatter losses in personal property during removals; provision of proper sanitation facilities in the New Villages prior to the arrival of the settlers; provision of adequate

1. Minutes of the MCA Sixth Cabinet Meeting, 10 November 1952.

financial and technical assistance to work the land upon arrival; and most important, careful selection of suitable sites for resettlement.¹ This MCA watchdog role helped prevent excessive bureaucratic disregard for squatter welfare during resettlement moves.

Besides making representations on behalf of squatters concerning adverse living conditions in New Villages, the MCA also attempted to check abuses arising from over-zealous application of the Emergency Regulations. For example, in early 1951, after a series of terrorist incidents in the area, the inhabitants of Sungkop Village in Kedah were collectively punished by the levying of a \$25,000 fine, and the closure of all shops for three months, during which they were allowed to open for one hour per day. The Kedah MCA finally succeeded in persuading the Mentri Besar (Chief Minister) to reduce the fine to \$5,000 and reduce the length of time for the closure of shops.² Machap Village was another case where the MCA succeeded in tempering the harshness of punitive measures. Machap Village was known to have supplied food to the guerillas. The police intended to cut off this supply line by wholesale detention of squatters and immediate evacuation of the village.

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1. Letter from the President, MCA Kedah/Perlis State Branch to the Agent-General, 16 September 1952; letter from the Hon. Secretary of the MCA Perak State Branch to the Perak State Agricultural Officer, 10 March 1953; and "Report of the MCA Agent-General: Yong Peng Resettlement", mimeo., 7 June 1952.
 2. Address by Soon Cheng Sun, President of the MCA Kedah/Perlis Branch, at the Special Meeting of the MCA Kedah/Perlis Branch on 3 May 1952.

The Malacca MCA approached the authorities and persuaded them to drop the idea of detention. Evacuation was to go ahead, but a period of grace of one month was obtained before the villagers were to be moved to Machap Bahru.¹

3.3.2 Adult Education

The MCA New Village adult education program, publicised as having been started to "eradicate illiteracy, raise standards of knowledge, improve living techniques and cultivate good citizens for this country",² formed the core of the counter-insurgency psychological campaigns in the New Villages. A report prepared by T.H. Tan, the Chief Executive Secretary of the party stated: "... our work in the New Villages would go beyond the pale of a literacy campaign. The task ahead of us was one of winning over the adults of the New Villages from Communist influence, if not domination".³ The chairman of the Social, Benevolent and Cultural sub-committee, Leung Cheung Ling who was entrusted with the running of the adult education and public library program, noted in a memorandum that the Chinese library units were formed in the New Villages "as a measure to combat the ideological war and to promote culture and education

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1. Report of the Malacca MCA Branch to be submitted to the Second Annual General Meeting on 31 December 1952, p.4.
 2. "Rules for the Formation of Literacy and Adult Education Classes", mimeo., n.d.
 3. Report by the Chief Executive Secretary entitled "Adult Education", mimeo., 15 October 1952, p.1, TCL Papers, TCL/V/315.

in Malaya".¹ The importance of psychological warfare as a platform in the MCA Emergency program is reflected in Tan Cheng Lock's statement that the party existed "primarily ... to win the hearts and mind of the people to the side of the free world of democracy, and thus prevent the people from going over to the side of the Communists".²

In its ideological venture to combat communism, the MCA was aided by the leading self-professed guardian of democracy - the American government. The Director of the United States Information Services (USIS) in Singapore informed the MCA that he would support its adult education program "to the limit of his budget" and assured the party that his USIS officials would work closely with MCA officials in the New Villages. The USIS did not make direct financial payments to the MCA but underwrote publication costs of "desirable literature", mainly textbooks in Chinese with a strong anti-Communist content for use in the adult education as well as the public library program.³

The MCA's effort in opening public libraries was supported by another American body, the Committee for Free Asia, the forerunner of the Asia Foundation, which funds, up to the present day,

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1. Letter from Leung Cheung Ling to the Hon. Secretary-General dated 4 August 1954, TCL Papers, TCL/15/105.
 2. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Templer dated 15 May 1953, MCA headquarters.
 3. Report by the Chief Executive Secretary entitled "Adult Education", pp.1-2. The USIS is an overseas agency of the US government responsible for US official information activities, and cultural and educational programs.

educational and cultural exchanges between Malaysia and the US. Robert Sheeks, a member of the Committee for Free Asia, formed an Advisory Committee in conjunction with the MCA to supervise the running of the Malayan Public Library Association, which set up a number of public libraries throughout the country. By 1956, 85 libraries had been established; smaller ones were located in the New Villages while larger operations were located in towns such as Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Taiping, Kuala Pilah and Raub.¹

The party's adult education program, which started in mid 1952, was well attended. In 1953, the program ran a total of over 1,000 classes with an enrolment of some 35,000 students. It employed 4,000 teachers, helped by a small number of MCA voluntary teachers. Out of these 1,000 classes, 35% were courses on Chinese language, 30% on English, 30% on arithmetic and 5% on Malay and other subjects. The program was fairly widespread; in Johore for example, out of 60 New Villages, 42 ran a total of 293 classes, with an enrolment of 10,000 pupils.²

An interesting collection of statistics was prepared by the party giving a breakdown of the age structure and occupation of pupils attending the classes. On a nation-wide basis, 20% of the attendants fell between the ages of 12 to 14 years, 50% between 15

1. Report of the MCA Hon. Secretary General to be submitted to the Eighth Annual Meeting of the Central General Committee on 20 May 1956, p.2. TCL Papers, SP3, List of Printed Materials, No.21, and Malayan Mirror, Vol.2, no.12, 30 June 1954.

2. Malayan Mirror, Vol.1, no.2, 28 June 1953.

to 18 years, and 30% over 18 years. Occupation statistics based on the Selangor classes revealed that 34.0% of the attendants were rubber tappers, 20.0% domestic workers, 4.0% mining labourers, 2.5% farmers, 2.5% merchants and 37.0% were labourers including carpenters and other artisans. Of these attendees, 20% were classified as completely illiterate and 80% slightly illiterate.¹ The statistics showed that the Chinese working class within the younger age group constituted the largest single social group which took advantage of the MCA adult education program. While one is unable to draw any conclusions from the statistics regarding the efficacy of the program as a counter-insurgency psychological measure, it can be said that the program was popular because it offered opportunities for self-improvement for illiterate and semi-illiterate Chinese working class youths in the rural areas.

3.3.3 Detainees

The question of detainees interned under Emergency Regulations 17, 17C and 17D, was an urgent consideration of Emergency policy. Emergency Regulation 17 made provisions for the detention of activists and suspects for a period up to two years without trial, during which the detainees need not be informed on what grounds they were being held. Regulation 17C provided for the deportation of detainees and their dependents other than those who were Federal

1. Report entitled "MCA Social, Benevolent and Cultural Sub-Committee: Statistics on Literacy and Adult Education Classes", mimeo., 23 February 1953, LYK Papers, SP3, Box 2.

citizens and British subjects. Regulation 17D paved the way for collective detention of groups of people who were suspected of having aided, abetted or consorted with bandits, of having suppressed evidence from the authorities or of illegally possessing arms.¹ To ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of its control over the movement of the squatter population, the government introduced a system of national registration whereby a person apprehended by the police without his identity card was liable to immediate detention.²

By the end of 1948, detention camps were opened to house detainees who were arrested as a result of the Emergency Regulations. Six detention camps had been established by March 1952, at Ipoh, Port Swettenham (now Port Kelang), Muar, Tanjong Bruas, Kluang and Marjeedi (Johore Bahru).³ In addition, special rehabilitation centres were established where detainees were taught elementary technical skills such as carpentry and electric wiring so that they could find employment upon their release.⁴ Squatter detainees who were considered suitable for resettlement after the police had no more case for detaining them were subsequently moved to New Villages. Mawai

1. Detention and Deportation during the Emergency in the Federation of Malaya, p.8. See also Short, pp.159, 184, 188.

2. Short, p.142.

3. Information provided by the Secretary of Defence, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 19 March 1952, p.33.

4. Detention and Deportation..., p.11.

New Village, for example, which was financed largely from MCA funds, was resettled by detainees from the Majeedi Camp.

Between June 1948 and February 1953, 29,828 people were detained under Emergency Regulation 17. Out of these, 11,083 were eventually released. At the same time a further 10,146 were held under Emergency Regulation 17D, and an additional 24,036 detainees and their dependents were repatriated, almost all to China.¹

The detention question was a major preoccupation of the MCA because the party considered the legal safeguards governing the detainees' right to appeal to be inadequate. A number of the MCA Federal Legislative Council spoke up against the detention regulations: Ng Sui Cam brought the Council's attention to the disproportionately large numbers of people who had been detained during the first few months of the Emergency, commenting that the very number indicated that the innocent had also been held together with the guilty. Leong Yew Koh stated that many hundreds had been arrested without trial and inquiry and pointed out that though Advisory Committees had been formed a few months previously to enquire into the arrests, so far not one single arrest had been dealt with.² On another occasion, Tan Siew Sin wanted the government to take steps to allay public anxiety regarding allegations that persons held in police custody were subjected to physical violence.³

1. Detention and Deportation..., p.6 and Appendix B.

2. Speeches by Ng Sui Cam and Leong Yew Koh, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 5 October 1948, B.474.

3. Speech by Tan Siew Sin, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 19 September 1951, p.210.

The major objectives of the MCA's work on detainees was to ensure that justice was properly administered and detainee welfare adequately safeguarded. As in the case of squatter welfare, work related to detainees necessitated constant communication between MCA office holders, the authorities and the squatter population, which made up the largest number of detainees. Party branches located in New Villages formed special sub-committees to keep a close watch on detainee problems. MCA local leaders used the Consultative Liaison Committee - bodies formed in New Villages comprising representatives from the police, Special Branch, Department of Chinese Affairs, and the MCA to assist the government in the screening, classification, release, rehabilitation and resettlement of detainees and Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEPs) - to advance the interests of detainees and their families and to seek redress for cases where justice had not been done.

In early 1951 the MCA prepared a comprehensive report outlining how the party could work with the authorities and how detainees' welfare could be safeguarded. Its major recommendations were:¹

- (a) that MCA representatives be allowed to assist officers in the Chinese Affairs Department in the screening of detainees to ascertain whether they should be held or released;
- (b) that MCA representatives be appointed to the Boards of Inspection of the various detention camps;

1. Report to be submitted to the Annual meeting of the General Committee to be held on 21 April 1951, pp.3-4.

- (c) that liaison be established between the Chief Police Officers and the various MCA branches concerning all matters arising from detention;
- (d) that each squatter area have a Chinese Council of Ketua (headmen) to act as liaison between security forces and inhabitants of the area;
- (e) that any detainee must be notified of his right to lodge objections against his detention order;
- (f) that the government revise its list of detainees and release on bond those whom the authorities had no real case against;
- (g) that the government provide a definite scheme of employment for detainees and surrendered bandits;
- (h) that deportees be transported at the expense of the government to their native places after arrival at any port in China;
- (i) that wives and children of detainees who were to be deported be allowed to remain if they did not wish to accompany the deportees;
- (j) that minors born in the Federation and eligible to apply for Federal citizenship should not be deported.

These recommendations, most of which appeared to have been heeded by the authorities, helped to ensure that justice was administered as correctly as possible. Furthermore, the party collected case histories of detainees who were believed to have been wrongly detained. The four cases quoted below give an idea of the problems MCA representatives tried to deal with:¹

CASE 1: Detainee No.7432, Ipoh Detention Camp. Interviewed on 7 October 1952

The person was a Cantonese male aged 35, born in Menglembu in Perak. He had some Chinese primary education, owned a small tin mine and timber logging business, and was married with five children.

1. These case studies are kept at the MCA headquarters.

He was arrested on 14 December 1951. His statement read:

In or about the month of August 1950, bandits came to our mining kongsi and took away the identity cards of the labourers.... I was in the kongsi at the time but the bandits were strangers to me.... The bandits came again to our kongsi after a month or so. They again robbed the labourers of their identity cards. On this occasion I was not there. I have never given any food supply or contributed money to the bandits.

I have done nothing to merit this arrest and detention. I imagine that someone else wanted me out of the way. I cannot say who it was but in order to get me out of the way, I believe the services of a Surrendered Enemy Personnel was obtained to put me into trouble.

I say this because some time before my arrest, a young man of about 20 years approached me for a loan of \$50. When he approached me for the loan, he was wearing civilian clothes. I did not know that he was a Surrendered Enemy Personnel at that time but I did not give him the loan. When I was arrested by the jungle squad, it was the same man who pointed me out to them. On that day he was wearing jungle green uniform similar to that of the jungle squad.

The MCA Agent-General's recommendation to the Secretary of Defence read: "I believe his statement made to me to be true ... I would therefore recommend that his case be given a quick review in order that he may not have to be detained longer than necessary".

CASE 2: Detainee No.884, Port Swettenham Detention Camp.
Interviewed on 18 March 1953

The detainee was a Hokkien male, aged 20, born in Dengkil in Negri Sembilan. He had three years of Chinese education and worked as a rubber tapper. He was arrested on 30 July 1952. He testified that soldiers came while he was tapping rubber and arrested him:

I was the only person arrested and the reason for my arrest was as follows:

My identity card was asked for. I had only a temporary identity card which I produced. My original Identity Card has been handed in by me to the District Office for replacement on account of the card having been damaged. When I handed in the original I was given a temporary Identity Card.

When I produced my temporary Identity Card to the soldiers there were \$2 in one dollar notes enclosed in this paper. I kept the temporary Identity Card in my purse and I forgot to take out the \$2 when I went out to work in the morning.

I was therefore arrested because I had \$2 enclosed in my Identity Card which was kept in my purse.

Asked if he had any enemies in the area, he replied:-

None, except one Lim Leong San who is a coffee shop keeper in Dengkil and who also sells cooked food (i.e. Mee Hoon). I quarrelled with him because I complained about the cup of "meehoon" supplied to me when I went to his shop for lunch. The vegetable had not been properly washed and there was a vegetable worm in the cup. I have had a few mouthfuls before I noticed the worm. I complained about it and I refused to pay him. The price was \$1.20. I believe that he (Lim Leong San) has informed against me either before or after my arrest.

After my arrest and detention my mother came to see me. My mother informed me that Lim Leong San had sent one Ah Khim Soh to see my father after my arrest. Ah Khim Soh told my father that Lim Leong San could help me out if my father would spend a sum of \$500. My father did not entertain the proposal.

When he was asked whether he had given money or food to the Communists he denied having done so.

The Agent-General's recommendation was: "Judging from the detainee's demeanour and out-spoken attitude I believe that he had been truthful. The detainee struck me as a decent young man and a dutiful son.... If you should consider that it is not possible to release him now then I would suggest that he be sent to the Rehabilitation Camp in Taiping".

CASE 3: Detainee No.A/25895 in Majeedi Camp. Interviewed
on 28 April 1953

The detainee, aged 48, was arrested for being in the company of Communist guerillas. He was born in China and came to Malaya 28 years ago. He owned about 22 acres of rubber land and a house in Triang New Village, and was married with five children. He was arrested on 20 December 1951. He stated that he was visited and harassed by Communist terrorists because he was a member of the Kuomintang which he had joined soon after the liberation of Malaya from the Japanese. His statement read:

Sometime in 1949 the head of the Triang Kuomintang Branch named Tee Cheow Yeam was killed by bandits in Triang Town. About one month after Tee Cheow Yeam was killed, 3 bandits visited my house one night between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. My door was shut at the time. The bandits ordered me to open my door by speaking in Malay. I thought that the security people were outside and opened my door. It was when they entered my house that I became aware that they were bandits.... One of the bandits held a short gun at me - pointing it close at my stomach. The other two bandits also had short guns. The bandit who held a gun at my stomach ordered me to produce my Kuomintang membership certificate. He said that he knew I was a Kuomintang member. I was in great fright. I did not deny that I was a Kuomintang member but I said that I did not have a membership certificate. The bandit then said that if I did not produce it within a week he would deal with me severely. The bandits did not search my house. They then went away. They did not take anything from me.

The Agent-General's recommendation to the Secretary of Defence was that the order of detention and repatriation should be cancelled.

CASE 4: Detainee No.8449-A/206114, Ipoh Detention Camp
Interviewed on 31 April 1953

The detainee, aged 50, was born in China. He was a rubber tapper, married with five children. He lived with his family in Sungei Patang Estate in Pahang behind estate labourers' lines which were fenced in. He was arrested on 5 February 1952. Upon his arrest, he was told that a Surrendered Enemy Personnel had informed the authorities that he was a member of the Communist-led Labour Union. He denied that he was a member of the Labour Union and said that the only party he belonged to was the MCA. His statement said:

... sometime in May 1950 bandits came to my house and took away my identity card and that of my wife. The bandits came about 8 p.m. Two bandits entered my house. Both were armed with (short) guns.... I recognised one of the bandits.... He was known as YIP WAI CHOON.... I knew him when he was a boy during the time when I was a vegetable gardener in Lanchang.... It was YIP WAI CHOON the bandit who took away our identity cards that night. I reported the matter to the Police at Karak. I did not give the name of the bandit. I was in great fear.

He went on to say that his brother had been murdered by bandits in December 1949. After killing him, the bandits robbed his family.

He continued:

My sister-in-law told me that YIP WAI CHOON was one of the bandits who killed her husband. My deceased brother was also a member of the MCA. During that period, we were all afraid to admit to anyone that we were members of the MCA.

I did not know who was the S.E.P. who gave information against me, but if it was YIP WAI CHOON, then his motive would be to get me out of the way in order to save himself from being prosecuted for murder.

The Agent-General recommended that the Secretary of Defence should reconsider the detention order of the above.

Squatters were often forced, under threat to life and property, to give assistance to the guerillas, but duress was no excuse, for under Emergency Regulation 17 anyone was liable for detention even if he was only seen in the company of a guerilla. The detainees in case studies 1, 3 and 4 were visited by guerillas and this alone provided sufficient cause for their arrest. As can be seen from Case 2, people might be arrested due to false information given in order to settle personal scores. Moreover, informers gave false information because it was an easy way of extorting money from the victim's family, or more often, of obtaining money from the Special Branch which paid cash for such information. Since those accused were presumed guilty, it is likely that a high proportion of innocent people were detained.

MCA party records of the early 1950s confirm the case studies' evidence that MCA and KMT supporters were singled out as targets by the MCP.¹ Several hundred MCA members were murdered during the Emergency by Communist guerillas, and the party paid out compensation to families whose breadwinners had died at the hands of the MCP or were detained on apparently planted charges such as those described in case studies 3 and 4.

Given the fact that detainees had little means of redressing injustice, the MCA provided a crucial source of defence through its access to officialdom. The party's efforts in obtaining the release

1. See, for example, Annual Report of the MCA Selangor State Branch 1951, p.12. Annual Report of the MCA Muar Branch for 1952, p.3; Annual Report of the MCA Malacca State Branch for 1953, p.4.

of detainees were not entirely futile, for various branches reported some successful results of their intervention with the authorities on behalf of detainees. For instance, the Negri Sembilan State branch managed to obtain the release of 50 people out of 105 listed for detention. In another case, the Kelantan State branch reported that on 9 March 1956, after having made representations to the Kelantan authorities, most of the 24 villagers from Gua Musang who were detained were released on bond.¹

Apart from working for the release of detainees, the MCA urged the government to improve conditions in detention camps and to make the transition back to civilian life easier for Surrendered Enemy Personnel. On 15 November 1949, for instance, the president of the Johore State branch wrote to the Secretary for Chinese Affairs about the sub-human living conditions in the Kluang Detention Camp. He pointed out that the camp was grossly overcrowded; there were 1,883 detainees when the full capacity was fixed at 1,500. Inmates there also suffered from malnutrition, and one detainee had died from beri-beri.² The party also distributed money, clothing and food to the inmates of detention camps. Party leaders used their influence to obtain jobs for released detainees, and gave cash relief to help them readjust to civilian life.³

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1. Minutes of the MCA Sixth Cabinet Meeting on 10 November 1952; Annual Report of the MCA Kelantan State Branch for 1956, p.6.
 2. Letter from Dr. M. Birchee, President, Johore Bahru MCA, to the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, 15 November 1949, MCA headquarters.
 3. See, Annual Report of the MCA Muar Branch for 1952, p.3; Report of the MCA Taiping Branch for the period 24 June 1951 to 4 September 1952, p.2.

3.3.4 Manpower Recruitment

When in 1951 the government passed an Emergency Bill on the conscription of manpower, directing 20,000 men of all races into the police force, the Chinese response was appallingly low.¹ Chinese youths between the call-up ages of 18-24 years moved from place to place to avoid service to call-up notices, 6,000 of them absconded to Singapore and several thousand others to Indonesia, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the People's Republic of China.² The response to the bill came mainly from Malays.

On 3 July 1952, the Federal Legislative Council passed a National Service Bill designed mainly to improve the recruitment of Chinese youths to the police and armed forces. The government had set up a Federation Regiment, and it hoped that 50% of its servicemen would be Chinese. More Chinese were also desired for other divisions such as the Boys' Company, the Federation Armoured Car Regiment and the Federation Engineer Squadron. However, the Chinese response was again abysmally poor. Application for the Federation Regiment was 81% Malay.³ By 31 October 1952, there were only 50 Chinese recruits in the Federation Regiment and 505 in the police force, or 0.003% and 0.089% respectively of the male Chinese population over 19 years.

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1. Speech by D.C. Watherston, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 20 September 1951, p.269.
 2. Tan Cheng Lock, "Memorandum on Manpower Conscription (A Chinese View)", mimeo., 19 December 1951, p.1, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 146.
 3. Singapore Standard, 4 December 1953.

By November 1954, Chinese recruitment into the Federation Regiment improved slightly, but the overall percentage of Chinese in the armed forces remained at 5.1% of the rank and file, and 3.3% at the officer level. The situation was hardly better in the police force: out of 50,000 policemen, only 2,059, or 4.1%, were Chinese.¹

MCA national leaders, seeing the call-up as much as a claim upon Chinese to demonstrate their loyalty to Malaya as a security measure, were as concerned as the government over the poor Chinese response. Speaking during the debate on the National Service Bill, Tan Siew Sin said: "We can probably never build up a national consciousness in this country, the diverse races living in this country can never feel a sense of oneness unless amongst other things we have a National Army comprising all races".² Moreover, during the first few years of the Emergency, two-thirds of all civilians killed by terrorists were Chinese, and it is not surprising that the party saw it was to the advantage of the Chinese if the defence forces were strengthened and Chinese participation in them increased.³

Although the MCA believed in the need to increase Chinese participation in the defence forces, it argued that conscription as

1. Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 18 November 1954, p.1036.

2. Speech by Tan Siew Sin, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 3 July 1952, p.300.

3. Circular issued by Tan Cheng Lock entitled "Direction of Man-power: the Need", mimeo., 18 July 1951, TCL Papers, TCL/1/30e-f.

required by the National Service Bill would not be supported by the Chinese community. Cheng Lock presented a memorandum to the Federal War Council outlining the reasons for Chinese failure to respond to conscription, and recommending an alternative scheme in the form of the Home Guard service.¹ He identified the reasons for the failure of Chinese recruitment as: the low level of Malayan-centred political consciousness exhibited by the community, low awareness of Malaya as a nation state requiring sacrifice of lives in its defence, and lack of political incentives for Chinese to sacrifice their lives for their adopted country. Over and above these considerations was a cultural tradition which put low value on soldiering as a profession, as is evident in the Chinese proverb: "Good steel is not made into nails, and good sons do not serve as soldiers". Traditional Chinese antipathy towards soldiering was probably related to the practice of ancestor worship which required sons, especially the eldest born, to remain with and outlive their parents to carry on ancestral worship rites which underpinned the Chinese religious-cultural system.

The memorandum pointed out that Malayan Chinese consciousness of duty, service, and group loyalty had not developed beyond that to family, clan, dialect group and community. Cheng Lock explained: "... universal conscription depends for public support on public education and ideals such as loyalty to the nation and social

1. Tan Cheng Lock, "Memorandum on Manpower Conscription...."

justice which are not yet generally held by the Malayan Chinese." He argued that the concept of national service with its connotation of sacrifice for the defence of nation state, king and country, did not make sense to the "present mentality of the Malayan Chinese", and added that the spirit of a Malayan nationhood was still lacking within the community. The "concept of general social justice" was of far less importance than the preservation of the immediate interests of the individual family. This lack of recognition of the fact that Chinese had a duty towards the upkeep of law and order during the Emergency resulted in Chinese youths evading their obligations, "abetted and encouraged by parents and friends".

Cheng Lock further pointed out that Chinese lacked political incentives to sacrifice their lives for Malaya. While Malays were granted the privileges of citizenship under the Federation of Malaya constitution, most Chinese had been denied the "full status, rights and privileges of Malayan citizenship". They were therefore reluctant to shoulder the "duties, responsibilities and obligations of citizenship" demanded of them by the Manpower Regulations. Chinese community leaders likewise singled out disenfranchisement as a major reason for the poor Chinese response to the call-up. For example, when over 100 delegates representing 60 bodies - which included the MCA, CCC, huay kuans, trade guilds and 19 schools in Malacca - met to discuss the National Service Bill, they stated that "Chinese should be accorded equal political rights along with the other communities in Malaya" to make them feel it was their "bounden duty ... to

protect and defend this country".¹

As national service was an untenable means of getting Chinese to join the armed forces, the MCA advised the government to find another course of action which would take into account "a traditional Chinese way of thought to bring the Chinese to battle". Cheng Lock argued that the only institutionalised method of committing more Chinese to fight the guerillas was through the Home Guard service, which was based on traditional principles of self-defence familiar to Chinese society. It may be recalled that lineages in nineteenth century Southeast China organised their men folk in local militias to defend their villages against outside attacks. Cheng Lock explained: "The Home Guard system makes use of the only universal loyalty, loyalty to family and locality". He listed the following advantages of the Home Guard system from the Chinese point of view: (1) a full time Home Guard service would introduce the Chinese gently to the military arts without arousing passive disobedience, which had been the reaction to the Manpower Regulations; (2) hardships caused by conscription into the police and armed forces and posting outside the locality would be avoided; parents would not lose sight of only sons, and they in turn would be at hand to perform the filial duties required of them; (3) financial hardships caused to families would be largely eliminated since the guard member could still help in the family agricultural or commercial interests while off duty; (4) the home guard

1. Minutes of the Joint Meeting of Representatives of Chinese Associations, Guilds, Societies and Schools in the Settlement of Malacca held to consider the National Service Bill on 16 March 1952.

would not have to fear bandit reprisals while at work since his duties would be within the perimeter fences of the New Village.¹

The Home Guard system, implemented along the lines suggested by the MCA, proved to be a successful means of getting Chinese to defend lives and property during the Emergency. General Sir Gerald Templer, who succeeded Gurney as High Commissioner, enlarged the system in mid-1952, directing that 400 fully armed and fully operational Home Guard units be formed to serve along side the police and armed forces.² The proportion of Chinese in the Home Guards grew steadily. By the end of 1950, out of a total of 30,000 Home Guards, only 3,500 or 11.6% were Chinese. However, by September 1954, 129 New Villages out of 323 were defended by Chinese Home Guard units.³ The MCA Annual Report for 1954 noted: "... the policing and defence of a large number of New Villages have now been transferred to the hands of Home Guards whose personnel is mostly Chinese".⁴

A special Home Guard unit, the Kinta Valley Home Guard (KVGH) was the country's most successful local Chinese defence scheme. Unlike normal Home Guard units which were planned, financed

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1. Tan Cheng Lock, "Memorandum on Manpower Conscription...."
 2. See Templer's Annual Address, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 19 November 1952, p.462. For more information on the formation and functions of the Home Guard, see, Short, pp. 411-415.
 3. Speech by Tan Cheng Lock at the Annual Meeting of the Central General Committee of MCA, 21 April 1951, TCL Papers, SP13, Ucapan Tan Cheng Lock, Item 35, and Short, p.413.
 4. Report of the MCA Hon. Secretary General to be submitted to the Seventh Annual Meeting of the General Committee to be held on 15 January 1955, p.9.

and operated by the authorities, the MCA played a major role in planning, partly funding and running the KVHG.¹ The KVHG comprised mainly ex-KMT and secret society elements and existed to protect the mining activities of Perak towkays, the majority of whom were MCA leaders.

Leong Yew Koh, a founder member of the MCA in Perak and a successful tin miner, recalled that the idea was the outcome of a meeting of the Perak State War Executive Committee. During the meeting it was said that 90% of the Chinese tin miners in Perak were paying protection money to the terrorists and that the government's suspicions had been confirmed by a confession signed by two representatives from the Perak Chinese Miners' Association. The position of all Chinese miners in Perak was endangered by this state of affairs, as it rendered them liable to detention. Consequently, Leong submitted a scheme whereby the Chinese mines in Perak would be protected by a unit of Home Guard which would be financed by the Perak miners and the MCA. The existence of the KVHG would make it unnecessary for the miners to continue payment of protection money; at the same time no further suspicions would be cast in their direction.²

1. Report of the MCA Hon. Secretary General to be submitted to the Seventh Annual Meeting of the General Committee to be held on 15 January 1955, p.9.

2. See, Chong Wai Meng, "Report of the Perak Chinese Mining Association Home Guard Fund: period 16-4-52 to 30-11-54", mimeo., n.d.; LYK Papers, SP3, no.42; and Minutes of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the MCA General Committee on 27 December 1953.

According to H.S. Lee, fighting men for the KVHG were recruited from the ex-KMTM and secret societies allied to it.¹ Lau Pak Khuan, the KMTM leader in Perak and founder member of the MCA, apparently resurrected the old KMTM guerilla unit in Perak, which had fallen apart since the end of the war and organised it into the KVHG. Lee stated that Templer was initially reluctant to sanction the scheme, as he felt that a well-trained and fully-armed KMT force paying loyalty to Taiwan might prove a liability to the Malayan authorities. Moreover, he objected in principle to a private army raised by private means to protect the interests of the Kinta tin miners. He opposed the idea of "allowing the Chinese to arm themselves for their own protection" since it contradicted his belief that defence should be provided by the government for the collective security of all Malaysians.² However, Templer finally sanctioned the scheme, as he was persuaded by the argument that the regular police and armed forces were unable to defend the Kinta mines effectively. Adequate defence of the Kinta Valley was a major consideration, for it was the country's largest source of tin supply, and tin and rubber were the government's two biggest revenue earners.

Templer finally consented to the scheme also because he was assured by the MCA leaders that the unit would be disbanded when its services were no longer needed (which was the case). After approving the scheme the government contributed a generous two-thirds towards

1. Interview, H.S. Lee, 22 July 1975.

2. Minutes of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the MCA General Committee on 27 December 1953, p.5.

expenses incurred in setting up the force and assumed a measure of responsibility and control over its operation. The MCA, for its part, spent a total of \$225,000 on the KVHG, a sum which exceeded its expenditure on its nation-wide recruiting drive for the police force (discussed below). During a meeting of the General Committee in 1953, a delegate from Negri Sembilan objected to what he considered the disproportionately large sum of money which the party had spent in Perak alone, by reason of the KVHG, and insisted that future expenditure be spread out more fairly among the other states.¹ His objection reflected the fear that party members would become aware that the distribution of funds was controlled by a few leaders in the Central Working Committee, and that funds which should have been used for Emergency welfare work were being used to protect the vested interests of a privileged group within the party leadership, the Perak towkays.

At its peak, the KVHG was a well-organised and well-trained force comprising 1,656 men and officers.² The force was successful in carrying out its counter-insurgency duties as evidenced by decreasing incidents of Communist sabotage of tin mines and intimidation of mine owners and workers, which had previously occurred frequently.

In April 1952 the MCA forwarded a proposal to Templer to make good the shortage of Chinese in the police force. The party pledged to recruit 2,000 Chinese policemen. In return, the government was asked not to enforce the National Service Bill except in case of

1. Minutes of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the MCA General Committee on 27 December 1953, p.7.

2. "Report of the Perak Chinese Mining Association...", p.1.

external emergency. Incentives recommended by the MCA included the granting of citizenship to recruits after three years' satisfactory service in the force, payment of a bonus sum of \$200 to each recruit and postings as near the recruits' homes as possible for a minimum period of one year after the period of training.¹

The government decided to let the MCA recruit Chinese policemen on its behalf, because it was uncertain about its own rate of success through the National Service Bill. Addressing a Federal War Council meeting on 8 February 1952, the Federal Chief Secretary said that though the Federal Legislative Council had already accepted the National Service Bill in principle, the government would not enforce it. He explained that the government was not totally convinced that compulsory conscription would necessarily produce the desired results: "... what we have to weigh is the probability of a lot of trouble with young men running away into the jungle when Registration is proclaimed coupled with the demand for manpower which the scheme will require to work it, against the alternative of keeping the registration machinery in the background while attempting to meet our demands by voluntary enlistment".² At the same meeting, the Deputy Chief Secretary divulged that the government was willing to try a recruiting drive along the lines suggested by the MCA starting from April 1952.

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1. Malayan Chinese Association, "Scheme on Recruiting of Chinese into the Police Force for Submission to H.E. the High Commissioner" mimeo., 21 April 1952. See also Tan Cheng Lock, "Plan to Mobilise MCA Resources to Produce 2,000 Police Recruits", mimeo., 8 April 1952.
 2. Minutes of the Federal War Council meeting on 8 February 1952 (item 2), TCL Papers, SP13, Item 170.

Another explanation for the government's willingness to introduce the MCA recruitment scheme may be that at least some official opinion did understand and was sympathetic to the Chinese problem. Thus a memorandum prepared by a Major N.D. Poulsen of the Buffs stated that even if the accusation against the Malayan Chinese' unwillingness to play their part in the anti-terrorist war was true, this ignored the fact that the Chinese in Malaya had in the past received little encouragement from the British to make them feel politically committed to Malaya as their new home. The British had never encouraged them to take up citizenship or urged them to play an active part in the country's political welfare. He pointed out that as a result of this historical background the Chinese were now "in the unenviable position of being treated as foreigners, or at least second-class citizens". At the same time, they were "expected to behave like patriotic Malaysians". He suggested that if the government expected the Chinese to join the defence forces in large numbers it should offer two major concessions: more generous citizenship provisions and better salary scales in the forces.¹

While the government agreed to the grant of citizenship, it objected to the idea of financial incentives. Templer wrote to Cheng Lock:²

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1. Major N.D. Poulsen, "The Recruitment of Chinese for the Army in Malaya", mimeo., 17 October 1953, pp.1, 3-5, MCA headquarters.
 2. Letter from Templer to Tan Cheng Lock dated 24 April 1952, MCA headquarters.

I consider that any scheme for obtaining Chinese recruits which is based on the payment of a bounty would be wrong in principle and would be tantamount to a breach of faith with those Chinese who have already joined the force under existing conditions of service without bounty or any other allowances.

A system which depends on the payment of a bounty would be an admission that the Police rates of pay are insufficient and would cause dissatisfaction and complaints from members of other racial communities already in the force.

The subsidising of police recruits by a party or organisation strikes at the essential impartiality and independence of the Police and should be rejected on those grounds alone.

Malay members of the Federal War Council likewise opposed the proposed MCA bonus payment to Chinese police recruits, pointing out that the payment of money subsidies to Chinese recruits would immediately upset Malays serving in the police force.¹

Despite their reservations, the authorities did not stop the MCA from paying out subsidies once the recruitment scheme was launched. As it was widely known that Chinese youths balked at serving in the defence forces because they found more lucrative employment in the private commercial, mining and agricultural sectors, the government decided to tolerate these payments as a temporary measure to obtain much needed Chinese police manpower. The MCA for its part was aware that it had to offer bonus payments and to play up the issue of economic security - that a career in the police force guaranteed long-term employment and a pension - rather than appeal to the youths' sense of duty.²

1. Minutes of the War Federal Council Meeting on 4 January 1952 (Item 3), speech by Mustapha Albakri, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 170.

2. An MCA official advising the party on the recruitment drive stated that few Chinese would "act from the duty incentive" when deciding to join the police force. Ho Yung Chi, "Memorandum on Recruitment of Chinese Policemen", mimeo., 2 May 1952.

The MCA recruitment drive was a well organised and intensive campaign. Before its scheme received official sanction, the party had set up at every MCA centre special subcommittees to deal with recruitment under the Manpower Regulations. In its drive to recruit the quota of 2,000 youths for service in the regular police force, the MCA headquarters alerted all branches to publicise the time of arrival of recruiting teams, the qualifications required for service, the terms of service and the emoluments provided. Branch officials were told that their propaganda work should not be confined only to the towns, but "it should reach the level of villages including all schools".¹ They were also to make known to the Chinese that recruits would not have to eat Malay food, that the police headgear was not a Malay cap but a survival from a former British Regiment, and also that many of the instructors in the Training Depots were in fact Chinese. Such information was given to reassure Chinese recruits that becoming a policeman did not involve adopting a more Malay life-style, an approach which shows the MCA perceived racial incompatibilities to be obstacles to Chinese joining a Malay-dominated Police Force. Above all, the MCA wished it to be known to recruits that three years' full time service would automatically give them Federal citizenship.²

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1. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Bingham, Secretary for Chinese Affairs, 9 May 1951, TCL Papers, TCL/V/91; and Circular from the MCA Agent-General to the Hon. Secretaries of all State/Settlement Branches entitled "Chinese Recruits for Regular Police Force", 10 April 1952.
 2. Circular from the MCA Agent-General to the Hon. Secretaries of all States/Settlement Branches entitled "Chinese Recruits for Regular Police Force", 28 April 1952.

After an unpromising start, the recruiting campaign headed by Yap Yin Chung - the Recruiting Liaison Officer responsible for mediating between government recruiting officers, District Officers, Resettlement Officers, members of village committees and local MCA officials - successfully attained the target quota. Yap reported that the MCA's campaign had "broken to some extent the 'barriers' and age-old customs" inhibiting the Chinese from entering a military-type profession. But he emphasized that the majority of the applicants were drawn by the widely rumoured "welfare" the MCA gave to recruits.¹

The total number of recruits at the end of the campaign was 2,059. When a member of the Central Working Committee (CWC) suggested that the party spend another \$200,000 to raise a further 1,000 Chinese policemen, this proposal was vetoed, as the CWC considered that the party had already spent "hundreds of thousands of dollars to recruit a mere fraction of the Police Force".² At the same time when, during a session in the Federal Legislative Council the Secretary of Defence complained that 2,059 new recruits for the Police Force were insufficient, Leong Yew Koh retorted that the Federal War Council had been satisfied with the number of 2,000 recruits when the MCA submitted its recruitment scheme, and the MCA and the Chinese community should not now be blamed for not providing more than the agreed quota.³

1. Memorandum by Yap Yin Chung entitled "Recruiting", mimeo., 24 April 1953, LYK Papers, SP3, no.66-67.

2. Minutes of the MCA Central Working Committee on 4 April 1954, p.10.

3. Speech by Leong Yew Koh, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 19 November 1954, p.1081.

The MCA campaign also raised recruits for the armed forces. By the end of June 1953, it recruited 855 Chinese youths for the Federation Regiment, Boys' Company and Federation Engineer Squadron.¹ Although this figure was considered inadequate by the government, no special drive was launched to increase it. While the MCA succeeded in getting more Chinese to join the Home Guard service and police force through special incentives and appeals to traditional concepts of self-defence, it realised that Chinese cultural prejudice against a soldiering career in the regular defence forces was too strong to be overcome.

3.3.5 Miscellaneous Services

In addition to its work on squatter welfare, adult education, detainees and manpower recruitment, the MCA carried out a number of other social-service activities which mirrored those performed by the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and huay kuans. For example, the MCA paid for burial expenses of destitute members and gave financial relief to flood and fire victims. During Chinese New Year, the most important festival celebrated by Chinese, the MCA gave ang pow (gifts of money) to the old and poor.² The settlement

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1. Yap Yin Chung, "Progress Report on Recruiting", mimeo., 25 July 1953.
 2. See, e.g., Annual Report of the MCA Kelantan Branch for the year ended 30 June 1952, p.2; Annual Report of the MCA Muar Branch for 1952, p.3; Annual Report of the Penang and Province Wellesley Branch for the year ended 30 June 1954, p.3; and Report of the Working Committee to be submitted to the Annual General Meeting of the MCA Malacca Branch 23 September 1955, pp.6-7.

of disputes arising from family or business differences was a major service provided by party leaders. The Muar branch, for example, reported that it settled 296 cases of family disputes for the period 1955-1956. Other branches similarly singled out the settlement of family disputes as an important item of their general welfare work within the Chinese community.¹ Some state branches even set up special bureaus to provide miscellaneous welfare and advisory services for the Chinese public. In March 1954 the Penang and Province Wellesley Settlement Branch established an Advice and Service Bureau to "give and render service, where possible, to all members of the Chinese community, besides its own members, in all matters affecting their personal affairs, their dealings with the Government, and in their duties and their rights as law-abiding citizens of this country". It was stated that the Bureau rendered service mainly to the poor and distressed "who did not know where to turn to for help when such help was urgently needed".² The Perak State Branch set up a similar bureau, called the Public Services Bureau, which performed several services including giving aid to all Chinese on immigration citizenship and other legal matters, obtaining employment for the poor, and advising on cases of family and business

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1. MCA Muar Branch: Report of the Association's affairs for the period 1955 to 1957, p.2; Report of Dindings District Branch, included in the Report of the Working Committee MCA Perak Branch to be submitted to the Annual General Meeting to be held on 26 October 1952, p.12; and MCA Kampar Sub-Branch: Annual Report for the Fourth Term 1-7-55 to 31-5-57, p.1.
 2. MCA Penang and Province Wellesley Branch: Report for the year ended 30 June 1954, p.5.

disputes.¹

The MCA also contributed a considerable amount of money to non-Chinese charitable organisations such as the Red Cross (Red Crescent) Society and St. John's Ambulance Brigade, which carried out important medical work in the New Villages. The party Annual Report for 1952 stated that when teams of the British Red Cross and the St. John's Ambulance Brigade arrived in Malaya to do work in the squatter areas, the Association "extended to them financial aid to the tune of nearly \$500,000, enabling them to get the necessary transport for their work in the New Villages".² The MCA also spent \$210,000 towards the expenses of raising 25 teams of nurses and welfare officers for work in the New Villages. Another charitable organisation doing welfare work in the Kinta New Villages, the St. Michael's Catholic Action, received a sum of \$51,250 from the MCA. Smaller sums of money were given to a number of public organisations working among the orphaned, poor, sick and aged of all races. Among the recipients of such aid were the Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged (Singapore), the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (Malacca), the Home of the Aged (Penang) and the Ramakrishna Orphanage (Penang). On one occasion, the party contributed money to defray the expenses of Buddhist monks proselytising in the New

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1. MCA Perak State Branch: Report of the Working Committee to be submitted to the Sixth Annual General Meeting to be held on 28 December 1954, p.3.
 2. Report of the Hon. Secretary of the MCA to be submitted to the Fifth Annual General Committee to be held on 31 January 1953, p.8, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 20.

Villages in Selangor.¹

The final increment of miscellaneous expenditure was spent on Malay welfare. In July 1952 the MCA set up a Malay Welfare Fund consisting of \$500,000 from its lottery proceeds.² Out of this fund, money was released for the welfare of Malay policemen, soldiers, squatters and detainees. Gifts of money during Hari Raya (the end of the Muslim fasting month) were distributed among Malays held in detention camps throughout the country. \$3,000 was allotted to Malay settlers at Kampong Sepial in Pahang, and \$5,000 was given towards the building of married quarters for Malay soldiers stationed in Singapore.³ The MCA thus did not ignore the needs of the non-Chinese; however, compared to the volume of time, energy and money which the party expended on behalf of its members and the Chinese community at large, the attention it gave to the other races was modest indeed.

3.4 The MCA and the Emergency: Some Conclusions

From the beginning of the outbreak of the Emergency, the government was fully aware that the Chinese community in Malaya were reluctant to commit themselves to the official side in the terrorist war. This reluctance stemmed from a number of reasons, the main ones

1. "List of Welfare Expenditure...."

2. Straits Times, 14 July 1952. For more information on the Malay Welfare Fund, see Chapter 5.

3. "List of Welfare Expenditure...."

being: fears of reprisals from terrorists if they cooperated with the authorities; a genuine desire on the part of others to support the Communist cause; deep-rooted prejudices which held them back from serving in the armed forces; unfamiliarity in dealing with affairs outside the scope of their immediate family, clan and dialect group concerns; and more generally, hostility towards being controlled by a government which was overwhelmingly non-Chinese.

The government realised that a successful conclusion of the war depended upon its ability to break these attitudes, especially among the squatters. To achieve this, it had to use the mediatory services of a group of community leaders brought together in the MCA. The party proved to be the ideal "political broker" between Government and squatters for the following reasons: firstly, the loyalty of its leaders to the anti-Communist cause was unquestionable. They were successful capitalists who had as much to lose as the British and Malay leaders if the MCP were to win the war. Secondly, they were established public figures within the Chinese community before they came together in the MCA. As traditional association leaders, they had built up an impressive and comprehensive structure of patron-client relationships within the community. This meant that to a considerable extent they could influence political behaviour and command the loyalty of members of the community. Thirdly, a number of these leaders were trilingual. Thus the party could communicate between an English and Malay-speaking official elite on the one hand and a Chinese-speaking (Mandarin and all other dialects included) squatter population on the other.

The enthusiasm which the MCA leaders displayed in carrying out their Emergency duties did not derive solely from purely selfish and opportunistic motives relating to the protection of capitalist class interests. They also believed that they had a responsibility to alleviate the hardships inflicted on the Chinese masses during the Emergency. For its vigorous contribution towards the terrorist war the MCA received its share of casualties. For example, it lost more than 300 office bearers and members due to Communist reprisals.¹ The party's belief in the success of its own role in the fight against Communism is succinctly expressed in the following words of Cheng Lock: "I am perfectly positive that without some such Chinese organisation as the MCA as a counter to the MCP, the danger of Communism establishing its rule over Malaya will be increased ten-fold".² The government likewise acknowledged that the MCA played a significant role in facilitating its counter-insurgency program and praised the party for serving as a rallying point in the anti-Communist crusade.³

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1. During the MCA 19th Annual Meeting of the Central General Assembly in 1969, it was proposed that the party should erect a monument in Kuala Lumpur to commemorate the deaths of these "MCA Patriots" who "sacrificed their lives in order that the people of Malaya may live in peace and harmony". Annual Report of the Secretary General to be submitted to the 19th Annual Meeting of the Central General Assembly to be held on 17 March 1969, p.7.
 2. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Templer, 15 May 1953, MCA headquarters.
 3. See, Extract from Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs (n.d.), CO537/4761/52849/48/49(28) and Federation of Malaya, Despatch no.3 by Gurney to Colonial Office dated 12 January 1950, CO717/201/52849/41(3).

CHAPTER 4

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE MCA INTO A POLITICAL PARTY

Concerned that the MCA's deep involvement in welfare work during the early years of the Emergency had given it a reputation of being a prototype CCC-huay kuan, the national party leadership decided to emphasise the party's political dimension. In late 1951, they seized upon the opportunity presented by the introduction of local elections in the country to reorganise and streamline the MCA into a modern day political party. When the reorganisation campaign was over in late 1953, although the party still retained some basic CCC-huay kuan characteristics, it had been largely transformed into an efficient political organisation capable of working in conjunction with the UMNO in electoral politics and in spearheading the independence involvement in Malaya.

4.1 Party Organisational Structure Prior to Reorganisation

From its beginning the MCA had a rationalised and streamlined hierarchy of branch organisations, with a corresponding hierarchy of Working Committees at each level. At the apex of the organisational pyramid was the party headquarters, which controlled and supervised the affairs of all branches. Decisions of the party headquarters were made by the Central Working Committee, the highest organ in the Association. Immediately below the CWC were the State Working Committees, which supervised the affairs of the state

branches and had supervisory powers over the district branches and the District Working Committees. The district branches, in turn, supervised the area branches and the Area Working Committees.¹

A number of sub-committees were created at each level of the organisational hierarchy to look after specific areas of party affairs. The first sub-committees set up in the CWC were welfare, legislation, political, youth and women, publicity, social, education and benevolent, financial and economic, labour. From 1949 to 1952, due to the party's involvement in Emergency welfare work, the active sub-committees were welfare, financial and economic, and publicity. After the reorganisation campaign and with the party becoming increasingly preoccupied with political issues, the legislation, political, education and youth sub-committees became the most active sections in the party.

The pyramidal format of party branches and committees rested upon a structural base comprised of the traditional Chinese associational network in Malaya.

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the MCA was launched with the cooperation of leaders from the most important Chinese associations in the country, and its subsequent growth was due largely to the work done for the party by the CCC-huay kuan leaders. The setting up of state branches was left to the initiative of CCC strongmen in each state: Lau Pak Khuan and Leong Yew Koh in Perak, Wong Shee Fun in Johore, Ng Sui Cam in Penang, Foo See Moi in

1. Rules of the Malayan Chinese Association.

Kelantan, Wu Cheok Yee in Trengganu, Lim Teng Kwang in Perlis and Kedah, Lee Tee Siong in Negri Sembilan and H.S. Lee, Khoo Teik Ee and Yong Shook Lin in Selangor. The fact that Chinese association leaders were the founders and promoters of the MCA resulted in the party being physically accommodated on the premises of Chinese associations, most notably the Chambers of Commerce. All the state branches (except Negri Sembilan) were housed on the premises of the offices of CCC. Below the state branch, Chinese association premises were likewise used to accommodate the local party branch or were used as venues for party meetings. For example, the Muar District Branch held its meetings at the Chei Chih Assembly Hall; the Bukit Merah District Branch was located at Hung Kang (Teochew) Huay Kuan; and the Bentong District Branch was found at the Bentong Chinese Town Hall.¹ Area branches were less frequently found on the premises on Chinese associations, since these associations were seldom located in New Villages and small towns;² they were commonly housed in the local Chinese village school or the community hall. The administration of party affairs was normally attended to by employees of the CCC or huay kuan which accommodated the party branch; this same body of CCC-huay kuan personnel aided the MCA in carrying out Emergency activities such

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1. Information obtained from the list of addresses of party branches for the period 1949-50 kept at the party headquarters.
 2. The social uprooting of people and the mixing of various dialect groups in New Villages impeded the formation of many dialect-based associations in those areas except for a few mutual aid and recreational societies. See, Nyce, pp.111-25 and Newell, pp.37, 39.

as squatter and detainee welfare, and the manpower recruitment drive.¹

The extent to which the MCA was enmeshed in the Chinese associational network is further illustrated by the following reports of two state branches: Malacca reported that when the first Working Committee was formed, a representative from every major Chinese association in the state was invited to sit in the Committee.² In Johore, after the state branch was established, the state chairman acknowledged the crucial role played by Chinese associations, going so far as to claim that if it had not been for the work done by the Chinese associations the party would not have been formed in Johore.³

4.2 Internal Party Dynamics

The dependence of the MCA westernised leaders upon the linkage services of CCC-huay kuan leaders to provide a widespread organisational as well as membership base for the MCA meant that the latter constituted the real power-brokers within the new party. Possessing a large degree of autonomous power, these Laukeh leaders were able to run state and local branches much in accordance with

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1. "Report by the Agent-General on a visit to Penang and Province Wellesley", c. April 1952, mimeo., p.3. Malayan Mirror, Vol. I, no.14, 31 December 1953, p.5.
 2. Minutes of the inaugural meeting of the MCA Malacca Branch held on 11 March 1949.
 3. "Brief Report of the MCA Johore State Branch", mimeo., n.d. (c.1951), TCL Papers, TCL/7/10.

their own wishes. The lack of centralised control and supervision over local party affairs resulted in the MCA becoming, in Tan Siew Sin's words, like "a capitalist organisation with no coherent aims ... drifting helplessly about like a ship without a rudder".¹

The westernised top leadership felt the need to curb the powers of the Laukeh party bosses partly because of its desire to impose centralised control and partly because of concern over the negative public image generated by the Laukeh leaders' conduct of party affairs. Since the Laukeh leaders did not view the MCA as a political party but rather as another CCC-huay kuan, they tended to regard office holding in the MCA as a right and privilege owing them because of their high social status within the CCC-huay kuan establishment and to conduct their party responsibilities in the same manner as they conducted association affairs. As such leaders were the patrons dispensing largesse in local communities, they conducted the MCA's business in a highly personalised and occasionally opportunistic manner, with little public accountability for their actions. They were thus frequently subject to allegations of corruption and abuse of power.

Relations between the national leadership and the Pahang state branch chairman, Ong Seong Tek, vividly illustrate the cavalier manner in which the state leader conducted party affairs and the extent to which power at the state level was concentrated in single hands. Ong Seong Tek, the foremost CCC leader in Pahang,

1. Letter from Tan Siew Sin to Y.C. Kang dated 9 February 1952, MCA headquarters.

set up the MCA state branch in 1949 and remained chairman till 1954. During his five year term of office, Ong did not convene a single meeting of his Working Committee or call for the election of new office holders.¹ While the rest of the squatter community in the country benefitted from the welfare work carried out by the party, the squatters in Pahang were neglected to a large extent as a result of the state chairman's lack of interest in discharging his duties. Despite repeated requests from party headquarters to the state chairman to fulfill his obligations, Ong continued to treat the MCA in Pahang imperiously, ignoring requests from headquarters to produce and submit audited accounts of the branch's finances for the scrutiny of the party's auditors. At one point he even moved the state branch office to his shop premises in Kuala Lipis, thus creating the impression that the MCA in Pahang was the personal property of its state chairman. Finally in 1953, the party headquarters decided to take legal action against him on the grounds that he had failed to submit the financial statements of the Pahang state branch for the years 1949 to 1953. The party won the law suit, Ong resigned, and in November 1954 the Pahang State Committee met for the first time since 1949 and elected a new state chairman and Working Committee.

While there is little evidence to suggest that the first Pahang chairman engaged in personal profit-making, a serious

1. The following account is based on: Report on the Pahang Branch by T.Y. Chen dated 11 April 1953; letters from T.Y. Chew to the Chief Executive Secretary dated 14 May and 24 July 1953; and "Pahang Branch Accounts: Ourselves vs Mr. Ong Seong Tek", circular sent out by T.H. Tan, Chief Exec.Sec., to all members of the CWC, dated 11 November 1954.

controversy arose over corruption by party officials of the Singapore branch. During 1952, MCA headquarters discovered that a considerable sum of money (\$37,575) from the party sweepstake held in Singapore had not been remitted to the Central Welfare Sub-Committee. Investigations revealed that the sum of money had been misappropriated by a number of senior office holders in the Singapore Working Committee. The findings compiled by the party headquarters read: "It is clear ... that not only the President but other members of the Singapore Branch thought that there was no harm in utilising the funds of the Association for their own private purposes and it is surprising that no report was ever made that these substantial sums of money were missing from the Association's funds".¹ When the party headquarters asked the Singapore Committee to make good on the loss of party funds, the latter, instead of making amends, tried to re-elect itself and vindicate itself of any guilt in the affair.²

Faced with this blatant flaunting of party discipline, the Chief Executive Secretary, T.H. Tan, advised Cheng Lock to proceed with legal action, arguing that "... unless the Singapore branch is handled firmly, the whole future of the MCA is at stake A political association of our size if it is incapable of taking firm action within its own house cannot hope to achieve

1. Memorandum on the missing money in the Singapore Branch, unsigned, typescript, n.d. (c. January 1953), p.5.

2. Letter from T.H. Tan to Cheng Lock dated 13 April 1953, LYK Papers, SP3, Box 6.

anything outside. So far, you have repeatedly attempted conciliation, only to meet with open challenge to your authority".¹ He suggested that the president appoint a protem committee and remove the present one even if it entailed calling in the police: "... I do not see how the Singapore Branch troubles can be eased over. I have a feeling that, in the end, we shall have no alternative but to lay information before the Deputy Public Prosecutor and let the whole crowd go to jail".² Cheng Lock eventually succeeded in working out a compromise acceptable to both sides, and the incident did not develop into an embarrassing public scandal. The guilty parties agreed to pay up token sums of money and to remit \$80,000 from the Branch's coffers to the headquarters. The state chairman was allowed a face-saving gesture: he remained in office for another year before a new chairman was elected.

A wider dimension was added to the Singapore incident through the involvement of the Johore state chairman in the affair. His son was an office holder in the Singapore Committee and was believed to have been implicated in the scandal. The state chairman of Johore shielded his son's involvement when investigations were made, thus implicating himself. When headquarters wanted the guilty parties to resign, the chairman of the Johore Branch retorted that "he was not prepared to resign unless the MCA was liquidated".³

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1. Letter from T.H. Tan to Tan Cheng Lock dated 13 April 1953, LYK Papers, Sp3, Box 6.
 2. Letter from T.H. Tan to Tan Cheng Lock dated 24 March 1953, LYK Papers, SP3, Box 6.
 3. Memorandum on the missing money in the Singapore Branch, p.3.

His reaction illustrates the confidence of a party strongman who believed he could make or break the party in the region under his control. The state chairman's grip over the party apparatus in Johore was so secure that despite this incident he remained as chairman from the inception of the state branch in 1949 till 1961.

The MCA received numerous complaints from party members about alleged abuse of power and corrupt practices by local party bosses. For example, a member of the Klang District Branch wanted headquarters to investigate a missing sum of party funds which he believed had been embezzled by the branch secretary and treasurer.¹ In another instance, three members of the Seremban District Branch wrote to the party's Chief Executive Secretary alleging that a senior office holder in the branch was "always making tea-money" getting stall licenses for individuals who needed them. They complained that MCA office holders should discharge these services on behalf of the Chinese community without having to be bribed.²

In a third case, a member of the Mersing District Branch wrote to the Agent-General to draw his attention to "the corruptible ways of the President of the MCA of Mersing...." He said that the branch chairman would not allow any other office holder or member to look at the branch's financial statements; this, he

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1. Letter signed by a member of the MCA Klang Branch to Tan Cheng Lock dated 29 January 1953, MCA headquarters.
 2. Letter signed by three members of the Seremban Branch to the Chief Executive Secretary dated 8 June 1955, MCA headquarters.

thought, was because the branch chairman was syphoning off party funds for his private use. He also complained that this corrupt office holder never found time to attend to the needs of poorer members: "When poor people come to see the MCA president for help he is usually too busy or /is/ in Singapore. But when rich people come to see him he is not too busy and even his brothers will go all out to help."¹ Such incidents indicate why the MCA developed a reputation of being a party dominated by self-seeking opportunists and corrupt towkays, and as it became apparent that party headquarters could not prevent local bosses from abusing their office, the MCA's reputation became severely damaged. It should also be pointed out, however, that some state chairmen worked selflessly for the benefit of the MCA and its constituents, and did not abuse the power concentrated in their hands. The behaviour of the Penang state chairman is a case in point. Party headquarters reported that the state chairman was doing all he could to work for the good of the party and that there was no abuse of power in the state.² It appears, therefore, that the degree of cooperation which party headquarters obtained from the various state branches depended almost entirely upon the personality and temperament of the individual state strongman.

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1. Letter signed by a member of the Mersing Branch to the Agent-General dated 22 May 1952, MCA headquarters.
 2. "Report by Agent-General on a visit to Penang and Province Wellesley", p.4.

4.3 Goals of the Reorganisation Campaign

The major impetus behind the reorganisation campaign in late 1951 was the national leadership's decision to involve the MCA in the local election of Kuala Lumpur scheduled to take place in February 1952. In order to court Malay cooperation in the Kuala Lumpur election, the MCA leaders wanted to instil confidence in potential Malay allies that their party was not simply a social welfare organisation but an effective modern day political party capable of winning elections. Thus, they hoped to overcome such negative opinions as that of the top ranking UMNO leader, Dr. Ismail bin Abdul Rahman, who averred that the MCA was largely a social welfare association whose members joined in the hope of benefitting from the party lottery.¹

While the immediate impetus for the reorganisation was the Kuala Lumpur election, the national leadership had also felt the need to place the MCA on a new footing due to growing concern generated by over-involvement in Emergency social welfare activities and the lack of centralisation and direction in party policies and organisation. Tan Cheng Lock brought up the need to reorganise the party for the first time in June 1950, when he expressed concern that the MCA had failed to become the centralised political party that the national leadership wanted it to be. He was also worried that the MCA's raison d'etre revolved so much around the Emergency that at its termination the party would become moribund: "... the

1. Dr. Ismail told MCA leaders that this was his initial opinion of their party. Minutes of the Alliance Roundtable Meeting held on 21 February 1953.

MCA is very far indeed from being a well-organised and disciplined body. It is in fact a rather loosely-knit association of persons scattered all over the country, most of whom may not even know what precisely are the basic aims and objects of the Association. It is a most unsatisfactory state of affairs, and there is little doubt that if we go on as we do the MCA will pass out of existence after the end of the Emergency".¹

The basic objective of the reorganisation program was to centralise party machinery and improve coordination between party headquarters and branches in order that the rank and file would be better informed about the party's political objectives and be mobilised for political action.² Cheng Lock wanted the MCA to be a modern political party participating in elections, but at the same time he recognised that Chinese interests would have to be represented to the government authorities, which would be colonial or Malay-dominated. In this respect, he anticipated that the MCA would have to play a "fact-finding and advising" role representing Chinese interests to the authorities in much the same way as a western pressure group would operate. Cheng Lock likened the role of the reorganised MCA to that of "a Pressure Group on the American Model and not precisely a Political Party on the English

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1. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Leong Yew Koh dated 24 June 1950, TCL Papers, TCL/2/131.
 2. See pamphlets entitled "Memorandum on the Organisation of the MCA", 28 October 1951, and "Progress Report on Re-organisation, Centralisation of Funds, Headquarters Building, Labour Organisation and Investment" by Tan Cheng Lock, Paper No.1 of 1953, MCA headquarters.

Model".¹ Cheng Lock's suggestion that the MCA's principal function resembled a pressure group was an astute assessment of the fact that the party he helped to form could never govern Malaya directly, but had to work through its powerful Malay allies for the protection of Chinese political interests.

A further important consideration behind the reorganisation drive was the encouragement given by the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, to MCA leaders to secure greater Chinese working class support through labour programs aimed at undercutting the MCP's influence with the Chinese proletariat. While the High Commissioner was happy with the MCA's performance in Emergency social welfare work, he was dissatisfied by the MCA's failure to provide effective political leadership, especially in counter-insurgency programs directed at winning the allegiance of the Chinese working class.² On 20 September 1951 Gurney urged the MCA national leadership to reorganise and strengthen the Association in order that it would be considered by the Chinese community at large to be an attractive political alternative to the MCP.³

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1. Memorandum entitled "The Organisation of the MCA as a Political Pressure Group", by Tan Cheng Lock, mimeo., 19 April 1951, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 177 no.35.
 2. Note from Gurney to Tan Cheng Lock, n.d., TCL Papers, SP13, Item 158.
 3. Speech by Henry Gurney, Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 20 September 1951, p.300.

4.4 The Demise of the Campaign

In early 1952 a reorganisation committee headed by Tan Cheng Lock was set up to implement the campaign. The committee drew up a blueprint aimed at democratising the party machinery to enable the rank and file to have a greater say in party matters through a system of widened responsible participation. The blueprint also envisaged the establishment of a widespread network of channels of communication linking the party to the Chinese community, especially the rural squatter population and the urban labour movement.¹ However, not all of the proposed changes were fully instituted. Although a Central Party Office was set up to conduct political relations at the centre with the colonial administration and non-Chinese political bodies, there was no increased centralisation of the party apparatus after the reorganisation campaign was terminated in mid-1953. The appointment of a Chief Executive Secretary and an Agent-General to be the watchdogs of the party headquarters over the state branches did see an improvement in the coordination of party activities, but there was no diminution in the autonomy of the state branches.

The inconsistency between avowed objectives and achieved results of the reorganisation campaign stemmed largely from the top leadership's own attitude towards the whole notion of reorganisation. It is apparent that the national leadership only paid lip service

1. Memorandum by Tan Cheng Lock entitled "Democratising the MCA", mimeo., 14 September 1952, LYK Papers, SP3, Box 8.

to the proposals to democratise the party and ensure greater grass-roots participation in the management of party affairs. An examination of the way leadership handled the "reorganisation" of Chinese labour demonstrates all too clearly that it did not intend to transform the Association into an organisation which would give prominence to the interests of the Chinese working class.

In early 1953, the party launched its "unionisation of Chinese labour" campaign and issued a 15-point Labour Manifesto.¹ The Manifesto made a general statement that the MCA would ensure that Chinese labour receive better working and living conditions and fair wages. A special labour organiser, B.H. Tan, was appointed to take charge of the Labour Sub-Committee. Tan was charged with two duties: to encourage Chinese workers to join the existing trade union of their craft, and to form trade unions among Chinese workers in areas where none existed.² Given the fact that organised labour in the country was dominated either by Indian trade unionists or pro-Communist labour organisers, B.H. Tan was directed to concentrate his efforts among the Chinese New Village population.

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1. "The MCA Labour Manifesto", mimeo., c. February 1953, LYK Papers, SP3, Box 6. See also "A Note on the Labour Sub-Committee of the Malayan Chinese Association", mimeo., c. early 1953, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 127.
 2. B.H. Tan's duties were described in a progress report of the MCA's activities prepared by the Chief Executive Secretary dated 7 September 1953, mimeo., p.4.

The scheme was never properly initiated. It appears that the Labour Sub-Committee's most significant achievement was the unionisation of some 4,000 workers in B.H. Tan's own state of Negri Sembilan.¹ A year after his appointment, Tan fell out completely with the MCA leadership, accusing the party of being insincere and hypocritical in its unionisation drive. He said that the MCA was "afraid that the scheme might turn out to be a hideous Frankenstein ... which would devour them in the end".² The party defended itself by saying that its efforts to enter the labour arena were obstructed by the Indian-dominated Malayan Trade Union Congress, a justification too transparently weak to warrant serious consideration.³ The party leadership finally made a complete volte-face on the subject. On 6 May 1954 it issued a press release stating that the party had never had a policy of forming Chinese labour unions. At the same time, it tried to save face by insisting that it was nonetheless concerned with the welfare of the Chinese working class. All this heightened the reputation of the party as a towkay party and alienated the Chinese proletariat.

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1. Progress report of the MCA's activities prepared by the Chief Executive Secretary dated 7 September 1953, mimeo., p.5.
 2. Quoted from a party press release issued by Leong Yew Koh, Secretary-General of the MCA, dated 6 May 1954.
 3. Letter from C.H. Yin, a party labour organiser, to Leong Yew Koh dated 25 May 1953. Yin said that the Malayan Trade Union Congress Central Committee opposed the MCA's entry into the labour movement as the move was construed as an attempt by the MCA to dominate the economy of Malaya through the control of labour. LYK Papers, SP3, No.66-71 (single bundle).

A significant point which emerges from the reorganisation campaign was the curious fact that the very leaders who advocated the necessity of regarding the MCA as a political party behaved in a completely contradictory manner on the occasions when it suited their interests to treat the MCA essentially as a huay kuan. For example, when in October 1952 the government decided to ban the party sweepstake in Singapore on the grounds that political parties were prohibited from gaining income from lotteries, Cheng Lock suggested that the Singapore Branch of the Association be retained as a purely social welfare party and not be reorganised. Instead, he would form a separate organisation to be called the "MCA National Election Party" which would carry out political goals.¹ The scheme was not accepted by the government of Singapore, and the incident only made party members and outside observers more confused about the purposes of the MCA.

A second incident reveals an even more alarming departure from the avowed principles of the reorganisation. The party headquarters was looking for a means of activating the Youth Section, which had existed only on paper because the party lacked financial resources and physical facilities for looking after it. In October 1952 the CWC entertained the idea of affiliating its Youth wing to a wealthy and famous Chinese association in Kuala Lumpur, the Chen Woo Association.² The party proposal was that the Chen Woo be

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1. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to M.J. Hogan, Attorney-General of Singapore, dated 5 October 1952. TCL Papers, TCL SP13, Item 89-166 (single bundle).
 2. The Chen Woo Association, housed in a large building in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, is the city's major cultural, dramatic and recreational huay kuan.

given charge of the MCA Youth and Sports Section, which would accordingly be renamed the "MCA-Chen Woo Department". The merger did not materialise, but the incident itself illustrates the willingness of the party leadership to let a Chinese association have control over an integral part of its organisation for reasons of financial expediency.

The inconsistency of behaviour found among the leaders who called for reorganisation makes sense if one remembers that these leaders were also the most important Chinese Chamber of Commerce and huay kuan leaders in Malaya. While they wanted to modernise the Association by fashioning it along the lines of a western political party, they themselves were nonetheless too rooted in the Laukeh political culture to pursue a consistent course of reorganisation. Even the most cosmopolitan leaders such as Cheng Lock occasionally acted more like a parochial association leader. For example, on one occasion he engaged a stratagem commonly used by Chamber of Commerce and huay kuan strongmen to rig MCA branch elections. This involved the enrolment and payment of members of the huay kuans under their leadership to attend the party election to vote them into office. In mid 1953, Cheng Lock decided to stand for the post of chairman of the Singapore Working Committee, which would replace incumbent office bearers who were stepping down as a result of the lottery fund scandal discussed earlier. In this connection, he consented to the payment and recruitment of 1,500 members from the Chiang Chew Kong Huay (a territorial huay kuan of

his dialect group) in Singapore to attend the forthcoming branch meeting and vote him into office, an event which duly took place.¹

Ironically, the factor which finally dispelled the image of the party as a social welfare organisation came not as the result of the party's reorganisation program but from an action taken by the government. This was the banning of the party sweep-stake in June 1953, a ban imposed as a result of the MCA's participation in the February 1952 local elections held in Kuala Lumpur in a coalition arrangement with the UMNO. The High Commissioner, General Templer, in deciding to ban the lottery explained that its proceeds gave the Association an unfair financial advantage over other political parties contesting the elections.² Another consideration which led Templer to instruct the MCA to terminate its lottery was the fact that the bulk of the most pressing Emergency welfare and squatter resettlement work had been accomplished by mid 1953 and thus the MCA's financial contribution was no longer as vital to the government anti-insurgency campaign as it had been between 1949 and 1952. Deprived of its most lucrative source of party income, the MCA terminated its Emergency social welfare projects by the end of 1953. As a result of this withdrawal from welfare work, the image of the party as a social welfare body began slowly to erode.

1. See letter from C.H. Yin to Tan Cheng Lock dated 19 June 1953, LYK Papers, SP3, no.66-71 (single bundle).

2. Letter from the Financial Secretary of the Federation of Malaya to Tan Cheng Lock dated 5 June 1953, MCA headquarters.

In sum, the reorganisation program developed and strengthened the political facet of the MCA and helped prepare it for the Kuala Lumpur election of 1952, but did not erase its CCC-huay kuan orientation, which constituted the organisational and ideological bedrock of the party in the pre-independence period. By the end of 1953, although the MCA was no longer essentially a social welfare organisation, the reorganisation campaign had not transformed it completely into a mass-based political party. It remained a hybrid organisation of ideological and organisational features abstracted from western and Laukeh modes of socio-political organisation. Right up to independence in 1957, the MCA manifested its three facets - as a modern day political party through participation in electoral politics and the independence movement, as a CCC-huay kuan which engaged in local community welfare work, and as a pro-KMT organisation displaying sympathy for Chiang Kai Shek's government.

CHAPTER 5

THE MCA AND THE EVOLUTION OF COMMUNAL POLITICS

Between 1952 and mid 1957 the colonial administration introduced measures to devolve power from the British Crown to an independent indigenous government in Malaya.¹ The process of decolonisation raised the issue of how an independent government in Kuala Lumpur would deal with the problems of political integration and national unification in a country with an extreme degree of cultural and structural pluralism.² While the British government planned to introduce a political system based on the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy in independent Malaya, its major

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1. British moves towards decolonisation were a major component in its overall strategy to defeat communism in Malaya. By introducing local government and promising self-rule, the Templer Administration was removing a key plank in the MCP platform, i.e. its call for Malayan independence.
 2. The concept of pluralism used here is based on J.S. Furnivall's definition, which states that a plural society comprises two or more entities living together but separated from each other by race, language, culture, religion and place of origin. Each entity possesses its own parallel set of values and institutions and pursues its life interests and goals more or less independently of one another. Furnivall, J.S., Netherlands India, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1939. Studies which deal with the theoretical aspect and practical impact of pluralism in Peninsular Malaysia include the following: Nagata, J. (ed.), Pluralism in Malaysia: Myth and Reality, Contributions to Asian Studies, No. 7, Leiden, 1975; Lent, John A. (ed.), Cultural Pluralism in Malaysia: Polity, Military, Mass Media Education, Religion and Social Class, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, North Illinois University, 1977; Rabushka, A., Race and Politics in Urban Malaya, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1973.

goal was to foster a system based on cooperation among English-educated elites of the three major races, a political system which some writers have referred to as consociational democracy.¹

The British government intended to hand over power to the westernised elite of Malaya, who were to be entrusted with the responsibility of working out a modus vivendi to contain the centrifugal tendencies inherent in the plural nature of Malayan society.² The socialisation of English-educated leaders in western educational and political institutions gave them a common point of reference for resolving political differences and problems, especially those arising from racial issues, within a democratic framework. Sharing a common westernised outlook, these leaders, it was believed, might make political compromises to overcome the tendency toward cultural fragmentation more readily than leaders from purely Malay, Chinese and Indian backgrounds, who tended to display stronger primordial loyalties to their ethnic origins.

To obtain pluralistic consensus from the different ethnic groups, the westernised multi-racial leadership had two options -

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1. The concept of consociational democracy was developed by Arend Lijphart in his case study of the Netherlands, The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1968, and in the following works: "Consociational Democracy", World Politics, 21, no.2, January 1969, pp.207-25; Democracy in Plural Societies, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1977. R.K. Milne and D. Mauzy apply the concept to the Alliance and National Front coalition system of government in Malaysia in Politics and Government in Malaysia, Times Book International (revised edition), Singapore, 1980, pp.352-56.
 2. Interview, Malcolm MacDonald, 24 May 1977.

one was to foster an integrated multi-racial political system and the other was to participate in an alliance of communally-based political parties. The British government's point of view was to turn over power to whichever arrangement emerged as the more viable. In the early 1950s both alternatives existed, in the form of the multi-racial Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) and the communally-based UMNO-MCA Alliance. Most British officials originally appeared to favour the IMP as the preferred route to pluralistic consensus. The IMP, however, fared disastrously in the local and state elections held between 1952 and 1955, and a sober assessment of political reality made the colonial administration lose its initial optimism for the IMP as the vehicle for the transfer of political power to an independent Malaya. Attention was then focused on the UMNO-MCA Alliance, which emerged as the arrangement preferred by the Malay and Chinese elites and their respective constituencies to regulate inter-communal political relations in Malaya.

5.1 The Communities Liaison Committee

5.1.1 The Organisational Framework

To promote the concept of multi-racial westernised elite cooperation, the colonial government established the Communities Liaison Committee (CLC) in early 1949. The CLC was both the manifestation of the British concept of consociational democracy and the forerunner of successive multi-racial political coalitions such as the Alliance and the present-day National Front (Barisan Nasional). The viability of this institution stemmed basically from the affinity of class interests and social backgrounds of the UMNO and MCA leaders

first brought together in the CLC by the colonial authorities. Apart from having similar westernised social backgrounds, UMNO and MCA national leaders had a common elitist ethos. Top ranking UMNO leaders came mainly from the landed Malay aristocracy and the higher reaches of the bureaucracy; their MCA counterparts came from wealthy towkay circles; the two groups thus shared a conservative political and economic philosophy.

The architect of the CLC was Malcolm MacDonald, the Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia. Concerned at the atmosphere of racial tension generated by the heated argument between Malays and non-Malays over the Malayan Union and Federation proposals, and feeling the need to bring the conservative Malay, Chinese and Indian leadership together to confront the MCP insurrection, MacDonald persuaded Datuk Onn and Tan Cheng Lock, together with their close colleagues, to work out their political differences behind closed doors with a view to minimising inter-ethnic friction.¹

Although the life span of the CLC was short - it began early in 1949 and was defunct by late 1951 - and although it was an organisation which attracted little public notice, its impact on the development of Malayan politics was far-reaching. The racial composition of the CLC and its style of conducting business and agenda of subject matter set the trend for the subsequent regulation of communal coalition politics, and prepared the ground for the UMNO-MCA

1. MacDonald stated that he was successful in forming the CLC only because Onn agreed to its formation. Interview, Malcolm MacDonald, 24 May 1977.

partnership in the Alliance.¹ The Alliance inherited from the CLC an elitist style of conducting business and an agenda centring upon the resolution of racially salient issues, in particular citizenship for non-Malays and special rights for Malays.

The CLC comprised six Malays and six Chinese, the majority of whom came from the UMNO and MCA, and one representative each from the Indian, Eurasian, Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) and European communities.² The UMNO and MCA delegates dominated the proceedings of the CLC, and negotiations in the committee were conducted mainly by these two groups. Business was conducted in a highly elitist manner - all meetings were held in secrecy, free from public scrutiny and without reference to UMNO or MCA second echelon leadership and membership opinion. The CLC members concurred that they would be unable to reach consensus on racially sensitive issues if they had to take into consideration grass-roots sentiments, which were often irreconcilable on matters pertaining to race.³ Upon reaching consensus,

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1. Karl Von Vorys makes a similar observation when he states that the style and procedure of bargaining set by the CLC "rather persuasively suggested the method through which a definite settlement of the terms of intercommunal relations in the future could be reached". Von Vorys K., Democracy Without Consensus: Communalism and Political Stability in Malaysia, Princeton University, Princeton, 1975, p.104.
 2. Although Onn was the leading figure in the CLC, Datuk E.E.C. Thuraisingham, president of the Ceylon Federation, was its chairman. MCA leaders who served on the CLC at one time or another, apart from Tan Cheng Lock, included: Yong Shook Lin, Khoo Teik Ee, Leong Yew Koh, Chin Swee Onn, Foo Yin Fong, Y.C. Kang, Toh Eng Hoe, Lee Kong Chiang, Dr. Ong Huck Chye and Lim Koon Teck.
 3. Interview, Malcolm MacDonald, 24 May 1977.

CLC decisions were turned over to the Federal Legislative Council to be acted upon, and the public only then got to know of them through press statements. The CLC's insistence that its members observe the rule of secrecy concerning matters under discussion is illustrated by the occasion when it rebuked Cheng Lock for making a highly indiscreet public statement on the citizenship provisions of the Federation of Malaya Agreement then under discussion.¹

5.1.2 Discussion of Citizenship and Special Rights

The CLC opened the dialogue on citizenship for non-Malays and special rights for Malays which dominated UMNO-MCA inter-party talks until final consensus was reached in the independence constitution discussed in Chapter 7. The major preoccupation of the MCA delegates in the Committee was to overturn the stringent citizenship provisions of the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement; the UMNO delegates, on the other hand, wanted to obtain unequivocal non-Malay support for Malay special rights and have the government implement a special rights policy.

The Federation of Malaya Agreement citizenship clauses disqualified the overwhelming majority of Chinese and other non-

1. Defending his action, Cheng Lock stated: "Though I have made it a rule, in order not to mar the harmony at meetings of the Committee, to avoid any reference to controversial or delicate questions, I had no idea that a member of the Committee should also bind himself not to speak on such subjects by way of ventilating genuine fears or grievances outside the meetings of the Committee or make statements of fact in public which he considers true and accurate without doing so in any offensive or immoderate manner." Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to E.E.C. Thuraisingham dated 6 May 1949, LYK Papers, SP3, Box 11.

Malays from becoming citizens. According to the MCA leadership, out of the 3,100,000 persons (59% of the total population) who had become Federal citizens by early 1951 through the process of automatic operation of law and through application and naturalisation, the racial breakdown was as follows: 78% Malays (2,450,000 persons), 12% Chinese (380,000 persons), 7% Indian, Pakistani and Ceylonese (Sri Lankans, 210,000 persons) and 2% others (60,000 persons). Of the remaining 41% who were ineligible for citizenship, the large majority were Chinese.¹

The MCA national leadership was determined to widen the Chinese citizenship base, both from a desire to establish the MCA as a Malayan-centred political party as well as the need to widen the party's political clientele. It was clear to the MCA leadership that so long as large numbers of Chinese remained citizenless and disenfranchised, the MCA could never be an effective force in Malayan politics. This viewpoint was understood and shared by the Laukeh second echelon leadership, who fully supported the top leadership in seeking a liberalisation of the 1948 citizenship clauses.

The MCA leaders in the CLC argued their citizenship case both on grounds of political ideals and pragmatic security concerns, as is reflected in a memorandum submitted by the party to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, James Griffiths, and the

1. The statistics were presented by Tan Cheng Lock in his address to the MCA Annual Central General Committee Meeting held on 21 April 1951, TCL Papers, SP13, Ucapan TCL, Item 35.

Secretary of State for War, John Strachey, in May 1950.¹

To obstruct the natural legitimate aspirations of the non-Malays to become Malayan citizens and to cast doubt on their loyalty and bona fide intention to identify with this country would alienate them and militate against the success of the task of constructing Malayan nationhood and the solidarity of the anti-Communist united front.

The only effective way of weaning the China-born Chinese from being concerned with Chinese national politics is to make a generous offer to them, as for instance, under the original Malayan Union Schemes, of Malayan Citizenship, which alone can reconcile them to their loss of interest or participation in the Kuo Min Tang.

We cannot have it both ways, i.e., prevent the Chinese from embracing the Kuo Min Tang or any other Chinese National political party or object thereto and at the same time place obstacles to their becoming Malayan citizens.

The security argument made the case that the grant of citizenship would cause the Chinese population to identify itself with Malaya and the authorities' fight against the MCP. At the same time, it was argued that if all Chinese were treated as Malayan citizens, they would have less incentive to engage in unMalayan political activities through participation in the Kuomintang and other China-centred organisations. The argument based on political ideals stressed the need to bind the loyalty of Laukeh Chinese to their adopted home, and the need to generate a common spirit of Malayan identity through the grant of citizenship for all the domiciled races.

1. Tan Cheng Lock, "Confidential Memorandum on Malaya submitted to the Right Honourable James Griffiths, Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Right Honourable John Strachey, Secretary of State for War", mimeo., 19 May 1950, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 169.

The persuasiveness of the security argument helped to win the case the case for the MCA. Soon after the outbreak of the insurgency, and in view of the deteriorating security situation, the Gurney Administration embarked upon a political campaign to win the "hearts and minds" of the Chinese population, realising that the war could not be won through military means alone. The citizenship question and lack of land tenure for the squatter population were identified as the major stumbling blocks which prevented the authorities from gaining the active support of the Chinese population. The CLC was thus set up with the main objective of removing Malay opposition on the question of citizenship; and the authorities of the individual states were pressurised into giving more secure land tenure terms for Chinese squatters in New Villages. Gurney instructed the British Advisers and Resident Commissioners to get the Malay District Officers and other government officials to persuade the Malay population to accept a liberalisation in the citizenship clauses: "They /the Malays/ do not appreciate the true nature of the Communist threat to Malaya, which can never be successfully resisted by holding at arm's length nearly half the population of the Federation instead of enlisting the co-operation and help which most of them are anxious to give".¹

Gurney left the initiative with Malcolm MacDonald to use the CLC as the vehicle to neutralise Malay opposition on the issue of citizenship for non-Malays. MacDonald played on Malay fears that the MCP could seize power unless the government acted upon the

1. Letter from Gurney to all British Advisers and Resident Commissioners dated 3 June 1950, C0537/6018(39).

issue, explaining that Chinese supported the Communists because the MCP, unlike the government, promised citizenship and equal political rights for all races if they came to power. He said that the government should pre-empt this appeal by offering the same deal to non-Malays;¹ and, in the face of the Communist threat, the UMNO leadership felt it had little choice but to give in to MacDonald's urgings and to help the MCA increase its popular standing within the Chinese community. It therefore consented to meet the MCA's demand for a liberalisation of the citizenship provisions.

It was, however, the MCA leadership's agreement to the implementation of a Malay special rights policy that finally removed UMNO opposition to the easing of citizenship conditions for non-Malays. Onn told the CLC that the UMNO would agree to political changes if Malaya got economic privileges in return. Central to Onn's agreement to liberalise the citizenship provisions was the establishment of the Rural and Industrial Development Authority (RIDA) in mid 1950 with Onn as its Chairman.²

The principle of special rights treatment for the Malay community had been written into the Federation of Malaya Agreement (Clause 19d).³ The Malay leaders in the CLC reminded the non-Malay

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1. Notes of Discussion of the CLC held on 30 December 1949.
 2. See, letter from Onn to Gurney dated 16 May 1950 and letter from Gurney to Onn dated 18 May 1950, C0537/6018(24).
 3. For a description of the term "special rights" and its application in Malaysia up to the present, see, Means, G.P., "'Special Rights' as a Strategy for Development: The Case of Malaysia", Comparative Politics, Vol.5, no.1, October 1972, pp.29-61.

representatives that the Malay community had an intrinsic and unquestionable claim to special rights treatment for the following reasons: (a) The Malay race should be accorded the status of primus inter pares in relation to other races in Malaya because Malays (and the term included recent immigrants from the Indonesian archipelago) were the true indigenous people of Malaya.¹ (b) The colonial government recognised that the fount of authority and sovereignty in Malaya stemmed from the Malay monarchical institutions in the nine Malay states. The British administration in Malaya derived its legitimacy and authority from its treaty arrangements with the Malay sultans, and it had regarded Malaya as a Malay country from the inception of colonial rule in the country. (c) The Malay community, however, had to live with the fact that the other half of the population which migrated to Malaya with the advent of British rule was not going to return to its countries of origin, China and India. As a by-product of colonial rule in Malaya, the immigrant races had come to enjoy the lion's share of Malaya's economic wealth. It was therefore argued that if the immigrant races were to be accorded political rights in Malaya, the Malays should be accorded special rights to give them a just share in the wealth of their motherland.²

1. Technically speaking, the aborigines of Malaya are the earliest inhabitants in the land. However, their political, economic and social isolation from the mainstream historical development of Malaya - a fact dictated by their isolated existence in the interior highlands and the insignificant size of their population in relation to the total population of Malaya - has resulted in a total lack of their impact on Malayan political life.

2. Notes of Discussion of the CLC held on 13 and 14 August 1949.

The Malay representatives in the CLC outlined how the policy of special rights should be implemented and recommended three strategies to improve the economic position of their community.¹ First, the government should subsidise Malay business ventures and set up trade schools to train Malay manpower to participate in the modern economic sector of the country. Second, a system of quotas should be introduced in certain industries where Malay capital and enterprise would be put to good use. The transport industry in rural areas having a predominantly Malay population was singled out as a sector where Malay special rights should be implemented; quotas to operate bus businesses should be introduced, and ownership of shares be transferred to Malay hands so that bus companies serving predominantly Malay areas would have at least 51% Malay share capital.² Third, Malays should receive preferential treatment in the allocation of educational and employment opportunities; scholarships and jobs should be reserved for Malay applicants on a quota basis. Fourth, non-Malay businessmen and employers should voluntarily increase the proportion of Malay participation in all sectors of the country's economy, in particular the tin-mining, rubber and coconut processing, rice-milling, fishing, textile, road transport and retail trade sectors. A striking feature of these recommendations was the concern to create a Malay capitalist class.

1. See, Notes of Discussion of the CLC held on 18 and 19 February; 14 and 15 March; 19 and 20 April; 13 and 14 August; 29, 30 and 31 December 1949; and 21 February 1950.

2. Notes of Discussion of the CLC held on 9 and 10 February 1949.

The privileges were aimed at improving the position of Malays who were in or wished to enter the bourgeoisie rather than be peasants and workers. The UMNO representatives in the CLC were mainly "feudal" leaders who saw the creation of a Malay bourgeois class as a solution to Malay economic backwardness, possibly because their western-style upbringing had persuaded them that such a strategy was necessary for the Malays to achieve prosperity.¹

The UMNO leaders' approach in the CLC dialogue on special rights was unaggressive and low-key. They emphasised repeatedly that they were seeking the voluntary cooperation of Chinese business interests to raise the economic performance of the Malays. They also urged the MCA leaders to ensure that Chinese business interests refrained from obstructing the establishment and development of fledgling Malay enterprises. The MCA leaders' response was ambivalent: while they appeared sympathetic, they were in actual fact both unable and unwilling to comply with the UMNO's requests, which went against the interests of the Chinese business community that was their constituency. Although these westernised MCA leaders might feel it necessary to support pro-Malay economic measures and might not themselves be affected by such policies, they were unable to obtain the cooperation of the second rung Laukeh leadership to support Malay special rights policies which threatened Chinese business interests. For example, they were unable to prevent a combine of Chinese bus companies from blocking the successful

1. A major preoccupation of the New Economic Policy implemented since 1969 has been the creation of a Malay capitalist class, an objective which has been largely fulfilled.

establishment of an UMNO-backed bus company.¹

As early as 1932 when he was a member of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, Tan Cheng Lock made the following statement on the problem of special treatment for Malays:²

... we are very sympathetic with the Malays and consider it the duty of the Government to assist them where they are badly handicapped in their competition with the other races. Let Government help them in every way so long as the interests of the non-Malays are not seriously and prejudicially affected thereby and when and where necessary similar assistance and treatment will be extended to the other races.

Seventeen years later, speaking on the same subject in the CLC, Cheng Lock raised the following questions: "I do not say that the special position should not be upheld, but in what direction? Is there going to be inequality as between the citizens themselves or are they to be on equal footing?"³ Cheng Lock's query epitomised the divided mind of the MCA on the subject of special rights: while preferential treatment for Malays appeared a necessary thing, its implementation, or more precisely, the nature and scope of its implementation raised the difficulty, if not impossibility, of reconciling non-Malays to the creation of two classes of citizenship in Malaya. Special rights by its very nature abnegated the principle of equal citizenship and equal opportunities sought by the MCA and

1. Notes of Discussion of the CLC held on 29 December 1949.

2. Tan Cheng Lock, Malayan Problems..., p.75.

3. Notes of Discussion of the CLC held on 13 August 1949.

the non-Malay community at large. At the same time, by stressing equality of citizenship and the need to respect free enterprise and private property, Cheng Lock held on to a political card useful in minimising the effect of Malay demands on the Chinese community.

The obstruction of Malay economic interests by Chinese combines and the inaction of the MCA leadership evoked a strong warning from Malcolm MacDonald. He stressed that unless the Chinese co-operated voluntarily in setting up Sino-Malay business ventures and increasing Malay participation in all sectors of the economy, the government could well be forced to legislate on behalf of Malay economic interests. He pointed out that the prevalent laissez-faire policy did not allow Malays to compete effectively with Chinese business interests, and the government might have no choice but to curb the free interplay of economic forces and ensure more effective Malay participation in economic life. MacDonald warned the MCA leaders:¹

... one or two other communities, by their activities here, have put themselves in a much stronger position than the Malays are in, and if that position were allowed to develop without any kind of qualification or curb, the Malays would perhaps come to a situation in their own country where they would be so poor that they could not stand up themselves. Therefore it follows from the fact that the position of the Malays must be safeguarded in Malaya, that all sorts of steps should be taken, and that the High Commissioner is charged with the responsibility of seeing that they are taken, to safeguard the Malays, so economically they have a proper share in the wealth of Malaya.

1. Notes of Discussion of the CLC held on 13 August 1949.

MacDonald's words are significant in that they presaged the basic economic policies which the Alliance Government subsequently introduced in Malaysia, especially the New Economic Policy implemented after 1969.

Apart from leading to the establishment of RIDA, the CLC dialogue on special rights ended inconclusively. However, it marked the first phase of a series of negotiations between the UMNO and the MCA which eventually culminated in the agreed common stand which was written into the independence constitution.

While MCA assurances to the UMNO on special rights, however guarded, appeared instrumental in gaining UMNO agreement to the liberalisation of citizenship for non-Malays, it should also be noted that Cheng Lock himself played a crucial role in gaining the friendship, confidence and trust of Datuk Onn, the UMNO president who was responsible for getting the UMNO General Assembly to approve the citizenship amendments. Before being brought together in the CLC, the UMNO and MCA presidents had not enjoyed an amicable relationship, as they had occupied opposing positions during the Malayan Union-Malayan Federation controversy, Datuk Onn leading the UMNO-orchestrated anti-Malayan Union movement and Cheng Lock heading the AMCJA-PUTERA. However, the experience of working together in the CLC built up a bond of trust between the two men, an outcome which MacDonald had planned and hoped for.¹ The following argument used

1. A British intelligence report suggested that Onn had softened his constitutional position as a result of the moderating influence exerted by Tan Cheng Lock and E.E.C. Thuraisingham in the CLC. Malayan Political Report for September 1949, CO537/4790 (79).

by Cheng Lock to further the Chinese case for more liberal citizenship provisions is a good illustration of the manner in which he succeeded in winning the confidence and goodwill of the Malay members in the Committee, especially that of Datuk Onn:¹

... if the Chinese are sincere and want to be loyal and give their allegiance to this country, and to be regarded by the Malays as their true brothers and sisters, the Chinese should prove their sincerity by being willing to be also the subjects, in the same way as the Malays are, of the Malay Sultan of the State in which they are born or in which they reside and want to settle down. Only when the Chinese acknowledge the same sovereign as the Malays do, can they demonstrate their will to be the equals and brethren of the Malays.

Cheng Lock's words struck the right psychological chord in the political and emotional attachment of the UMNO's leadership to the sovereignty of the Malay monarchical institution. In fact, the Malay response to Cheng Lock's speech was so favourable that the Committee resolved unanimously: "that the jus soli should be introduced forthwith in each of the Malay States, so that all persons of Asiatic or Eurasian parentage who are born in that State shall become natural-born subjects of the Rulers of that State, thereby entitling them automatically to become at the same time Federal Citizens under the terms of the present Federal Constitution...."²

Nonetheless, when the Federation of Malaya Agreement was amended in 1952 to liberalise the citizenship clauses, the principle

1. Quoted from Letter by Tan Cheng Lock to Yong Shook Lin dated 19 January 1950, TCL Papers, SP13, Item 167.

2. Ibid.

of jus soli was not incorporated into the amendments. This reflected a shift in the power relationships within the UMNO as well as a change in British views. Datuk Onn made the promise on jus soli to the MCA in early 1950, but in August 1951, shortly before the amendments came up before the Federal Legislative Council, he was replaced by Tunku Abdul Rahman as UMNO president. Tunku Abdul Rahman was unwilling to give in on the point partly because he had not participated in the CLC and did not feel bound by its decision, but more important because the decision was unacceptable to the UMNO second rung leadership and rank and file. Being newly-elected to his office, the Tunku was reluctant to support the unpopular measure.¹

The colonial government's withdrawal of complete support for the idea of jus soli stemmed from its concern that the sudden granting of citizenship to large numbers of non-Malays, potentially more than 50% of the voting population, would be both destabilising and politically unacceptable to the Malays. MacDonald explained to the Colonial Secretary: "Actually, the High Commissioner and I think that these proposals are better than the Communities Liaison Committee's proposals, for we too felt concerned when we realised fully the very large number of non-Malays who would be admitted to citizenship under the Committee's proposals." He added that Malay agreement to an amendment of the 1948 citizenship clauses "depended on the numbers of non-Malays qualifying for citizenship being not

1. Interview, Tunku Abdul Rahman, 2 August 1976.

too great in relation to the number of Malays who (would) qualify".¹

However, although the amendments did not include, *jus soli*, they eased considerably the citizenship conditions and made possible a significant increase in the number of Chinese and other non-Malay citizens in Malaya. The percentage of Chinese who were citizens increased from about 24% in 1950 to 50% by June 1953.²

Other issues discussed by the CLC included the question of the introduction of local elections and self-government, the cultural position of Malays vis-a-vis the other races, and a national educational policy. Since citizenship and special rights occupied the centre stage, dialogue on these issues was mainly perfunctory and did not result in any major decisions or policies. The Committee did not draw up a detailed timetable for the introduction of elections and self-government, but merely recommended that elections be held as soon as the security situation improved. Guided by MacDonald, the CLC recommended that elections be held on a progressive basis, starting from the town and municipal councils to the state councils and finally to the Federal Legislative Council; it also advised that the franchise should be based on possession

1. Letter from MacDonald to the Secretary of State for the Colonies dated 5 April 1950, C0537/6018(9).

2. Ratnam, pp.84, 92.

of Malayan citizenship.¹

On the question of a common education policy, the CLC members concurred that English and Malay should be taught as compulsory subjects in every government and government-aided primary school in the country.² The Committee, however, was deadlocked in its cultural discussions. The Malay members wanted to see Malay culture form the basis of the new Malayan culture, and the Malay language become the new Malayan national language. The MCA members rejected this position, arguing that it was unacceptable to assume that non-Malays had to acknowledge the supremacy of Malay culture and language over their own in an independent Malaya.³ Neither party, however, pushed the matter at this point because of the overriding concern to reach consensus on citizenship and special rights.

5.2 The Experiment with Integrationist Politics

For a short period, from the middle of 1950 to the middle of 1952, it appeared that the coming together of the UMNO and MCA leadership in the CLC might result in the de-institutionalisation of communally-based politics in Malaya. During that period, Datuk Onn and Tan Cheng Lock led a campaign to decommunalise the structure of the UMNO and MCA and to make the newly-created multi-racial

1. Communities Liaison Committee Issues Statement of Policy (Press Release), dated 18 September 1949.

2. Ibid.

3. Notes of Discussion of the CLC held on 8 September 1949.

Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) the leading political party in the country.

The move toward multi-racial politics was spearheaded by Onn and Cheng Lock and encouraged by high-ranking British officials, particularly Gurney and MacDonald. In 1949 Onn had first entertained the idea of forming a multi-racial party, the United Malaya National Party, to embrace the different racial groups. According to Cheng Lock, who urged Onn to establish such a party, Onn had consulted both Gurney and MacDonald and had received their support and encouragement on the project.¹

Onn's motives for initiating a multi-racial party while he was still the undisputed leader in UMNO, the strongest political force in the country, remain unclear. R.K. Vasil has suggested that Onn acted out of visionary ideals in wanting to turn Malaya into a politically integrated multi-racial state, the strident chauvinism displayed by Onn between 1946 and 1948 having been dictated by the sheer need to ensure the political survival of the Malay race in the face of the threat contained in the Malayan Union proposals. After that threat was averted, Onn's more deeply-held political convictions came to the surface.² This interpretation does not appear to be borne out by subsequent events in Onn's political life, particularly when he returned to conservative Malay communal politics following the

1. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Sir George Maxwell dated 12 July 1951, TCL Papers, TCL/V/148.

2. Vasil, R.K., Politics in a Plural Society: A Study of Non-Communal Political Parties in West Malaysia, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1971, pp.41-42.

failure of his multi-racial experiment in the form of the IMP. At least as likely an explanation is that Onn simply misread the major political currents of the period. Lacking an appreciation of the strength of communally-based politics in the country or the potential of an alliance-type coalition of such parties, and more importantly, misreading the strength of the apparent British desire to turn over power to a completely multi-racial independence government, Onn made what appears to have been a major political miscalculation. In any case, Onn's initiative reflected the only plausible and seriously-taken attempt at inter-ethnic politics involving high Chinese and Malay leaders in the history of Malaya and Malaysia, and its failure sounded the death knell for integrationist politics.¹

Over confident from his success in leading the UMNO crusade against the Malayan Union scheme, Onn believed he was strong enough to carry the UMNO with him in his move to decommunalise Malayan politics. He had hoped to use the UMNO as the vehicle for integrationist politics by opening the party to non-Malays and by changing its name to the United Malayan National Organisation. His manoeuvrings, however, were rejected by the party Central Working Committee and general assembly which instead accepted his resignation in August 1951. Faced with this failure, Onn formed the IMP (Independence of Malaya Party) on 16 September 1951 to pursue his political objectives.

1. Multi-racial parties formed since the IMP such as the People's Progressive Party, the United Democratic Party, the Democratic Action Party and Gerakan Ra'ayat Malaysia have never received the backing of top ranking Malay leaders.

The IMP was supported from its inception by Cheng Lock and a few other westernised MCA leaders such as Tan Siew Sin, Khoo Teik Ee and Yong Shook Lin, who had become personal friends of Datuk Onn. These MCA leaders were attracted to the IMP partly because of their friendship with Datuk Onn, but mainly because the IMP's platform promised to grant citizenship based on *jus soli* to non-Malays as well as equal rights and privileges for Malays and non-Malays.¹ Writing about his support for the IMP to his old friend, Sir George Maxwell, Cheng Lock stated: "My interest in the IMP is primarily in support of the principle for which I have been fighting all my life, that is, the issue of communal harmony and equality in this country."² It may be recalled that shortly before the formation of the MCA, Cheng Lock had made an unsuccessful attempt to set up a multi-racial party himself.

Although Cheng Lock campaigned vigorously for the IMP, speaking at the inaugural meetings of IMP branches formed in Kuala Lumpur (16 September 1951), Johore Bahru (16 November 1951), Malacca (11 May 1952) and Penang (15 May 1952), he was unable to persuade the majority of the MCA top leadership and the second rung Laukeh leadership to support Onn's new party. At the same time, the MCA leadership also rejected Cheng Lock's attempts to decommunalise the MCA.

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1. For a discussion of the IMP's objectives, see Vasil, pp.71-72.
 2. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Sir George Maxwell dated 18 December 1951, TCL Papers, TCL/V/232.

Between late 1950 and mid-1951, there were parallel moves by both Onn and Cheng Lock to decommunalise the UMNO and the MCA as a first step towards their goal of promoting an integrationist political system in Malaya. Onn was unsuccessful in his attempts to manoeuvre the UMNO onto a multi-racial course and open its doors to non-Malay members enjoying full membership rights.¹ Cheng Lock likewise failed when in April 1951 the party general assembly turned down his proposal to accord non-Chinese associate members equal voting and office-holding rights.² The sharpest opposition to Cheng Lock's proposal came from the Selangor and Perak state branches, the strongholds of the CCC-huay kuan establishment.³ Faced with Cheng Lock's threat to resign as party president and seeing the necessity of retaining his services as party spokesman in the CLC citizenship talks, Cheng Lock's opponents struck a compromise with him. It was agreed that associate members would be allowed to vote at party meetings and to stand for public elections on the MCA ticket, but would not be allowed to hold office in the party.⁴

The compromise on the status of associate members had no impact on the existing structure of the MCA, which remained

1. See, Vasil, pp.41-50.

2. The party constitution of 1959 admitted non-Chinese associate members without voting or office holding rights. In 1951, associate members, located mainly in Singapore, comprised nearly 10% of the party membership. Straits Times, 21 May 1951.

3. Straits Times, 15 May 1951.

4. Straits Times, 21 May 1951.

inaccessible to non-Chinese. Only one associate member, an Indian woman, was ever selected to stand on the MCA ticket during the party's entire history; and the reason for her selection during the Kuala Lumpur 1952 municipal elections was because the ward in question contained predominantly Indian voters.

After Cheng Lock was replaced as party president by Dr. Lim Chong Eu in March 1958, the party leadership abolished non-Chinese participation in the MCA in two stages. A revision of the party constitution in 1959 abolished the rights of associate members to vote on party affairs and to stand for public elections on the MCA ticket. A further constitutional revision in 1967 withdrew the category of associate membership from the party rules, thus closing the MCA completely to non-Chinese.¹

5.3 The Institutionalisation of Communal Politics: Formation of the UMNO-MCA Alliance

The contrast to the IMP, the UMNO-MCA Alliance, formed in January 1952, developed rapidly as a successful and viable arrangement for inter-ethnic political co-existence. Not only was the coalition arrangement acceptable to the Malay and Chinese electorate it also satisfied the British desire to see multi-racial power sharing in the soon-to-be independent Malayan nation state.

1. Constitution of the Malayan Chinese Association (Approved and adopted by the MCA General Committee at a meeting held on 22 March 1959), China Press Ltd., Kuala Lumpur; and Constitution of the Malayan Chinese Association (Incorporating all amendments up to March 1969), Solai Press, Kuala Lumpur.

The formation of the UMNO-MCA Alliance, a major turning point in the development of Malayan politics, institutionalised the country's political system on a communal basis. The Alliance was the brainchild of the Selangor UMNO and MCA leaderships, particularly the chairman of the Selangor UMNO Election Committee, Datuk Yahaya, and Selangor MCA chairman H.S. Lee and Working Committee members Ong Yoke Lin and S.M. Yong. The initiative for forming the coalition came from the MCA leaders. Rejecting Cheng Lock's decision to support the IMP in the election, the Selangor MCA leadership searched for an alternative strategy which would enable the MCA to field its candidates on a communal ticket but within an inter-ethnic framework. A coalition arrangement with the UMNO appeared an attractive possibility and Ong Yoke Lin, a schoolmate of Datuk Yahaya's, paved the way for talks between H.S. Lee and the UMNO leaders.¹

Major contributing factors to the formation of the UMNO-MCA Alliance were: the intensity of communal feelings among the Malay and Chinese population at large; the organisational strength of the MCA and the UMNO within their respective communities; the financial resources of the MCA; and the desire on the part of both parties to be part of the government of Malaya on the attainment of independence.

1. Interview, H.S. Lee, 22 July 1975; and Ong Yoke Lin, 18 May 1976. Tunku Abdul Rahman stated: "It was Ong Yoke Lin who got together with Datuk Yahaya and decided to form an Alliance to contest this election". Tunku Abdul Rahman, Looking Back, Pustaka Antara, Kuala Lumpur, 1977, p.177.

Of these, the communal particularism of the Malays and Chinese was the most important reason for the founding of the Alliance. When the Selangor State Branches of the UMNO and the MCA were preparing their separate strategies to contest the election, the racial arithmetic of the Kuala Lumpur electorate was the foremost consideration. The racial breakdown of the town was then roughly 62% Chinese, 23% Indian, Pakistani, Ceylonese, Eurasian and European and 15% Malay.¹ The Chinese proportion of the electorate, however, was substantially lower than its proportion of the total population, as the franchise was weighted in favour of the Malay electorate. Nonetheless, the Chinese voters of Kuala Lumpur still exceeded the Malay voters: they formed 37.7% of the electoral rolls, compared to 33.8% Malay and 28.5% Indian.² Franchise for the election was not based on Federal citizenship but length of residence (a minimum period of three years) in Malaya.

The significant feature was that despite the disproportional representation of Chinese voters in the electoral rolls, Chinese formed the majority of voters in two electoral wards (Petaling and Imbi), Malay voters in one (Sentul) and Indian voters in the fourth (Bungsar). Thus, out of the total 12 seats in the four wards to be contested (three seats in each ward), six were "Chinese" seats and only three were "Malay" seats. The racial

1. Taken from O'Callaghan, D., "The 1952 Local Body Elections in Malaya: A Study of the Relationships between British Policy and Malayan Political Evolution", MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1974, p.35.

2. Sunday Mail, 17 February 1952.

arithmetic therefore suggested rather strongly that the MCA could capture at least six seats and the UMNO only three.

Although the Selangor MCA leadership was confident that the MCA would win the election by itself because of the majority of Chinese seats, it nonetheless wanted to contest the election on some sort of inter-ethnic platform. This consideration was dictated by the need to gain the approval of the colonial administration and to pursue a multi-ethnic approach to political participation, since the British had made it clear that self-rule for Malaya would be withheld until there was political co-operation between the leaders of the different communities.¹

While the MCA leadership in Kuala Lumpur appreciated the fact that they had to come up with some solution to promote political co-existence with non-Chinese leaders, they did not believe that Cheng Lock's attempts to decommunalise the MCA and his co-operation with Onn in the IMP was the desired solution to the problem. Cheng Lock wanted the Selangor leadership to campaign on behalf of the IMP, or better still, to field MCA candidates not on the party ticket but the IMP's.² The chairmen of the Selangor MCA, H.S. Lee, decided against the advice of the party president. He and his members of

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1. On a visit to the country in December 1951 just before the Kuala Lumpur elections, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Oliver Lyttleton, reiterated that there would be no independence unless the leaders of the various communities could work together. See speech by Tunku Abdul Rahman given at the Alliance National Convention dated 23 August 1954.
 2. Malayan Mirror, Vol.2, No.21, 16 November 1954, article entitled "How the Alliance Began, the First Roundtable Conference", by T.H. Tan.

the State Working Committee felt that Cheng Lock's vision of political Utopia in Malaya - symbolised by harmonious multi-racial co-existence under the leadership of the IMP or other such multi-racial organisations - was mere wishful thinking. The cold facts of the matter, they thought, were that Chinese, Malays and Indians, for all the historical reasons which brought about a plural society in Malaya, were too deeply-rooted in their own communally-based life styles to abandon organisations which promoted their specific communal interests. The prevailing opinion in the MCA leadership hierarchy was that the Chinese masses, especially the Laukehs, would not vote for the IMP or any other multi-racial party in the Kuala Lumpur election.

The racial arithmetic of the Kuala Lumpur electorate made Datuk Yahaya realise the advantage of forging an electoral pact with the MCA. Datuk Yahaya's decision was also influenced by the Penang UMNO's experience in contesting the municipal election of Georgetown held on 31 December 1951, the first local government election staged in Malaya. Georgetown, the second largest town in Malaya after Kuala Lumpur, was also a predominantly Chinese town. There the Chinese formed 73% of the population, the Malays 14%, Indian, Pakistanis and Ceylonese 11%, and others 2%. The Chinese likewise formed the largest proportion of the electorate.¹ The Penang UMNO contested the election in an electoral coalition with

1. O'Callaghan, p.31.

the Muslim League.¹ Opposing the UMNO-Muslim League coalition were the Penang Labour Party and the Radical Party, ostensibly non-communal organisations but regarded by the Malays as representing the sectional interests of the Chinese.² The Penang MCA did not contest the election, for reasons that probably had to do with a desire to launch the Association's political debut in the more important Kuala Lumpur election. The UMNO-Muslim League coalition performed poorly: it won only one seat out of a total of nine contested. The Radical Party took six seats, the Labour Party one, and the remaining seat went to an independent candidate.³ It appeared from the results that the Chinese voters had supported Chinese-based organisations and that the UMNO stood little chance of getting voted into power in electoral constituencies containing a majority of Chinese voters. Under these circumstances, Datuk Yahaya understandably found the MCA coalition proposition attractive.

The second factor which made coalition with the Selangor MCA attractive to the UMNO was the strength of the Association's organisation in Kuala Lumpur. The linkage services provided by the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and huay kuan leaders who held office

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1. The Muslim League in Penang is a communal organisation formed by the Indian Muslim community of Penang. Some of its members have since joined the UMNO, and the Muslim League is today an insignificant body limiting its function to social welfare work within the community.
 2. For an account of the Labour Party and Radical Party, see Vasil, pp.80, 91, 93-166.
 3. O'Callaghan, pp.27-34.

in the MCA gave the party access to the Chinese community at large. In Kuala Lumpur H.S. Lee, besides being the MCA state chairman, was among the most influential Chinese association leaders, as the chairman of the Selangor Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Selangor Kwangtung Huay Kuan. Other prominent association leaders were represented on the Selangor MCA Working Committee, and they were confident that the Chinese would close ranks behind their communal organisations and the MCA when presented for the first time with the unfamiliar process of the western electoral system. At the same time, the recently-launched campaign to transform the MCA into a modern day political party with an effective election-participation machinery made the MCA an even more attractive political partner.

The organisational advantage which the MCA had over any other party which sought the Chinese vote was acknowledged by the IMP in a report analysing its disastrous electoral performance. The report observed that the party had failed because it lacked the organisational structure and resources to mobilise the Chinese voters, adding: "... we are convinced that the Chinese voters did not vote for us because our party had nothing to offer them, and in the absence of any such inducements, Chinese voters as a whole fell on their traditional loyalty /sic/ to a Chinese organisation, which has at least after all done something for them in the past".¹ There is no doubt that the Chinese organisation referred to by the IMP was the MCA and the work which the Association had done which won the support of the Chinese was its Emergency welfare work described in Chapter 3.

1. Taken from Vasil, pp.61-62.

An interesting insight into the politics of the Chinese community in Malaya is offered by the IMP admission that it had to organise along "sectional or communal" lines in order to build a base within the Chinese society at large. Given the MCA hold over the Chinese association network during the 1950s, it meant that if another organisation were to compete with the MCA for the support of the Chinese community, two possible tactics were open to the competitor. It could attempt to win over the allegiance of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and huay kuans, say, by putting up a set of leaders to displace the pro-MCA leaders as office holders in the associations, and so dislodge the MCA from its position at the apex of the Chinese associational network. Alternatively, it could choose to by-pass the linkage services provided by the Chinese associations and build up an independent organisational structure to parallel the associational network within the community.

In Chapter 1 it was shown that when the MCP and KMTM were competing for the support of the Chinese masses during the inter-war years, the KMTM gained the allegiance of the Chinese associations and mobilised the Chinese through them. The MCP set about to build up an extensive network of trade unions as an alternative base within the community, and succeeded in building up an independent structure which rivalled the traditional associational network to reach the Chinese masses, especially workers and students. It is a reflection of the degree of the MCP's success that the government had to prohibit the activities of the MCP-led trade unions and close a number of Chinese schools between 1946 and 1948 to prevent the further growth of the Communist-inspired organisational structure

within the Chinese community. By the early 1950s the traditional network had been largely restored, however, and thereafter it remained central to Chinese political mobilisation.¹

In the Kuala Lumpur municipal election, the UMNO-MCA coalition allotted seven seats to the MCA and five to the UMNO. The MCA fielded six candidates, who were all well-known figures in the Selangor Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall and/or the various dialect huay kuans of Kuala Lumpur. These men were Ong Yoke Lin, Douglas K.K. Lee (the son of H.S. Lee), Cheah Ewe Keat, Chan Chee Hong, Chan Kwong Hong and Y.T. Lee. In addition to holding office in Chinese associations, these men were also represented on the Boards of Managers of leading Chinese schools in Kuala Lumpur. The seventh MCA candidate, an Indian associate member, was slated to contest a seat in the predominantly Indian ward of Bungsar. The UMNO-MCA coalition won the elections handsomely, gaining nine out of twelve seats and 60.4% of the total vote.²

The majority of MCA candidates selected to contest the municipal and state elections held between 1952 and 1955 similarly came from well-established Chinese Chambers of Commerce and huay

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1. However, present day Chinese leaders agree that the influence exerted by Chinese associations over Chinese political behaviour have waned considerably since the 1950s. Interview, Lee San Choon, 21 November 1976; Lim Kit Siang, 30 June 1976.
 2. The three seats the coalition failed to secure were in the Bungsar ward; the IMP won two seats and an Indian independent the third seat. Ampalavanar, R., The Indian Minority and Political Change in Malaya 1945-1957, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1981, p.118; and, O'Callaghan, p.57.

kuan backgrounds. In the country's first General Election held in 1955, of the 15 candidates fielded by the party 13 were well known CCC-huay kuan leaders: Tan Siew Sin, Ong Yoke Lin, Tan Suan Kok, Tay Hooi Soo, Too Joon Hing, Cheah Ewe Keat, Lee Eng Teh, Teoh Chze Chong, Lee Thuan Hin, Lim Teng Kwang, Leong Yew Koh, Chee Swee Ee, and Lim Kee Siong. Only two, Dr. Cheah Khay Chuan and Dr. L.H. Tan, had no discernable links with the Chinese traditional associations.

In addition to racial arithmetic and the organisational strength of the MCA, the Alliance was given impetus by the financial resources available to the UMNO arising from a coalition arrangement with the MCA. Unlike the MCA, the UMNO did not have a regular and lucrative source of party funds as it was a party which drew its membership from the rural and most economically-deprived sector of the Malayan population: farmers and fishermen engaged in the subsistence economy of kampung life. The upper levels of the party hierarchy comprised members of the Malay aristocracy, civil servants, religious teachers, petty landowners and kampung traders.¹ The dearth of wealthy businessmen in the party resulted in a constant shortage of party funds. For example, in July 1950, it was believed that the UMNO bank balance amounted to only \$35.² The MCA, on the other hand, drew its income from a lucrative party lottery and, to a lesser extent, donations made

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1. Funston, J., Malay Politics in Malaysia: A Study of UMNO and PAS, Heinemann Education Books, Kuala Lumpur, 1980, ch.5.
 2. Extract from Malayan Political Report for July 1950, C0537/4790 (13).

by wealthy business patrons. At one point the UMNO leadership considered launching a party lottery modelled along the lines of the MCA sweepstake to obtain income for the party. The scheme was dropped not on religious grounds but because, according to Tunku Abdul Rahman, UMNO members lacked the financial resources to subscribe to such a lottery and the party itself did not possess the organisational means and know-how to run the venture on a large enough scale to make it a profitable undertaking.¹

The Selangor MCA was aware that Datuk Yahaya, the chairman of the Selangor UMNO Election Committee, was concerned about his party's shortage of money to finance the UMNO election campaign. H.S. Lee accordingly proposed to Datuk Yahaya that his Working Committee help out with the UMNO's election expenses as part of the terms of the proposed coalition.² The MCA's financial support to the UMNO, which contributed to the former gaining three out of the five seats contested in the Kuala Lumpur election, made Tunku Abdul Rahman, who had previously kept out of the internal settlement between the two Selangor parties, push for the idea of consolidating and formalising the ad hoc Selangor arrangement on a permanent Malayan-wide basis. According to T.H. Tan, the Chief Executive Secretary of the MCA, the Tunku had confided to him that "UMNO had

1. The UMNO Butterworth Branch unsuccessfully operated a small scale (\$50,000) lottery for a short period in 1952. Report by T.H. Tan on a conversation with Tunku Abdul Rahman on 23 September 1952, mimeo.; and, letter from T.H. Tan to Tan Cheng Lock dated 8 October 1952, MCA headquarters.

2. Interview, H.S. Lee, 22 July 1975.

no money" and would benefit from "a share of the MCA financial resources".¹

A report prepared by T.H. Tan, who subsequently became the secretary of the Alliance Party, accounting for the source of money used to finance the costs of the administrative and election expenses of the Alliance up to the Federal Election of 1955, stated that the MCA had borne the bulk of such expenses.² The MCA contribution towards the expenditure of the Alliance came from a sum of money which had originally been set aside for Malay welfare. In July 1952 the party allocated \$500,000 from the proceeds of its sweepstake to a Malay Welfare Fund, a move which was inspired by the discussions of the CLC on the need for non-Malays to help improve the economic well-being of Malays. The Association initially could not decide for what specific Malay projects the Malay Welfare Fund should be utilised. However, in April 1953 Cheng Lock informed the High Commissioner, General Templer, that the Fund would be used to build Vocational Training Centres to train Malay youths as apprentices to work in light manufacturing industries.³ In the event, the Fund was not used for that purpose. Half of it was used to cement the MCA's ties with the UMNO in the recently formed Alliance: the money financed a good part of the Alliance's administrative and

1. Report by T.H. Tan on his conversation with Tunku Abdul Rahman on 23 September 1952.

2. T.H. Tan, "Memo on Alliance Party, National Council and Executive Committee, With Proposed Rules", mimeo., 18 November 1955, p.2.

3. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to General Sir Gerald Templer dated 2 April 1953, MCA headquarters.

election expenses.¹ The remaining half was spent on cultivating Malay, particularly UMNO, grass-roots goodwill. Donations were made towards the building of mosques and kampong schools in UMNO strongholds, and towards meeting the special requests of a few top UMNO leaders.² A portion of the Malay Welfare Fund was also spent on the welfare of Malay detainees discussed above in Chapter 3.

The Malay response towards the creation of the MCA Malay Welfare Fund as a means to obtain Malay goodwill was mixed. A number of Malay leaders, including a few within the UMNO, were indignant that the MCA thought it could buy Malay goodwill. An UMNO office holder in Kedah urged the Malays to reject the scheme, saying: "Malays cannot be valued at \$500,000". Another UMNO leader

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1. Circular from T.H. Tan to the members of the MCA Standing Finance Sub-Committee dated 3 May 1953.
 2. Mosques which benefitted from the MCA Malay Welfare Fund included the Tiram Duku Mosque in Johore, the Pantai Kundor Mosque in Malacca, the Kampong Bahru and Jalan Pasar Mosques in Kuala Lumpur. See, "List of Grants towards the cost of Building or Repairing Malay Mosques", typescript. UMNO office holders who received MCA grants included the party Publicity Officer who received a grant of \$1,000, and another office holder, the Chairman of the Kedah UMNO, who received a grant of \$20,000 for medical expenses. Minutes of the MCA Hqrs. Standing Finance Sub-Committee meeting held on 17 December 1956; Letter from Senu Abdul Rahman, Secretary-General of UMNO to the President and Treasurer of the MCA dated 5 January 1956. Interesting enough the MCA turned down a request from the UMNO for a loan of \$45,000 which the UMNO wanted to buy out a Malay daily, the Majlis. The Association said the purpose of such a loan was outside the scope of the Malay Welfare Fund. Minutes of the MCA Hqrs. Standing Finance Sub-Committee meeting held on 17 December 1956. Another interesting application from the UMNO which was rejected was for a loan for \$50,000 towards the building cost of its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. Circular sent out by T.H. Tan to the MCA Hqrs. Standing Finance Sub-Committee dated 22 June 1954.

in Selangor described the MCA move as an attempt to "buy over Malays at 20 cents a head".¹ It was clear the scheme offended the moral sensibility of many Malays and served to reinforce the notion held by some Malays that Chinese thought money could buy anything. The UMNO top leadership, on the other hand, saw the scheme as motivated by a genuine desire on the part of the MCA to benefit the Malays, and Tunku Abdul Rahman supported its implementation.²

The MCA headquarters encouraged the MCA state branches to contribute financially towards the needs of various UMNO branches to strengthen the bond between the two parties in the Alliance. The following cases illustrate the types of financial assistance which some UMNO branches received from the MCA. The Perak MCA financed the bulk of Alliance's expenses in local elections held in the state during 1954. It also donated \$15,000 towards the building of a Malay hostel in Ipoh to accommodate trade apprentices and \$2,000 towards the purchase of equipment in the Teluk Anson (Teluk Intan) Malay Trade Training School. The Penang MCA contributed a small sum towards the construction of the Penang UMNO office. The Johore MCA gave \$12,000 to the UMNO branch in Tangkak to help defray its expenditure on the building of a local mosque. The Malacca MCA raised a sum of money towards the building of a Malay school in the

1. Straits Times, 30 July and 1 August 1952.

2. Minutes of the Alliance Roundtable meeting held on 3 February 1953.

state.¹ The UMNO considered the MCA an attractive ally not only because it was financially strong but also because it was a widely-based party with members distributed throughout the country, especially in the west coast states. The MCA's membership had grown so rapidly that by May 1954 there were 300,000 members in the MCA compared to 200,000 in the UMNO.²

The final reason for the formation of the Alliance was a desire on the part of both parties to attain independence for Malaya at the earliest possible date, and to become the first government in an independent Malaya. As the British Government insisted on seeing multi-racial political co-operation among the races before it left the country, a coalition of the two leading Malay and Chinese parties in Malaya appeared a suitable and acceptable arrangement. In addition to its acceptability to the colonial administration, the coalition pact between the UMNO and the MCA allowed them to present a multi-racial face to the Malayan people without having to dismantle the communal structure of their organisations. Both parties could present a multi-racial manifesto during elections aimed at protecting the interests of both the Malay and Chinese communities. At the same time, unlike the fate suffered by the IMP, they would remain communal bodies and thus retain the allegiance of the Malay and Chinese electorate.

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1. See, Minutes of the Perak MCA Working Committee held on 24 August 1954; Report of the Committee to be submitted to the Fifth Annual General Meeting of the Perak MCA Branch to be held on 16 August 1953, pp.8-9; Report of the Penang and Province Wellesley MCA Branch for the Year Ending 30 June 1955, p.4; Minutes of the Johore MCA Working Committee held on 3 May 1953; and, Report of the Malacca MCA Branch for the Year Ending 30 June 1952, p.3.
 2. "Statement by UMNO/MCA Alliance released in London 17 May 1954".

The Selangor UMNO-MCA Alliance was a limited and ad hoc electoral pact. It did not produce a comprehensive manifesto outlining its stand on racial issues, but was merely a pragmatic agreement between the two parties to field candidates on a joint ticket. As was shown earlier, candidates were selected on the basis of the racial composition of each seat. The Alliance manifesto for the Kuala Lumpur election in February and the Johore Bahru election in December 1952 dealt purely with parochial, non-racial issues such as the improvement and extension of public services and amenities, better schools, housing, sewerage and drainage.¹ It was not until the creation of the Alliance Roundtable in February 1953 that the Selangor ad hoc coalition was extended beyond the original limited pact.

5.4 Consolidation of the UMNO-MCA Alliance

Although the MCA top leadership was divided over the question of whether the Association should affiliate itself politically with the UMNO or the IMP, the disagreement did not lead to any crisis or separatist movement within the party. Except for the single resignation of Yong Shook Lin, a founder member of the MCA, who identified himself completely with the IMP, the rest of the party top leaders eventually chose to work with the UMNO. Although Cheng Lock and Siew Sin had campaigned for the IMP and not the MCA during the Kuala Lumpur election, the poor performance of the IMP forced them to reconsider their views on integrationist politics. Cheng

1. See, "Joint UMNO-MCA Manifesto to the Electors of the Johore Bahru Town Council Election" MCA headquarters. See also, O'Callaghan. p.47.

Lock could not effect an IMP-MCA partnership, because he did not hold the key to the MCA organisational strength and finances in Selangor and the other states, except for his home state of Malacca. Since the Selangor MCA power brokers had chosen the UMNO for an ally and had shown that they could deliver the Chinese vote, Cheng Lock had to accede to that political reality and to condone the UMNO-MCA Alliance.

Having succeeded in getting Cheng Lock to fall into line, H.S. Lee and the Selangor leaders made no attempt to challenge his position; instead they sought his cooperation in extending the ad hoc Alliance arrangement to the other states outside Selangor and putting it on a more permanent basis. Urging Cheng Lock to take up the matter with Tunku Abdul Rahman, H.S. Lee wrote: "I myself feel that I am not in a position to encroach upon the sphere of influence of other leaders of the MCA in other States and Settlements. I therefore beg of you to give my suggestion your kind consideration. If the UMNO-MCA could be established in the other parts of the country, it would go a long way to achieve a united Malaya".¹ It would appear that H.S. Lee refrained from challenging Cheng Lock's position, perhaps because he had no desire to become national president, but most probably because he realised his support base was limited to his Selangor home state. He realised that Cheng Lock commanded the overall support and allegiance of the MCA state leaders and was the only party leader capable of promoting the interests of

1. Letter from H.S. Lee to Tan Cheng Lock dated 18 February 1952, TCL Papers, TCL/9/33.

the Alliance on a country-wide basis.

Although Cheng Lock actively backed H.S. Lee's plans for the Alliance, he did not terminate his cooperation with the IMP immediately. Indeed, for the period from early 1952 until mid 1953, Cheng Lock politically cultivated both Tunku Abdul Rahman and Datuk Onn. Following the IMP's disappointing showing at the Kuala Lumpur polls, Siew Sin wrote to Datuk Onn: "You can rest assured that IMP will be formed in Malacca in the near future and will receive the active support of both my father and myself."¹ At the same time, starting from March 1952, Cheng Lock began talks with Tunku Abdul Rahman concerning the institutionalisation and expansion of the UMNO-MCA coalition arrangement.²

It is not clear why Cheng Lock continued to support the IMP after he made his commitment to the UMNO. It might have been that, due to his friendship with Datuk Onn, Cheng Lock wanted to give him face by not breaking off their political ties immediately. It might also have been because Cheng Lock still harboured a hope that British patronage would help Onn reverse his political fortunes vis-a-vis Tunku Abdul Rahman and the UMNO. At that point, Onn was more obviously marked out for official favour than the Tunku. For example, when the Member System - a modified cabinet system - was

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1. Letter from Tan Siew Sin to Onn dated 18 January 1952, TCL Papers, TCL 13/19. Siew Sin helped to form the IMP Malacca Branch in May 1952.
 2. See letter from H.S. Lee to Tunku Abdul Rahman dated 7 March 1952, TCL Papers, TCL/9/38.

introduced in March 1951 with the objective of allowing appointed non-government officials and Malayan leaders to participate in the formulation of government policies, Datuk Onn was given the prestigious portfolio of Home Affairs. And again, the colonial government appointed far more IMP than UMNO leaders to the Federal Legislative Council until April 1955, when the Council was reconstituted with the introduction of elected members.¹

However, with each electoral setback experienced by the IMP, Cheng Lock moved farther away from Datuk Onn. The IMP performed disastrously in all the elections it contested during 1952 and 1953 - out of a total of 134 local government seats contested, it won only three seats.² The UMNO-MCA Alliance, in contrast, chalked up impressive victories. In 1952, it captured 32 (74%) out of a total 43 contested seats in municipal and town elections. In 1953, it gained 64 seats (70%) out of 92 local government seats which it contested. In 1954, it scored a 91% success rate, winning 69 out of 76 contested seats. When the coalition contested the four state elections held by October 1955, it scored a landslide victory, winning all the seats in the State Councils.³ Onn reorganised the IMP into the Malay-communal Party Negara in February 1954, but this shift in tactics failed to halt the downslide in his political

1. See, Means, Malaysian Politics, p.137.

2. O'Callaghan, p.75.

3. Malayan Mirror, 16 December 1954, Vol.2, No.23; 1 October 1955, Vol.3, No.19.

fortunes. The Party Negara failed to win a single seat in the Federal Election held in April 1955, while the Alliance won 52 out of the 53 contested seats.¹

Recognising that Datuk Onn's political career had no long-term prospects, Cheng Lock decided to vest his, as well as the MCA's, political future in a close formal affiliation with the UMNO. On 3 February 1953, the two presidents set up the Alliance Roundtable as a vehicle to institutionalise the UMNO-MCA Alliance on a pan-Malayan basis. This body functioned as the supreme decision-making organ of the coalition until early 1955, when it was reorganised into the Alliance National Council. The Alliance Roundtable directed the UMNO and the MCA State Branches to form UMNO-MCA Liaison Committees to run the affairs of the Alliance in each state. The UMNO-MCA State Liaison Committees were then instructed to set up similar Committees at the district, town, and rural area or village levels within each state. Each UMNO-MCA Liaison Committee at every level was to have an equal number of representatives (six each) from the two parties, and it was to function as the co-ordinating body during elections.² By early 1954, thirty UMNO-MCA Liaison Committees had been established at the state, district, town and village levels throughout the country.³

1. For a discussion of the 1955 Federal Election, see, Ratnam, pp.186-200.

2. Minutes of the 5th MCA Cabinet meeting held on 3 October 1952, p.10; Minutes of the 7th MCA Cabinet meeting held on 9 March 1953, p.12; and T.H. Tan, Secretary to Alliance, "Memorandum on Alliance Organisation, Elections Machinery and Finance", mimeo., 26 October 1954.

3. Malayan Mirror, 31 January 1954, Vol.2, no.2.

By allying itself with the UMNO, the MCA made a shrewd investment in the long term political opportunities that would flow from UMNO goodwill. Whereas in the 1952 Kuala Lumpur election, the UMNO gained from the partnership, as only three out of the twelve seats contained a majority of Malay voters, this situation was highly atypical, save for municipal elections in Penang, Ipoh, Malacca and Seremban, which had Chinese majorities. Apart from these urban centres, the Chinese population was spread throughout the country and outnumbered by Malays, especially in the east coast states. For example, in Johore Bahru, the third town to hold a local government election in December 1952, Malays comprised 80.8% of the electorate, while Chinese made up only 13.7%, and Indians and others 5.5%. All the seats contained a clear majority of Malay voters.¹ However, the Johore UMNO-MCA coalition allotted three out of the total nine seats to the MCA. This pattern was similar for elections held at the state and federal level. For instance, when the election for the Johore State Council was held in 1954, there were 122,087 Malays (78.4%) who were eligible to vote compared to 26,400 Chinese (21.6%).² And, in the country's first General Election of 1955, Malays formed 84.2% of the electorate compared to 11.2% Chinese and 4.6% Indian and others, in the 52 Federal constituencies in the country. Out of the 52 Federal Legislative Council seats, only two

1. O'Callaghan, pp.72-73.

2. Minutes of the Muar MCA sub-branch Working Committee held on 22 August 1955. The Muar MCA pointed out that the electoral roll for the Johore state election for the Muar District comprised 44,555 Malay voters and only 9,721 Chinese voters, a percentage of 78.2 against 21.8.

contained a majority of Chinese voters.¹ The MCA nevertheless was allotted 15 seats for the election. Thus although Chinese voters then formed 11.2% of the electorate, the MCA was given a disproportionately generous share, 28.8%, of the seats to be contested. One can see, therefore, that the MCA relied to a significant extent on the goodwill of the UMNO and the backing of Malay voters to win seats in local government and Federal seats during the period prior to the attainment of independence, a pattern which has persisted up to the present day.²

In return for its generosity to the MCA regarding the number of allocated seats, the UMNO anticipated continued access to the MCA electoral machinery and its sources of financial support. In addition, by maintaining a strong alliance with the MCA, the UMNO was able to thwart all efforts by the IMP to attract MCA backing. Finally, because the UMNO leaders believed that many elements within the colonial administration favoured the IMP, it appeared all the more urgent that they demonstrate that the UMNO-

1. Ratnam, p.186.

2. For example, in the 1974 General Election, eight of the 19 Parliamentary seats won by the MCA contained a majority of Chinese voters, compared to eleven with a Malay majority. Report on the Parliamentary (Dewan Rakyat) and State Legislative Assembly General Elections of 1974 of the States of Malaya and Sarawak, Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1975, Appendix B. See also, Vasil, R.K., The Malaysian General Election of 1969, Oxford University Press, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, 1972, pp.38-39, and Table 4(a). The allocation of seats was and still is decided by the UMNO Supreme Council after consultations with the party's state leadership and other partners in the Alliance (National Front after 1969).

MCA Alliance was the more viable alternative to the form of multi-racial integrationist politics advocated by the IMP.

Angered and frustrated by his failure to win Chinese and Malay support, Datuk Onn led a campaign in the Federal Legislative Council to weaken the Alliance by seeking a ban on the MCA party lottery and attempting to discredit the party as the Kuomintang government's "fifth column" in Malaya. As the Member for Home Affairs, Onn introduced a motion in September 1952 asking for a ban on the MCA lottery. On the grounds that income from the MCA lottery which was used to finance election expenses gave the Alliance an unfair advantage over other political parties, the colonial government decided to impose the ban, which took effect in Singapore in October 1952 and in the Federation from June 1953 onwards. However, far from decreasing the MCA's political activity, the lottery ban terminated the MCA's social welfare activities and thus contributed towards its evolution into a modern day political party, completing the work of the reorganisation campaign of 1952. For its development as a party, the MCA had other sources of income, primarily in the form of contributions by wealthy towkay members and indeed from the entire Chinese business community, whose interests it represented. Backed by these Chinese capitalists, the MCA did not encounter difficulties in raising funds to finance its and the Alliance's election campaigns.¹

1. Since the early 1970s, Chinese capitalists have tended to contribute directly to UMNO election campaign coffers. Thus MCA financial support has ceased to be important to the UMNO. This point was made by several Chinese leaders in interviews, including Philip Kuok on 18 May 1976.

Onn's action against the MCA lottery precipitated the resignation of Tan Siew Sin from the IMP. In his letter of resignation, Siew Sin declared: "By passing the solution on lotteries run by political organisations, the Party /IMP/ has thrown a direct challenge at the Malayan Chinese Association. The resolution is couched in such strong language that the Party has compelled the Malayan Chinese Association to come to the conclusion that the Party is definitely hostile to the Association."¹

Cheng Lock had maintained a discreet silence during the fracas between Siew Sin and Onn, but his own break with Onn came a few months later. The occasion was precipitated by Onn's denunciation of MCA leaders as political lackeys of Chiang Kai Shek and the organisation as a fifth column working for the Kuomintang Government in Taiwan. Onn focused the public's attention on the presence of well-known Kuomintang Malaya leaders in the MCA leadership hierarchy and the fact that these leaders were constantly visiting Taiwan to pay homage and to pledge their political support for the Kuomintang Government. He further stated that the MCA was controlled by the Chinese Chambers of Commerce in Malaya, which had been the stronghold of the KMTM:²

The Malayan Chinese Association and the Chinese Chambers of Commerce are carrying out a plan to make this country the 20th Chinese Province to owe allegiance to Formosa, which was the 19th

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1. Letter from Tan Siew Sin to C.F. Gomes, Chairman, IMP Malacca Branch, dated 18 September 1952, MCA headquarters.
 2. Address by Onn to the IMP headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, reported in the Malay Mail, 26 March 1953.

Province.... The Malayan Chinese Association had assumed the role formerly played by consular representatives. The Chinese Chambers of Commerce had become the underground Kuomintang Party and is now dictating politics to the Malayan Chinese Association.

This accusation angered Cheng Lock so much that he terminated his political association with the IMP forthwith.

Faced with the necessity of having to win Malay support after the IMP was reorganised into the Party Negara, Datuk Onn mounted a series of attacks against the UMNO in order to discredit the latter's standing within the Malay community. Datuk Onn sought to weaken the UMNO by playing on Malay racial prejudices against the Chinese. For example, addressing a predominantly Malay election rally in Kuala Trengganu, Onn stated that the UMNO had come under the control of the MCA, and that UMNO leaders were selling out the interests of the Malay community to the MCA. He added that the identity of the UMNO had changed so much as a result of its partnership with the MCA that the UMNO flag no longer displayed the kris (Malay dagger) but the chopstick, a metaphor with a political message which would not be missed by Malays.¹ The Party Negara's dismal electoral performance indicated, however, that Onn's campaign failed to erode the bond of trust which existed between the UMNO and the majority of Malay voters.

When Onn tried to drive a wedge between the MCA and the UMNO by calling the MCA the Kuomintang Government's fifth column in Malaya, it did not produce a discordant note between the two

1. Onn's speech was reported in a letter from Tan Eng Aun, MCA Trengganu Branch, to T.H. Tan, MCA Chief Executive Secretary, dated 1 April 1954, MCA headquarters.

partners in the Alliance, as the UMNO leadership did not let whatever private reservations it held on the subject of the Kuomintang presence in the MCA come between the two parties. In fact, the top UMNO leaders went out of their way to demonstrate their support for the MCA when Tan Siew Sin introduced a motion of censure in the Federal Legislative Council against Onn for making his speech about the MCA and the Kuomintang. Tunku Abdul Rahman, Dr. Ismail and Tuan Sheik Ahmad voted with the MCA members for the motion which, however, failed to get passed.¹ On another occasion, in a rare and unexpected display of solidarity between the UMNO and the MCA in Malacca, a leader from the UMNO Youth Section attended the Double Ten Celebration held by the Malacca Chinese Chambers of Commerce, which was also attended by a number of MCA office holders, including Tan Cheng Lock.²

It appears likely that the UMNO turned a blind eye to the problem of the Kuomintang presence in the MCA because it wanted to preserve the necessary spirit of unity and goodwill to enable the Alliance to get on with its task of attaining independence for Malaya. It was only when independence was imminent that Tunku Abdul Rahman wrote a discreet note to the MCA Hon. Secretary-General suggesting that the Association should deal with the presence of "un-Malayan elements" in its midst. He advised the MCA to carefully screen the political affiliations of potential members and to reject the applications of those whose political

1. Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 7 May 1953, pp.395-6.

2. China Press, 12 October 1955.

loyalty to Malaya was suspect because of an attachment to the political doctrine of either Peking or Taiwan.¹ We will see later that the UMNO made a distinction between the two sets of leadership within the MCA - the English-educated and/or Baba leaders, whom UMNO regarded as true and loyal Malaysians, and the Chinese-speaking Laukeh leaders, who were regarded as pro-Kuomintang and Chinese chauvinists. During the independence negotiations between the UMNO and the MCA which worked out the Merdeka compact, the UMNO leadership ignored what it considered the pro-Kuomintang requests of the Laukeh leaders and worked only with the English-educated leaders of the MCA.

In conclusion, one can see that the period 1950-1955 was marked by two separate and opposed movements led by leaders from the UMNO and MCA to institutionalise politics in Malaya. Datuk Onn and Tan Cheng Lock sought to decommunalise the structure of the UMNO and the MCA and to create a multi-racial integrationist political system embodied by the IMP. On the other hand, Datuk Yahaya, H.S. Lee and Ong Yoke Lin worked to promote multi-racial political cooperation on a strictly communal basis but within the broader framework of the inter-ethnic Alliance coalition. It was the latter movement which succeeded in gaining the political support of the Malay and Chinese electorate throughout the country, first through the Selangor UMNO-MCA Alliance formed in January 1952 and ultimately through the permanent and nation-wide Alliance structure established between 1953 and 1955.

1. Letter from Tunku Abdul Rahman to the MCA Hon. Secretary-General dated 21 June 1957, MCA headquarters.

CHAPTER 6

THE MCA AND THE ALLIANCE CAMPAIGN FOR INDEPENDENCE

This chapter examines the position of the MCA during the period 1953-1955, when the UMNO-MCA Alliance initiated a campaign to attain independence for Malaya. The discussion takes place at two levels. The first level is an analysis of events which form the backdrop to the UMNO-MCA independence movement, and the discussion at the second level draws conclusions from the first to illustrate and highlight the manner in which the MCA had developed since its formation in February 1949. It is argued here that the period under review marked the peak of the party's popularity with the Chinese community at large; it was a high point in the party's political fortunes which has not occurred again up to the present day.

I have shown earlier on that a certain amount of ambiguity had surrounded the ideological identity of the MCA in the early years of its existence: whether it was a social welfare organisation or a revived Kuomintang Malaya or the first Malayan-centred Chinese political party formed in the country. By early 1954, however, the MCA had evolved into a clearly and highly effective Malayan-centred political party, sharing the limelight with the UMNO at the forefront of the independence movement. The MCA's involvement in the politics of independence dispelled its original image as a social welfare organisation concerned only with the resettlement problems of the squatter population in the newly created New Villages. Its

role in the independence movement also blurred the party's reputation as a revived KMTM, although, as is shown in the next chapter, the Kuomintang presence in the party continued to be a source of concern to the English-educated national leaders in the party and the UMNO, between mid-1956 and independence in August 1957.

The discussion of the MCA's participation in the independence movement serves also to throw more light on the way in which the relationship between the English-educated top leadership and the Chinese-speaking lower echelon leadership was developing during this period. When the party was formed the English-educated leadership relied heavily on the linkage services provided by the Chinese-educated leadership to create a widespread organisational base for the party. With the launching of the UMNO-MCA independence campaign, the Chinese-speaking leaders ceased to play as prominent a role as they had in the party's affairs during its early years. This was because they lacked the linguistic ability and political expertise which was required to deal with the British authorities and the UMNO national leadership in the politics of independence. The Chinese-speaking MCA leaders including the pre-war KMT figures in the party were, as we shall shortly see, committed to the attainment of independence for Malaya, and were happy to let the English-educated leaders steer the party through the course of nationalist politics.

The relationship between the English-educated top leadership and the Chinese-speaking leadership and party rank and

file was essentially a happy and harmonious one, as all the groupings in the party from different social backgrounds shared the same objectives and preoccupations during this period. Beside the shared objective of attaining independence, the other key pre-occupation was the settlement of the problem of Chinese education created by the enactment of the 1952 Education Ordinance. A further preoccupation of the MCA during the period was the party's participation in the country's first Federal Election held in July 1955. This involved the MCA national leaders in negotiating with the UMNO an election manifesto embracing a whole range of issues affecting the interests of Malays and non-Malays. Most fortunately, the negotiations between the MCA and UMNO English-speaking leaders produced a manifesto which satisfied the interests of the Chinese-speaking elements in the MCA as well as the Chinese community at large. The Alliance platform on citizenship and Chinese education appealed to all social groupings within the Chinese community, the economic pledges satisfied the interests of the Chinese mercantile class and the promises on land policies attracted the support of the half million strong New Village dwellers.

6.1 The UMNO-MCA Independence Movement

By mid 1953, the political leaders of Malaya knew it would be only a matter of time before the British Government gave Malaya her independence. The foremost question thus was: who amongst them would be the recipient of power and form the government of independent Malaya. Of the political parties formed in the

country since the end of the Second World War, only three parties, the UMNO, MCA and IMP, were seriously considered by the British as suitable candidates for that role. As the UMNO and the MCA had combined their political fortunes with the formation of the Alliance in February 1952, the struggle for the leadership of the independence movement was between the Alliance and Datuk Onn's IMP.

The two objectives pursued by the UMNO-MCA leadership from mid 1953 to late 1954 were (a) to outbid Datuk Onn in the competition for the leadership of the independence movement, and (b) to apply pressure on the British Government to speed up the timetable for self-government in Malaya. In the pursuit of these two objectives, the UMNO-MCA leadership employed two strategies, namely, the sponsorship of the Alliance National Convention, and the staging of a boycott by Alliance members of the Federal Legislative and Executive Councils and other government bodies in the country.

During the early 1950s, Datuk Onn was clearly the chief recipient of colonial political patronage. He was the leading Malayan figure in the wholly nominated Federal Legislative Council, holding the key post to the Member for Home Affairs. Despite the fact that the IMP was soundly defeated by the UMNO-MCA Alliance during the municipal and state elections held in 1952 and 1953,

the colonial administration still nominated more IMP than UMNO-MCA leaders to the Federal Legislative Council. Onn continued to have the ear of the colonial administration despite the IMP's lack of electoral success largely because a number of high ranking British officials, including the High Commissioner, General Templer, and Malcolm MacDonald wanted the IMP to succeed as Malaya's first multi-racial political party. Templer in particular felt that Malayan political life ought to be de-communalised, and an all embracing multi-racial organisation like the IMP ought to have official support, for it represented the ideal of multi-ethnic political co-existence in a racially divided country.¹ After the IMP was disbanded and replaced by the Malay-communal Party Negara in February 1954, Onn retained the favour of the British authorities, largely because a coincidence of opinion existed regarding the timetable for self-rule in Malaya, with both parties feeling that it should take place at a later rather than earlier date.

Although no one doubted then that the British Government was committed to the granting of independence for Malaya, there was some debate concerning the exact date of the handing over of power. In mid 1953, General Templer felt that in view of the fact that the Emergency was then not under complete control, independence should not be granted in the immediate future. He thought that it would take up to another ten years before conditions in Malaya were stable enough for the British Government to hand over power to an

1. Interview, Sir Gerald Templer, 9 November 1978.

elected indigenous government.¹ The colonial administration's preference for a later rather than earlier date for independence was warmly supported by Onn and his followers. It was obviously to Onn's advantage to have a delay in the holding of a general election and independence, since he needed time to reorganise and revive his ailing political fortunes. Onn's view that independence for Malaya should not be an immediate consideration emerged from the proceedings of a National Conference which he convened in April 1953 to debate the matter.

The National Conference was attended by the IMP and ten other organisations representing the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities. All these were, however, very small organisations which represented the interests of less than 15% of the total population.² The National Conference recommended the following:

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1. Interview, Sir Gerald Templer, 9 November 1978.
 2. The conference was convened by Onn and three Chief Ministers (Mentri Besar), Datuk Panglima Gantang of Perak, Othman bin Mohamad, Acting Mentri Besar of Selangor, and Datuk Nik Ahmad Kamal of Kelantan. The other ten organisations which attended the Conference besides the IMP were: the All-Malayan Muslim Association, the Eurasian Association of Malaya, the Straits Chinese British Association, the Ceylonese Federation of Malaya, the Federation of Indian Organisations, the Malayan Indian Association, the Malayan Indian Congress, the Malayan Pakistani Association, the Malayan Sikh Association, the Malayan Sinhalese Association. The last seven organisations represented the interests of the Indian, Pakistani and Ceylonese population which made up less than 10% of the total population. The Eurasian Association and the Straits Chinese British Association could at the most claim to represent the interests of less than 2% of the total population. The Indian element predominated at the National Conference because Indian leaders in Malaya were then strong supporters of Datuk Onn and the IMP. For an account of the Indian involvement in the IMP, See Ampalavanar, R., chs. 5 and 6.

(a) that the Federal Elections which were expected to occur in the immediate future to elect representatives to a reconstituted and enlarged Federal Legislative Council be postponed for at least another two years; (b) that there be an increase in the size of the nominated unofficial membership of the Council pending the elections; and (c) that the Member for Home Affairs, namely Onn, be accorded the status of "Deputy Leader of the Government" in the Council.¹ It appears that Onn had convened the National Conference to assure the colonial administration of his satisfaction in the prolongation of the colonial status quo. This pro-colonial bias in Onn's action at the time must not be construed as a lapse in the nationalist fervour which had driven him to organise the UMNO and to lead the campaign against the Malayan Union in 1946. In 1953 Onn was as determined as other nationalist figures to see independence realised in Malaya; his advocacy of a delay in the date of independence was merely a pragmatic move to buy time to reorganise his political resources to overcome the challenge posed by the UMNO-MCA coalition.

The UMNO and MCA leaders were, not surprisingly, highly critical of the activities of Onn. They boycotted the National Conference (turning down an invitation to attend) and roundly condemned its recommendations in no uncertain terms: "Instead of recommending immediate steps to establish democratic self-rule in

1. Report of the Malayan National Conference, Charles Grenier and Son Ltd., Kuala Lumpur, August 1953, pp.7-9.

the Federation, instead of granting the people - even if only by measured stages - their right of self-determination, the Working Committee of the National Conference proposes that the people, for more years to come, shall be governed in a manner more undemocratic than they are at present. The recommendations ... constitute a deliberate attempt to put back Malaya's political clock."¹ Tunku Abdul Rahman in fact believed that the National Conference was actually the brainchild of Malcolm MacDonald, who he felt had asked Onn to act as the colonial administration's front man to forestall the UMNO-MCA demand for immediate self-rule. MacDonald maintained that the Tunku's allegation was unfounded and that the colonial government had no vested interests in the proceedings of the National Conference.²

Having gained a clear advantage over other political parties in the local and state elections, the UMNO and MCA national leaders were naturally anxious to see independence granted at the earliest possible date. From the middle of 1953 until July 1955,

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1. "Statement by the UMNO-MCA Alliance on the Report and Recommendations of the Working Committee of the Mentri-Mentri Besar Sponsored National Conference issued on 23 August 1953", mimeo.
 2. See letter from Tunku Abdul Rahman to Tan Cheng Lock dated 24 March 1953, and "Notes of a Conversation between Tengku Abdul Rahman and Datuk E.E.C. Thuraisingham" by T.H. Tan, mimeo., 12 May 1953, MCA headquarters. Tunku Abdul Rahman told Thuraisingham that Malcolm MacDonald got Datuk Onn, Datuk Panglima Gantang of Perak and Datuk Nik Kam'1 to convene the National Conference. Malcolm MacDonald, on the other hand, informed me that he had not initiated the event but simply encouraged the other men to go ahead when they asked his advice on the matter. Interview, Malcolm MacDonald, 24 May 1977.

when the country's first general elections were held, the Alliance leaders initiated a series of coordinated measures which were designed to outmanoeuvre Onn's attempt to delay the date of independence and to gain British acceptance of the Alliance leadership of the independence campaign. These moves were: firstly, the activities of the Alliance representatives in the proceedings of the Election Committee; secondly, the sponsorship of the Alliance National Convention; and thirdly, the staging of a boycott of the Federal Legislative and Executive Councils and other government bodies.

In July 1953 the British Government appointed an Election Committee to investigate the question of holding a general election in Malaya. The membership of the Committee was dominated by Onn and his supporters, the Chief Ministers and IMP leaders; there were only seven UMNO and MCA representatives out of the total number of 46 appointed members.¹ The findings of the Committee were released in January 1954 and the seven UMNO and MCA members of the Committee objected to the majority findings on three key points, namely the composition of the reconstituted Federal Legislative Council, the timetable for independence, and the eligibility of civil servants to stand for the elections. The majority report recommended that the appointed membership of the reconstituted Council be slightly larger than the elected membership

1. The UMNO and MCA members were: Tunku Abdul Rahman, Dr. Ismail, Datuk Abdul Razak, H.S. Lee, Tan Siew Sin, Leong Yew Koh and Leong Cheung Ling. For a discussion of the work done by the Election Commission, see Ratnam, pp.175-183.

(48 nominated and 44 elected members) and that there be a gradual transitional change to a wholly elected Council. This recommendation in effect meant that independence would be withheld for the time being, since power would only be handed over to a Council with an elected majority. The majority report also recommended that civil servants should be debarred from standing for the elections. The Alliance minority report, on the other hand, stated that the elected membership should be larger than the nominated membership in the reconstituted Council (60 elected and 40 appointed members). It also insisted that Federal Elections be held by November 1954, and that there be no delay in the timetable for independence. It lastly argued that civil servants should not be excluded from standing as candidates in the elections. This point was made because the exclusion of civil servants from standing in the elections would effectively prevent a large number of UMNO leaders from seeking candidacy in the elections, since a major part of the party leadership were government officials.¹

6.2 The Alliance National Convention and Boycott of the Federal Legislative Council

To ensure that their views contained in the Election Committee report were not ignored by the British Government, the

1. Federation of Malaya, Report of the Committee Appointed to Examine the Question of Elections to the Federal Legislative Council, Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1954. The percentage of civil servants in the Supreme Executive Council of UMNO for the years 1949-1955 is as follows: 79% in 1949; 61% in 1950; 58% in 1951; 68% in 1952; 63% in 1953; 63% in 1954; 50% in 1955. Figures taken from, Chandrasekaran Pillay, "Protection of the Malay Community: A Study of UMNO's Position and Opposition Attitudes", M.A. thesis, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1974, p.7.

UMNO and MCA leaders organised a campaign to draw mass support for their cause. This consisted of sponsoring the Alliance National Convention, which held three meetings, on 23 August and 11 October of 1953 and on 14 February of 1954. In May and June 1954 the Alliance leadership staged a boycott of the Federal Legislative and Executive Councils and other government bodies to press the British Government to accept the views of the Alliance.

The proceedings of the National Convention, despite the attendance by four organisations other than the UMNO and the MCA, were entirely dominated by the Alliance leadership.¹ The Alliance leaders had invited a number of Malay organisations to attend the Convention mainly to give it a more convincing image as a truly national affair. It was, however, the case that the UMNO and the MCA were indeed the most popularly-based Malay and Chinese parties in the country; their combined membership of 360,000 in mid 1953 far outstripped the total membership of all other legal political

1. Fifteen organisations were invited to attend the Convention but only four bodies turned up - the Peninsular Malay Union, the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party, the Kelantan Malay Union and the Pan Malayan Labour Party. The low level of acceptance by organisations invited to attend the Convention was due mainly to dissatisfaction over the allocation of voting rights at the Convention - the UMNO and MCA allocated 14 votes each for themselves and gave only two votes each to other organisations. For further details of the Convention, see Means, Malaysian Politics, pp.144-50.

parties in the country.¹ The National Convention passed a number of resolutions, including a call for an elected majority in the reconstituted Federal Legislative Council, eligibility of civil servants to stand for elections and Federal Elections to be held not later than November 1954, demands echoing the Alliance recommendations in the report of the Election Committee.²

Whilst the Alliance-sponsored National Convention took a harder line on these issues than Onn's National Conference, the UMNO-MCA leadership was at the same time mindful to assure the British Government that its program for decolonisation was not a radical alternative to Onn's proposals. During the National Convention key speeches made by Tunku Abdul Rahman, Dr. Ismail and Tan Cheng Lock emphasised that an Alliance Government would be a loyal ally of the departing colonial power and would govern Malaya in such a manner that all British commercial and political interests in the country would be protected. The Alliance leadership also sought the goodwill of the Malay rulers by stressing that

1. This figure was given by Hashim Ghani, the leader of the Peninsular Malays Union in his address to the first session of the National Convention held on 23 August 1953. In mid 1954, the UMNO-MCA Alliance claimed a total membership of 500,000, 300,000 in the MCA and 200,000 in the UMNO. See "Statement by UMNO/MCA Alliance released in London, 17 May 1954", mimeo., TCL Papers, TCL/8/52a.

2. Minutes of the Third Session of the National Convention held on 14 February 1954, MCA headquarters.

it intended to uphold and guarantee the sovereignty of the Malay monarchical system in independent Malaya. The Sultans of the nine Malay states were given firm assurances by the Alliance leadership that all existing rights and privileges which the monarchs enjoyed under the terms of the Federation of Malaya Agreement would be preserved with the attainment of independence. The Alliance leaders took great care to emphasise that they had no desire to radicalise the political order in Malaya. They declared that they wished to attain independence only through "peaceful and constitutional means", and Dr. Ismail took pains to assure the Malay rulers that they would "form the pivot round which the loyalty and unity of the peoples of Malaya should revolve".¹

The Alliance courting of Malay royal approval for their independence initiative was dictated by two considerations. The first was the coincidence of aristocratic class interests between the UMNO national leadership and the Malay monarchy, and the second was the allegiance showed by the Malay masses towards their Sultans. A sizeable number of the UMNO top leaders had aristocratic connections — Tunku Abdul Rahman being himself a scion of the Kedah ruling house. The elitist social origins of these top echelon UMNO leaders explain their desire to preserve the monarchical system in independent Malaya. The vested interests of the UMNO in this respect happily coincided with the political and religious status

1. See speeches by Tunku Abdul Rahman, Dr. Ismail and H.S. Lee at the First Session of the National Convention held on 23 August 1953, MCA headquarters.

enjoyed by the Sultans within Malay society. The Malay community has historically regarded the Sultan of each Malay state as the font of political and religious authority in that state. Their allegiance to the Sultans has survived the colonial era and remains much in evidence today.¹ It was thus both necessary and advantageous for the Alliance coalition to safeguard the privileged position of the Sultans, since they possessed the influence to promote the cause of the Alliance through their hold over the Malay masses.

The Alliance courting of British goodwill through its pledges of maintaining good relations with the British Government after independence did not obtain for it the immediate assent of Whitehall for its independence proposals. In early May 1954 three Alliance representatives - Tunku Abdul Rahman, Datuk Abdul Razak and T.H. Tan - went to London to obtain the consent of the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttleton, to implement the resolutions passed by the Alliance National Convention. Failing in their mission, the Alliance leaders decided to stage a boycott of the Federal Legislative Council and other bodies to pressurise the British Government into heeding the Alliance terms for independence.

The Alliance boycott, held between late May and July, called for all UMNO and MCA members of the Federal Legislative and Executive Councils, state, municipal and town councils, and other

1. For a discussion of this, see, Chandra Muzaffar, Protector? An Analysis of the Concept and Practice of Loyalty in Leader-Led Relationships within Malay Society, Aliran, Ganesh Printing Works, Penang, 1979.

government bodies such as the Chinese Advisory Boards, not to serve on these bodies until the Alliance demands were met by the British Government. The boycott was observed by a total number of about 1,000 UMNO and MCA members (600 UMNO and 400 MCA) who resigned from their positions in these bodies.¹ Elected MCA representatives serving on the local councils in the New Villages were exempted from joining the boycott. The Alliance leadership agreed that the administration of the newly settled squatter population should not be disrupted by the boycott in view of the Emergency. The MCA leadership in particular did not want to undermine the political advantage it enjoyed in the New Villages, an advantage created by its social welfare work among the squatter population of the newly created New Villages.²

In addition to holding a boycott of government bodies, the Alliance also staged a number of mass rallies attended by their supporters to back up the national leadership's call for an elected majority in the Federal Council and immediate Federal Elections. Rallies were held throughout the country in June and July; on 8 July, a 6,000 strong crowd assembled in Kuala Lumpur and similar rallies were held in Seremban, Alor Star, Pekan and other towns in the country.³

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1. Memorandum from T.H. Tan to Datuk Abdul Razak, 4 June 1954, LYK Papers, SP3, No.49.
 2. Letter from T.H. Tan to Goh Chee Yan dated 24 June 1954, MCA headquarters.
 3. Malayan Mirror, Vol.2, No.13, 15 July 1954.

Shortly after the implementation of the Alliance boycott, Sir Donald MacGillivray, who had recently succeeded General Templer as High Commissioner, held secret talks with Tunku Abdul Rahman, Datul Abdul Razak and H.S. Lee to settle the dispute between the Alliance and the colonial government. MacGillivray's concessions to the Alliance leaders satisfied their demands on the composition of the reconstituted Federal Legislative Council and assured them of the intention of Whitehall to grant independence to Malaya at the earliest possible date.¹ Having secured their objective, the Alliance leaders called off the boycott. They were now firmly in control of the independence movement, having successfully beaten off Onn's challenge for the leadership of the movement.

The decision of the colonial government to switch its patronage from Onn to the Alliance leaders and its acquiescence in the latter's demand for immediate self-rule stemmed from a re-evaluation of the political situation. By mid-1954 British officials had become convinced that the depth of communal feelings in the country made the Alliance coalition a viable and realistic mode of inter-ethnic political regulation. It was also evident that the Alliance leadership had the widespread backing of the Malayan people in its call for immediate self-rule. Furthermore, Onn had abandoned the IMP and had returned to the fold of communal politics. Whitehall therefore decided that it had much to gain by accommodating the wishes of the Alliance leaders who had pledged to

1. Letter from D.C. MacGillivray to Tunku Abdul Rahman dated 6 July 1954, MCA headquarters.

safeguard British commercial and political interests in Malaya after independence. If Whitehall were to ignore the guarantees of the Alliance to protect British interests and to introduce the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy in Malaya, a Malay and/or Chinese radical nationalist alternative to the Alliance might develop in the country as a result of popular discontent and frustration bred by a continuation of colonial rule. Finally, the British Government felt confident enough to hand over the reins of power to an indigenous government, as it felt that the Communist threat was sufficiently under control by mid-1954.

6.3 The Impact of the Independence Campaign on the MCA

The MCA's participation in electoral politics after 1952 provided the first overt evidence that it had begun to function effectively as a Malayan-centred political party. The rise of independence politics in Malaya and the MCA's role in the movement brought the party into the limelight of the Malayan nationalist movement alongside the UMNO. The MCA's involvement in the independence movement in 1953-1955 not only firmly established its nationalist credentials but contributed towards its popularity within the Chinese community. It is argued here that the period 1953-1955 was in fact the high point of the party's popularity with the Chinese populace. This phenomenon resulted from the existence of a strong bond of unity and shared interests between the English-educated top leadership and the Chinese-speaking lower level leadership. This bond was created by a number of factors, the most important ones being the pursuit of independence, the settlement of the problem of

Chinese education arising from the 1952 Education Ordinance, and the wide appeal of the UMNO-MCA Federal Election Manifesto of July 1955 to the various social groupings within the MCA and to the Chinese community at large.

The objective of attaining independence was shared by all the leaders of the MCA regardless of differences in class and social backgrounds. Anti-colonial sentiments had been generated during the inter-war years within the Chinese community in Malaya as a result of the anti-colonial drive spearheaded by the Kuomintang and the Communist Party in China. KMTM and CPM leaders in Malaya propagated the belief that it was the patriotic duty of Chinese to combat colonialism whether it existed in Malaya or China. When the nationalist movement in Malaya came to a head during the early 1950s, the Chinese-speaking leadership and membership of the MCA were thus strongly sympathetic to the cause.

The English-educated leadership of the party was drawn from the same small westernised social group as the UMNO top leadership which was deeply committed to the objective of an independent Malaya. The commitment of these English-educated leaders to the cause of independence is made evident as early as 1926 when Tan Cheng Lock, then a member of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, had argued for political autonomy in Malaya. After World War Two when Cheng Lock and other English-educated leaders took the initiative of forming the MCA, they included the pursuit of self-government for Malaya as a key party objective.

When the process of decolonisation reached its final stages in Malaya, the English-educated and Chinese-speaking leaders of the party performed separate but complementary functions to achieve the objective of immediate independence. The English-educated leaders assumed complete control of party policies whilst the Chinese-speaking leaders mobilised the support of the party rank and file as well as that of the traditional Chinese associations. That the English-educated leaders had complete control over party policies is most clearly demonstrated by their presence on all the committees and working parties which were set up by the UMNO-MCA coalition to steer the Alliance successfully through the course of its independence campaign. The following is a list of the MCA representatives on the various committees set up by the Alliance between 1953 and 1957 to draw up the coalition's policies and to co-ordinate its activities during the independence movement:¹

- (1) The Alliance Roundtable (set up in February 1953 to coordinate the activities of the newly formed Alliance, its two key aims were the formulation of an Alliance strategy to obtain an early Federal Election and independence, and the extension and consolidation of the UMNO-MCA coalition on a nation-wide basis. The Roundtable was reorganised as the Alliance National Council in February 1955 and functioned henceforth as the

1. The following lists are compiled from the minutes of the Alliance Roundtable the minutes of the Alliance National Convention; the Report to the Alliance National Executive Committee by the members of a Special Committee to scrutinise Alliance Platform papers prepared by members of the Roundtable; the minutes of the Alliance Ad Hoc Political Working Committee.

supreme decision-making body of the Alliance, which was extended to include the MIC). MCA representatives: Tan Cheng Lock, Tan Siew Sin, H.S. Lee, Leong Yew Koh, S.M. Yong, Ong Yoke Lin, T.H. Tan, Leung Cheung Ling (temporary member).

(2) The Special Committee of the Alliance National Convention

(set up in mid-1953 to draw up the agenda and resolutions which were presented to the National Convention). MCA representatives: Tan Cheng Lock, Tan Siew Sin, H.S. Lee, Leong Yew Koh, S.M. Yong, Ong Yoke Lin, T.H. Tan.

(3) The Working Party to prepare the Alliance Federal Elections

Manifesto of July 1955. MCA representatives: Tan Cheng Lock, Tan Siew Sin, H.S. Lee, Ong Yoke Lin, T.H. Tan, Leong Yew Koh, Leung Cheung Ling.

(4) The Alliance Ad Hoc Political Working Committee (established in

March 1956 to draw up the Alliance proposals for the Independence Constitution). MCA representatives: Tan Siew Sin, Ong Yoke Lin, Leong Yew Koh, H.S. Lee, Lim Chong Eu, Ng Ee Teong, Too Joon Hing, Yong Pung How, T.H. Tan.

It is clear from the above that a handful of MCA leaders monopolised the conduct of party policies during the independence movement. They were all English-educated (H.S. Lee, Leong Yew Koh and Leung Cheung Ling were however also educated in Chinese), top-ranking leaders of the party. These representatives were appointed by Tan Cheng Lock acting in consultation with the party Central Working Committee (CWC). The CWC in turn derived its authority

from the party General Committee which comprised the elected representatives of the party branches. The fact that the party General Committee gave wide powers to the MCA representatives on the Alliance committee to promote the cause of independence is evident in the following resolution passed by a meeting of the General Committee on 13 June 1954:¹

The General Committee ... resolves that the MCA members of the Alliance Roundtable be and are hereby empowered to take such actions and/or such decisions as they consider necessary in the interests of the Federation and its peoples in their progress towards independence.

The above resolution clearly acknowledged acceptance of concentrated powers in the hands of a few English-educated top leaders by the Chinese-speaking lower level leaders and party rank and file. These few men were given unlimited authority to make decisions on behalf of the MCA and the Chinese community at large in matters relating to the independence of Malaya.

It is pertinent here to note the role played by Tan Cheng Lock in the independence campaign. We have seen that Cheng Lock initiated the formation of the MCA with a view to using the party to work for the cause of self-rule in Malaya. He pursued this goal with total dedication, working actively on all the committees which were set up by the Alliance to obtain independence. His health took a turn for the worse in early 1955 and he played a less and less

1. Minutes of the meeting of the MCA Central General Committee held on 13 June 1954.

active role in party affairs after that time.¹ Although he sat on the Working Party which prepared the Alliance Federal Election Manifesto, his role was largely nominal and he was not responsible for the drawing up of any major policy paper. Poor health prevented him from participating in the intra-Alliance negotiations which produced the Alliance constitutional proposals. In contrast, his son, Tan Siew Sin, played an active role in the affairs of the Alliance throughout his period. When Cheng Lock's health failed after 1955, Siew Sin in fact became the de facto president of the party, until March 1958 when Lim Chong Eu succeeded Cheng Lock as the party president. However, before his health declined, Cheng Lock played an active and crucial role in party affairs, especially those related to the problem of Chinese education, as we shall shortly see.

Whilst the English-educated leaders handled the party's relations with the UMNO in coordinating the Alliance independence campaign, the Chinese-speaking leaders performed the vital task of proving to the British authorities that the MCA possessed the

1. Interview, Tan Siew Sin, 24 June 1976. Tan Siew Sin said the following in Tunku Abdul Rahman's collection of memoirs: "You will recall that my father, though still nominally President of the MCA had, in fact, been out of action since the accident and illness which overtook him in 1955, and which had incapacitated him mentally." Tunku Abdul Rahman, Looking Back, p.177.

political clout to mobilise mass Chinese support to back up the Alliance demands. The MCA in 1954 claimed a membership of 300,000 which was almost entirely Chinese-educated and/or Chinese-speaking.

When the National Convention passed its resolutions to press for an elected majority in the reconstituted Federal Legislative Council and immediate independence, the MCA Chinese-speaking leaders brought their influence to bear upon the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and huay kuans to back up the Alliance demands. They convened mass meetings of Chinese associations to draw up petitions, copies of which were forwarded to the High Commissioner, the Colonial Secretary and the Malay rulers. In Selangor, 57 Chinese associations, ranging from the influential Selangor Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall to the major dialect/regional huay kuans in the state to smaller bodies such as the clan associations, trade guilds, social, cultural and recreational societies, held a mass meeting in Kuala Lumpur in February 1954 to support the resolutions passed by the National Convention. Similar meetings were held by Chinese associations in the other states; in Perak, the National Convention got the support of 25 Chinese organisations; in Negri Sembilan, 51 bodies; in

Malacca, 16 bodies; and Kelantan, 9 bodies.¹

When the Alliance national leaders decided to hold a boycott of the Federal Legislative Council and other government bodies, the success of this move depended on the willingness of the lower level leaders in both the UMNO and the MCA to observe the boycott. The Alliance national leaders who were members of the Federal Legislative Council would absent themselves from the Council, but the boycott of the State, municipal and local Councils, and other local government bodies would have to be observed by the lower level Alliance leaders. The willingness of the MCA Chinese-speaking leaders to comply with the wishes of the Alliance national leaders was expressed at a meeting of the party General Committee on 13 June 1954 where the following resolution was passed:²

In accordance with this resolution, those MCA members who were appointed by the Federal, State or Settlement Government to the membership of the Federal Executive and Legislative Councils, the Councils of State and Settlement Councils, State Executive Councils and Settlement nominated Councils, Municipal Councils, Town Councils and Town Boards will resign from such Councils, and those MCA members who were elected to these Councils will not participate in such Councils.

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1. Letter from H.S. Lee to the Secretary of the Federal Elections Committee dated 12 October 1953; letter from T.H. Tan to the Chairman of the Federal Legislative Council Elections Working Committee dated 14 October 1953. See also, Minutes of a meeting of Chinese Public Organisations in the State of Selangor held on 21 February 1954; Minutes of a meeting of Chinese Associations and Guilds in the State of Negeri Sembilan held on 21 February 1954; and Minutes of the Meeting of Representatives from all Chinese Organisations in Kelantan held on 28 February 1954.
 2. Minutes of the meeting of the MCA Central General Committee held on 13 June 1954.

The MCA national leaders organised meetings of Chinese associations to back up the boycott. In Selangor, for example, H.S. Lee, Chairman of the State Branch and President of the Selangor Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Chinese Assembly Hall, chaired a meeting of 120 Chinese associations which gathered to endorse the party resolution on the boycott.¹

It may be said that the MCA national leaders did get the majority of the party leaders at the State and lower levels to heed the Alliance boycott,. The boycott was effectively implemented in Selangor, Malacca, Johore, Pahang, and Negeri Sembilan, partially observed in Perak, and largely ignored in Penang.² The Alliance national leadership had decided to make the observation of the boycott a voluntary affair, and had not planned to impose disciplinary actions to enforce the boycott. In the event, the number of rebellious leaders lower down the UMNO and MCA party hierarchy were few, and the Alliance national leaders appeared satisfied with the overall results of the boycott, which saw some 1,000 Alliance resignations from government bodies.

To sum up, one can see that the degree of the effectiveness of the MCA's role in the Alliance independence campaign

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1. Letter from H.S. Lee to the Hon. Chief Secretary, Federation of Malaya dated 22 June 1954, MCA headquarters.
 2. The poor response from Perak and Penang was a result of the unwillingness of local party leaders to observe the boycott. Letter from Ong Seong Tek, Chairman of the Pahang State MCA to T.H. Tan, Chief Executive Secretary, dated 31 July 1954; Annual Report of the Malacca Settlement MCA for 1955; Minutes of a meeting of the Muar MCA Working Committee held on 22 August 1954; Minutes of a meeting of the Penang Settlement MCA Working Committee held on 14 July 1954.

depended on the extent to which Chinese community leaders, both inside and outside the MCA, were prepared to support the MCA's efforts. The widespread response of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and huay kuans to the proceedings of the Alliance National Convention and the boycott of government bodies demonstrated that the MCA indeed had the support of the traditional leadership of the Chinese community. It may well be the case that the appeal of independence by itself was strong enough to attract Chinese support for the MCA, and it was the party's championing of independence that created its popularity with the Chinese community, a popularity which reached its peak in 1952-1955. However, it is not valid to maintain that it was solely the issue of independence, and the MCA's championing of the cause, that explains why the party was at the heights of its popularity with the Chinese during the years. In 1956 and up to August 1957, the MCA was still engaged in the movement to attain independence for Malaya, yet the unity which had existed between the English-educated national leaders and Chinese-speaking leaders within the party, and between the party and the Chinese community at large, suffered a severe setback. A group of Chinese-educated leaders in the party broke away in 1956 to challenge the English-educated leaders' handling of the Alliance proposals for the Independence Constitution, as we shall see in the next chapter. To gain a clearer understanding of the reasons why the MCA reached its greatest appeal to the Chinese community in 1953-1955, we have to consider other issues which preoccupied the attention of the MCA as well as the Chinese public at large during that period; in particular, the issue of Chinese education.

6.4 The MCA Initiative on Chinese Education

The whole question of Chinese education in Malaya is a complex and wide-ranging subject; the discussion here seeks mainly to examine the manner in which the MCA gained political capital out of the issue in 1952-1955.¹

During the first half of the 1950s, as a result of the enactment of the 1952 Education Ordinance which threatened to destroy the whole system of Chinese vernacular education in Malaya, the Chinese community was totally preoccupied with the issue of Chinese language and education. There was a spontaneous outcry from Chinese community leaders and educationalists for the repeal of the Education Ordinance, and attempts were made to mobilise Chinese opposition to the Education Ordinance in a coherent and united manner. At the same time, the efforts of the community were also taken up by another major educational issue - the setting up of the Nanyang University in Singapore. The vociferous outcry against the 1952 Education Ordinance on the one hand, and the ardent support for the Nanyang University project on the other, were aimed at obtaining the common objective of promoting the cause of Chinese language and education in Malaya.

1. For a discussion on the development and significance of Chinese education within the context of Malayan post World War Two politics, see Tham Seong Chee, "Issues in Malaysian Education: Past, Present and Future" in JSEAS, Vol.10, no.2, September 1979; Enloe, C.H., Multi-Ethnic Politics: The Case of Malaysia, Research Monograph Series, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1970, chs. 2-5.

The 1952 Education Ordinance was based on the Barnes Report (released on 19 September 1951) which recommended an overhaul in the existing educational system in the country. The report called for the abolition of the separate vernacular schools and the creation of an integrated system of national schools where only the Malay and English languages would be taught.¹ At the same time that the Barnes report was being prepared, the colonial government had also appointed another Committee to make recommendations on Chinese education. The resultant report, the Fenn-Wu Report, advised against the findings of the Barnes report; it insisted that Chinese and Indian vernacular schools not be abolished but be incorporated into the proposed Malay and English national school system.² The colonial administration however ignored the recommendations of the Fenn-Wu Report and the Education Ordinance was completely based on the findings of the Barnes Report.

The publication of the Barnes Report immediately galvanised the leaders of the Chinese community into fighting for its repeal. They were convinced that the recommendations sounded the death knell for Chinese education and language in Malaya.³

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1. Federation of Malaya, Report of the Committee on Malay Education, Kuala Lumpur, Government Printer, 1951 (known as the Barnes Report).
 2. Federation of Malaya, Chinese Schools and the Education of Chinese Malaysians: The Report of a mission invited by the Federation Government to study the problem of the Education of Chinese in Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Government Printer, 1951 (known as the Fenn-Wu Report).
 3. Malayan Mirror, Vol.5, 15 August 1953.

Chinese education in Malaya had been set up through the patronage of community leaders of the traditional associations, particularly the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and dialect/regional huay kuans. On 31 March 1954, the Chinese student population in Malaya stood at 31% (251,174) of the total student enrollment (803,803) in the country.¹ The 250,000 odd Chinese students were enrolled in 1,200 schools, the majority of which received partial financial backing from the government in the form of grants-in-aid. As grants-in-aid per student paid to Chinese schools were lower than grants-in-aid paid out to English, Malay and Indian medium schools,² the running of Chinese schools still depended to a considerable extent upon the financial endowments made to them by the huay kuan leaders.

Hundreds of Chinese associations and educational bodies sent petitions and letters to the government, criticising the Barnes Report and requesting that the proposed Education Ordinance be based on the Fenn-Wu Report. The following quotations, one taken from the memorandum prepared by the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce (ACCC), and the other by Chinese school governors and school teachers, illustrate the tone of the Chinese response to the

1. Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, Council Paper 96 of 1955, 30 November 1955: Second annual report for 1954 of the Members of Education as required by Section 10 of the Education Ordinance 1952.

2. See Fenn-Wu Report, p.11.

issue.¹ The ACCC memorandum is quoted at some length because it lucidly expresses the reasons why the Chinese community found the Barnes Report objectionable:

The Barnes Committee propose that Chinese and Indians should eventually abandon their own languages and cultures and accept instead those of the English and Malays. Such action is considered to be "Malayanisation", without which there is no national unity. We quite agree that a true Malayan must have a Malayan outlook. But true Malayanisation ... is a successful digestion and combination of four cultures and ways of life dominant in Malaya, namely, Western, Muslim, Indian and Chinese. To favour only two and ignore the others is basically unjust, and will undoubtedly create a sense of fear and suspicion in the minds of those thus neglected, which might easily cause resentment and opposition. This will also contribute to communal misunderstanding and national disunity.... Self-government is not only a form of government, but an expression of a combined life. To think that such a government relies on the uniformity of language and culture is to

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1. "Memorandum on the Report of the Committee on Malay Education and the Report on Chinese Education presented by the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce of Malaya", mimeo, n.d.; Memorandum on the Select Committee on Educational Policy and the Education Bill 1952" presented by the meeting of Representatives of Chinese School Committees and Teachers in the Federation of Malaya to the High Commissioner, mimeo., 14 November 1952. Other petitions and memoranda sent in by the Chinese included: "Opinions and Views of Negri Sembilan Chinese on the Barnes Committee's Report on Malay Education", prepared by the Representatives of Chinese Educational Institutions and Public Bodies, Negri Sembilan, mimeo., 18 August 1951; "Memorandum on the two reports on Malay and Chinese Education" prepared by Representatives of a meeting of Chinese Teachers' Union of various States and Settlements of the Federation of Malaya, mimeo., 14 September 1951; "Memorandum on the Barnes Report" prepared by the Representatives of a meeting of Chinese Educational Institutions and Public Bodies of Perak, mimeo., 16 August 1951; "Memorandum on Malay and Chinese Education in Malaya" prepared by the Representatives of a meeting of the Chinese Schools and Chinese Associations in Johore", mimeo., 18 September 1951.

underestimate its significance; and to compare loyalty to Malaya with willingness to accept bilingual (English and Malay) system, as does the Barnes Report, borders on ignorance.

Chinese form almost half of the population in the Federation and the great majority of them are prepared to take Malaya as their homeland. By right their language should be taken as one of the official languages. But, to our great disappointment and dismay, its very existence is even now in peril.

The Fenn's Report on Chinese education is in direct conflict with the Barnes Report in the understanding of Malaya and Malayan culture. The latter believes that the formation of a Malayan culture and a Malayan nation, for that matter, presupposes the need to cherish two languages (English and Malay) and to extinct the others (principally Chinese and Indian). To the former, however, a Malayan culture may be achieved by mutual toleration and cooperation among all the existing races.... Unless we purposely choose the autocratic and the unjust, we are bound to agree in principle and method with the Fenn's Report.

The letter from the Chinese school governors and Chinese school teachers sent to General Templer read:

It is generally admitted that Chinese culture is one of the best in the world, and for this alone it may well deserve to be preserved and nurtured in Malaya. In addition, Chinese form about half the population in the Federation Your Excellency appreciates that the United Nations Charter stipulates that non self-governing governments should give due respect to the cultures of different peoples....

The unity of a nation does not, as contended by Dr. Fenn in his Report on Chinese education, depend on the singleness of tongue or the uniformity of languages.... In Malaya today, it appears to be politically more expedient to win the hearts of the people than to insist on the restriction of language.

The above passages indicate that Chinese objections were basically founded on two premises. Firstly, there was the insistence that

any ethnic group had a right to preserve its cultural heritage, especially in the case of the Chinese in Malaya as they formed nearly half of the total population of the country. Secondly, it was considered extremely unjust to create a sense of Malayan identity and consciousness among the various races by excluding the cultural heritages of the immigrant races. It was argued that such a method of Malayanisation could only cause inter-racial dissent rather than harmony.

The fears generated by the findings of the Barnes Committee led the teachers of Chinese schools to form the United Chinese School Teachers' Association (UCSTA) on 25 August.¹ (The UCSTA was the first pan-Malayan Chinese school teachers organisation and it functioned more as a pressure group lobbying for the interests of Chinese school teachers than as a trade union.) When the colonial administration brushed aside the objections of the Chinese community and enacted the Education Ordinance based upon the Barnes Report, Chinese response was immediate and widespread. The strength of Chinese anger aroused by the Education Ordinance is forcibly demonstrated in a letter written by Lim Lian Geok, the chairman of the newly-formed UCSTA, to Tan Cheng Lock, conveying his wish that Cheng Lock make known the following view of the UCSTA (which by August 1954 had a membership of 7,300 teachers in 1,200 schools, with a student enrollment of 260,000 and 23 branches throughout the Federation) to the High Commissioner, MacGillivray:²

1. Nanyang Siang Pau, 25 August 1951.

2. Letter from Lim Lian Geok to Tan Cheng Lock dated 1 November 1954, MCA headquarters.

Chinese here on becoming citizens of Malaya will do their duties and demonstrate their loyalty, but will never give up their mother tongue and culture. If Chinese education is not recognised as part of the educational system, then the Chinese are looked upon as conquered slaves and will never submit to the rule /of government/.

It is clear from the above that the Chinese-educated and Chinese-speaking population, which formed nearly 90% of the total Chinese population in Malaya, would question the legitimacy of a government which acted against the interests of Chinese language and education. Although this claim made by Lim Lian Geok may have been exaggerated, it nevertheless indicates the extent to which Chinese passions were aroused whenever the community saw perceived threats to the position of Chinese education and language.

From the very start, the leadership of the campaign to fight the 1952 Education Ordinance came under the control of the MCA. This occurred because of two factors: the relationship between the MCA and Chinese educational bodies and the huay kuan patrons of Chinese schools, and the personal commitment of Tan Cheng Lock to the cause of Chinese education in Malaya.

The Chinese-speaking leaders of the MCA who were the leaders of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and huay kuans were also the patrons of Chinese schools. They were the governors and managers who sat on school boards and committees which financed and managed the running of the schools. A central body for Chinese school governors and managers was set up with the formation of the United Chinese School Committees' Association (UCSCA) on 21 April 1954.¹ The UCSCA was as deeply concerned as the UCSTA about

1. Nanyang Siang Pau, 21 April 1954.

the threat posed by the Education Ordinance to Chinese education.

The commitment of Cheng Lock to the cause of Chinese education was a great boon to the Chinese-speaking leaders, who on their own would not have the necessary language and political skills to mount a campaign that would be a real source of concern to the colonial government. The importance of Cheng Lock's involvement in the Chinese education campaign lay not so much in his access to the highest circles of British officialdom in Malaya, but in his personal relationship with Tunku Abdul Rahman and in the political alliance between the MCA and UMNO. Although it was Templer's administration that passed the Education Ordinance and it was his successor, MacGillivray, who approved the release of the 1954 White Paper on Educational Policy,¹ Cheng Lock and other national MCA leaders knew that it would finally be the Alliance and not the colonial administration which would decide the fate of the Education Ordinance. The colonial administration was about to wind up its affairs of government in Malaya and to hand over power to the indigenous government soon to be chosen by the Malayan electorate. So although it had formulated an educational policy and enacted a bill to implement the policy, the colonial government could hardly justify the vast financial outlay which was required to train the manpower and construct the infrastructure for a system of national

1. The 1954 White Paper on Educational Policy stated the colonial administration's intention to implement the 1952 Educational Ordinance. Federation of Malaya, Educational Policy: Statement of the Federal Government on the Report of the Special Committee on the Implementation of Educational Policy together with the Report of that Committee, Kuala Lumpur, Government Printer, 1954.

schools at a time when it was about to leave the country. Given these circumstances, the MCA national leaders realised that it would be up to the Alliance (since the coalition stood the best chances of winning the forthcoming Federal Elections) to decide whether the 1952 Education Ordinance would be retained and implemented or be replaced by a policy drawn up by the new Alliance government. The vital factor, therefore, was the attitude of the UMNO national leadership towards the question of Chinese education. Only if the UMNO were to cooperate in the MCA's efforts to fight the repeal of the Ordinance would Chinese grievances be redressed.

In the meantime, it was to the political advantage of the MCA national leaders to do all they could to persuade the British authorities to repeal the Ordinance which had provoked such anger and consternation within the Chinese community. It was obvious that this was an opportune moment for the MCA to gain the widespread support of the Chinese masses. The championing of the cause of Chinese education at a time when its very existence was threatened would generate mass Chinese backing for the MCA. Whilst the party's involvement in the issue no doubt stemmed from this consideration, it was, however, not the only reason why the MCA fought the Education Ordinance so vigorously in 1952-1954. We have to look at Cheng Lock's role in the matter to understand why the MCA was so deeply committed to the cause of Chinese education in the early 1950s.

Cheng Lock's interest in Chinese education and language stemmed from a deep personal regard for his Chinese heritage which in his opinion sprang from one of the world's most ancient and

greatest civilisations. Although he was completely English-educated, he had taken great trouble to study Chinese classical works and had written a number of tracts on Chinese philosophical thought.¹ One of his most abiding beliefs was that Chinese in Malaya should never lose their cultural heritage and that the promotion of Chinese education in the country was crucial to the preservation of that heritage. As early as 1923, Cheng Lock had advised the colonial government that it should never contemplate doing away with Chinese and Indian vernacular schools, for the Chinese and Indian languages should be used as the means to inculcate a sense of Malayan loyalty among the offsprings of newly arrived Chinese and Indian immigrants in the country.² After the MCA was formed, Cheng Lock continued to champion the cause of Chinese education and language, as is shown in the following speech given in 1952 to a group of Chinese educationalists:³

While politically the Malayan Chinese must be one and united with the rest of the permanent population of Malaya, culturally they must be independent and must maintain a very strong intellectual and spiritual life of their own.... The Chinese must be brought into harmony with their native Chinese ethos in order that they may preserve their traditions, customs, institutions and manners and be conversant with the Chinese classics and culture. Thus only can they become good Chinese as well as good Malaysians.

In April 1953 Cheng Lock set up the MCA Chinese Education Central Committee (MCA Chinese Education CC) to lead and coordinate

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1. These include: "Ancient Chinese Philosophy", 3 February 1949 and "An Outline of Taoism", n.d., TCL Papers, SP13, Item 177 No.42 and Item 176.
 2. See speeches by Tan Cheng Lock in the Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, 29 October 1923, B185, and 26 October 1925, B175.
 3. Speech delivered by Tan Cheng Lock at the Conference of Chinese School Committees and Teachers on 9 November 1952 in Kuala Lumpur.

the campaign to fight the 1952 Education Ordinance. Cheng Lock's speech delivered at the second meeting of the MCA Chinese Education CC is noteworthy for the stress he placed on the MCA's duty to champion the cause of Chinese education and his belief that the Chinese would become loyal Malayan citizens only if they had the freedom to uphold their cultural traditions:¹

... the MCA ... must protect the Chinese not only politically but economically, culturally, educationally, and in every other respect. Because if the Chinese don't know any Chinese, they are not Chinese (without knowing Chinese culture); they cannot be Chinese if they do not practise Chinese customs and traditions.... Our idea is to be good Malayan Chinese as well as real, genuine Chinese culturally, racially, intellectually, religiously, and at the same time, we must be politically at one with the rest of this country in order to create what is most imperative - a united Malayan nation working and living in perfect harmony with each different component part.

The MCA Chinese Education CC espoused the following objectives: (a) to study, decide and act on the policies pertaining to Chinese education in the Federation; (b) to help or represent Chinese schools in any negotiations with the Government on all matters relating to Chinese education; (c) to unite school committees and teachers for the purpose of promoting the cause of Chinese education; (d) to discuss, promote and manage affairs pertaining to the development and betterment of Chinese schools.²

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1. Speech delivered by Tan Cheng Lock to the Second Meeting of Representatives of Chinese School Committees and Teachers in the Federation and Representatives of the MCA held on 19 and 20 April 1953.
 2. Minutes of the Second Meeting of Representatives of Chinese School Committees and Teachers in the Federation and Representatives of the MCA held on 19 and 20 April 1953.

The membership of the MCA Chinese Education CC comprised three groupings: representatives of the MCA, representatives of the UCSCA (the patrons of Chinese schools), and representatives of the UCSTA (the school teachers). The committee collated the views of the three parties on the threat posed by the 1952 Education Ordinance to Chinese education and language. The findings were published in a report presented to the government and "to all those charged with the responsibility of shaping the Malayan Nation of the future through education".¹ The memorandum was a summary of the views on Chinese education, language and culture expressed by Cheng Lock and other Chinese bodies noted above.

Besides presenting the MCA Education Memorandum to the colonial government, Cheng Lock also sought a number of private meetings with Templer and his successor, MacGillivray, to seek a satisfactory settlement of the problem. The meetings and correspondence between these men revealed that the colonial government would not repeal the Ordinance; on the contrary, the 1954 White Paper on Education stated that the colonial administration intended to proceed with the gradual implementation of the 1952 Education Ordinance, although this had not materialised by the time independence was declared in Malaya.²

1. Memorandum on Chinese Education in the Federation of Malaya, by Tan Cheng Lock, President MCA and Chairman MCA Chinese Education Central Committee, 31 March 1954, Art Printing Works, Kuala Lumpur.

2. See, letters from Tan Cheng Lock to General Templer dated 12 May 1953, and Templer's reply dated 6 July 1953; letters from Tan Cheng Lock to MacGillivray dated 21 October 1954 and 6 November 1954, and MacGillivray's letter to Tan Cheng Lock dated 15 October 1954, MCA headquarters.

The impact of the MCA's leadership of the campaign to fight the 1952 Education Ordinance was not in any way undermined by the fact that Cheng Lock's negotiations with Templer and MacGillivray had not resulted in the revocation of the Ordinance. The rallying of the party to the cause of Chinese education and Cheng Lock's outspoken views on Chinese culture proved potent enough to generate widespread Chinese confidence in the party. The control asserted by the party over the patrons of Chinese schools and Chinese school teachers in the MCA Chinese Education CC gave the party a powerful hold over the allegiance of the Chinese community at large.

The high regard which the Chinese community had for the MCA during this period was due very much to the personality of Cheng Lock as the party president, and his strong championing of Chinese culture in Malaya. Lim Lian Geok, the chairman of the UCSTA, paid homage to Cheng Lock's leadership of the Chinese community in the following words: "Sir Cheng Lock is known for his genuine love of Chinese culture, and could be said to be the real leader of Chinese in Malaya. He deserves the respect of our community including the teachers."¹

Popular Chinese support for Cheng Lock was materially translated into votes for the MCA during the local and State elections held from 1952 to 1955 and during the country's first

1. Speech by Lim Lian Geok taken from the Minutes of the Second Meeting of the MCA Chinese Education Central Committee held on 21 August 1954.

Federal Elections. The party's performance in General Elections held since independence has not matched the success it enjoyed at the polls during this period. While there are several reasons which explain the MCA's declining popularity with the Chinese electorate since independence, especially during the 1960s, one key issue has been its handling of the issue of Chinese education and language. After the MCA became a partner in the ruling Alliance government it had to honour the pledges made by the Alliance on Malay language and education in the Malayan Constitution (discussed in the next chapter). The constitutional pledge to make Malay the sole national language of Malaya placed severe constraints on Cheng Lock's successors in the MCA. Lim Chong Eu, Tan Siew Sin, Lee San Choon and Neo Yee Pan, the MCA party presidents since Cheng Lock's time until the present, have not lacked concern for the position of Chinese education and language, but the political partnership of the MCA in the Alliance government and the subordinate position of the MCA to the UMNO in the coalition made it difficult if not impossible for these men to champion causes such as the widespread demand by the Chinese community during the 1960s to make Chinese an official language, and the campaign to set up a Chinese university (Merdeka University) during the 1970s.

The other popular issue related to Chinese education and language in the first half of the 1950s, aside from the campaign to fight the 1952 Education Ordinance, was the project to set up a Chinese university to provide tertiary education for graduates from Chinese secondary schools in Malaya and Singapore who otherwise

would have normally gone to Chinese universities in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The proposed Nanyang University was to be built in Singapore on a piece of land donated by the Hokkien huay kuan in Singapore. The building and running of Nanyang University was to be largely financed by endowments made by individual Chinese philanthropists (such as Tan Lark Sye and Aw Boon Haw), Chinese Chambers of Commerce, huay kuans and business houses. The colonial administrations of Singapore and Malaya approved of the project and Malcolm MacDonald gave it his warmest support.¹

The overwhelming backing of the Chinese community for the project is reflected in the countless editorials and reports carried in the major Chinese dailies, for example, the Nanyang Siang Pau, the Sin Chew Jit Pau and the China Press, during the first half of 1953 when the campaign to raise money for the project took off. Leaders of Chinese associations in every state in the Federation set up Nanyang University State Committees to raise funds for the project; by the end of July 1954, it was reported that the various Committees had raised nearly \$2,500,000.²

The national leaders of the MCA spoke out in favour of Nanyang University from the very start. Tan Cheng Lock was a keen advocate of the project, and other leading MCA figures such as Leong Yew Koh and H.S. Lee publicly pledged their support for the

1. Nanyang Siang Pau, 24 January and 19 February 1953.

2. Nanyang Siang Pau, 8 August 1953.

university.¹ Several party branches passed resolutions backing the project and held meetings to discuss ways and means of helping to finance it.² A year later, in August 1954, the MCA became a member of the Nanyang University Council, the body responsible for supervising all activities connected with setting up the university.³

An important development in the MCA's involvement in the Nanyang University was the endorsement it obtained from the UMNO for the project. UMNO blessing for the project was contained in the manifesto drawn up by the MCA and UMNO national leaders for the Alliance National Convention held on 23 August 1953. The manifesto stated that the Alliance pledged its support for "the proposed Nanyang University as well as other universities that may be established in the future, so as to benefit all the communities of Malaya".⁴

The involvement of the MCA in the Nanyang University project greatly enhanced the party's reputation as the custodian of

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1. Nanyang Siang Pau, 11 and 27 July 1953. See also letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Goh Hon Sien, Hon. Secretary, MCA Singapore Branch, dated 15 February 1954 in which he stated that he strongly supported Nanyang University. LYK Papers, SP3, no. 34.
 2. See, e.g. Minutes of the Working Committee of the Penang MCA Settlements Branch dated 23 March 1953 and 24 March 1954; Minutes of the Working Committee of the Taiping MCA Branch dated 15 March 1953; Annual Report of the MCA Negri Sembilan State Branch for the year 1955, p.2.
 3. Minutes of a Meeting of the MCA Central Working Committee held on 21 August 1954.
 4. "Manifesto to be tabled at the Malayan National Convention", mimeo., 29 May 1953.

Chinese cultural and educational interests. Chinese-speaking party towkay leaders in each state were involved in the campaign to raise funds for the building of the university and made generous contributions themselves. They were also represented in every Nanyang University State Committee. The result of the commitment of both the English-educated and Chinese-speaking party leaders to the Nanyang University project was a great strengthening of unity between the top and lower echelon party leadership. It also contributed greatly to the popularity of the party with the Chinese community at large.

6.5 The Alliance Election Manifesto of July 1955

UMNO endorsement of the proposed Nanyang University at the meeting of the Alliance National Convention held on 23 August 1953 reflected the concern of the party's top leadership to conduct its newly formed political partnership with the MCA in as supportive and harmonious a manner as possible. The willingness of the national leaders of UMNO to accommodate the MCA's wishes on Chinese interests can be seen in the pledges made on issues affecting Chinese political, economic and cultural interests in the Alliance Manifesto for the country's first Federal Elections held in July 1955.¹ Before I

1. Although the MIC became the third partner in the Alliance Party and took part in the Federal Elections on the Alliance ticket, its leaders played no role in the drawing up of the Election Manifesto. This was because the contents of the Manifesto had already been decided upon by the UMNO and the MCA leaders before the MIC joined the coalition in April 1955. The MIC President, K.L. Devasar, informed the UMNO and MCA that he was happy to accept the Manifesto as it stood and that the MIC did not seek any changes in it. See "Statement by K.L. Devasar for incorporation into the Minutes of the Alliance/MIC meeting held on February 1955", mimeo., n.d.

proceed to discuss these pledges, it is pertinent first to understand why the UMNO was so supportive of the MCA during this period.

The most compelling motivation behind the UMNO top leadership's wooing of the MCA was its ambition to become the first government of independent Malaya. The British Government had attached a precondition to the granting of Malayan independence: it would hand over power only to a multi-racial government and not an exclusively Malay government (although the Malay component in it would be the superior force). The UMNO top leadership therefore had to seek allies from the leaderships of the Chinese and Indian communities, more particularly the former because of the greater numerical significance of the Chinese population in Malaya, in order to realise its ambition of gaining power. The MCA, with its widespread organisational network founded upon the Chinese association base, and the large financial resources of its towkay leaders, was at the time the most influential and effective Chinese party in the country. The electoral usefulness of the MCA to the UMNO was made apparent during the first municipal, local and state elections held in the country when the organisational and financial assets of the MCA contributed towards the massive victories won by the newly formed Alliance.

While the UMNO wished to promote a harmonious relationship with the MCA by being considerate of Chinese interests, it also knew that it could afford to make generous election pledges

to non-Malays since election promises, unlike constitutional guarantees, need not always be honoured. The function of an election manifesto lay primarily in its effectiveness as a vote-catching device; it had to appeal to as wide a section of the electorate as possible. The UMNO was prepared to hold out attractive promises to both Malay and non-Malay voters in the country's first general elections; the problem of sorting out the conflicting interests of Malays and non-Malays would be faced after the all important objective of winning the elections was first achieved.¹

A crucial factor which the UMNO top leadership had to bear in mind when drafting the Alliance Election Manifesto was the imperative need to retain the goodwill and support of its Malay voters whilst concessions were made to non-Malay voters. This meant that the UMNO national leadership had to maintain a careful balance in its pledges on issues affecting both Malay and non-Malay interests, a far from easy task since these interests were often diametrically opposed. The UMNO and the MCA national leadership, however, successfully performed this balancing act during the Federal Elections.

The 1955 election results showed that the Alliance Manifesto had appealed to the Malayan electorate regardless of

1. There were no citizenship requirements for non-Malays to be eligible to vote in the 1955 Federal Elections. There were also no language or property qualifications, only a residential qualification requiring the voter to have lived in the Federation for the last five years preceding the elections. Voters had to be over 20 years of age. Report of the Committee Appointed to Examine the Question of Elections to the Federal Legislative Council, p.18.

racial and class background. The Alliance party won a landslide victory, gaining 51 out of a total of 52 contested seats, and polling 80% of the popular vote.¹ The success of the UMNO and MCA leadership's wooing of Malay and non-Malay votes lay in a number of carefully thought out strategies. The first of these was that it held out, as far as it possibly could, equally attractive pledges on racially salient issues to both the Malay and non-Malay voters. Where this golden mean could not be achieved because of the sheer depths of racial passions aroused by the issues concerned, the UMNO and MCA national leadership avoided giving offence by declaring that the responsibility of making the decisions on these issues lay not with the Alliance but with an outside party - the independence Constitutional Commission, which was to be appointed to investigate the terms of independence for Malaya. Another strategy which the UMNO and MCA top leaders employed to retain their hold over the allegiance of their Malay and Chinese supporters was to control information that was allowed to filter down to the Malay and Chinese grass-roots during the election campaign. This was achieved mainly through the publication of two versions of its Election Manifesto.² The comprehensive version contained the full

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1. Party Negara, in contrast, failed to capture a single seat and polled a mere 7.6% of the total vote. Ratnam, pp.186-200.
 2. The full Manifesto is a 42-paged booklet entitled Menuju Kearah Kemerdekaan (The Road to Independence) : Alliance Platform for the Federal Elections, printed by the Alliance National Council in 1955, the abridged version is a 4-paged pamphlet entitled Alliance Manifesto for Federal Elections, TCL Papers, SP13, List of Printed Materials, no.37.

text of the Alliance pledges and policy statements and was intended only to have a limited circulation amongst the country's political elite - the British officials and members of the Federal Legislative Council and other opinion makers of the country. The main purpose of this version was to show the country's inner circle that the Alliance leadership had a clearly thought out policy on every major issue and was qualified to govern the Malayan people. The other version of the manifesto, specially designed for mass consumption and circulation, was an abridged and censored summary of the comprehensive manifesto. Parts of policy statements in the comprehensive manifesto pertaining to racially salient issues such as citizenship, special rights, land, and agriculture were omitted in the abridged version lest it provoke the hostility of either the Malay or non-Malay voters. Finally, the Alliance leadership contrived to take the heat out of racial sentiments by focusing the attention of all its voters on the immediate objective of Malayan independence. The Alliance leadership had judged correctly that independence would be its trump card in the election campaign, having staged the National Convention to press for immediate self rule and holding the boycott to press the British Government to accept the recommendations of the National Convention. In the eyes of the Malayan populace, the Alliance coalition had done more than any party to promote the smooth handing over of power in Malaya; certainly its record on that score was far more impressive than that of the other parties contesting the elections, including its most serious challenger, the Party Negara. By making the attainment of independence the key plank in its electoral platform, the

Alliance national leadership cleverly appealed to supra-communal sentiments and successfully got the Malayan electorate to submerge racial and class differences to achieve the higher objective of the colonial emancipation of the Malayan people.

The ensuing discussion of the manifesto examines the role played by the MCA English-educated leaders in drawing up the manifesto, and how this MCA influence was reflected in the resulting election platform of the Alliance. Responsibility for formulation of the election platform was given to five UMNO and seven MCA representatives. The MCA drew up the following paper: "Finance and Economic Policies" by H.S. Lee; "Education" by Leung Cheung Ling (a leading MCA representative on the MCA Chinese Education CC); "Consequences of the Alliance Assuming Responsibility without Financial and Economic Powers" by Tan Siew Sin; "Housing and Town Planning in the Federation" by Ong Yoke Lin; "Alliance Organisation, Elections Machinery and Finance" by T.H. Tan; "Cost of the Emergency in the Federation" by Tan Cheng Lock; and "Economic Aid to Malays" by Leong Yew Koh.¹

1. Leong Yew Koh's paper on "Economic Aid to Malays" was not a policy paper on Malay special rights, but was merely a comment on the UMNO papers on the subject. The UMNO representatives who drew up policy papers for the Manifesto were: Tunku Abdul Rahman - "Politics" (this included papers on the Position of Rulers and Constitutional Reforms, Malayanization of the Services, Citizenship, National Language, Form of Government); Datuk Razak bin Hussein - "Administration", "Alliance Believes in Free Malaya" and "Local Government". Dr. Ismail bin Datuk Abdul Rahman - "Agricultural Policy", "Land Policy" and "Medical and Health". Bahaman bin Samsuddin - "Social Services". Aziz bin Ishak - "Information Services". Information taken from "Report to the Alliance National Executive Committee", mimeo., 18 March 1955.

The MCA papers on economics, finance and education contained clear-cut policies which were beneficial to Chinese interests. Although the platform papers on special rights, citizenship, land, agriculture and fisheries were drawn up by the UMNO representatives, Chinese interests in these fields were not adversely affected; on the contrary, the pledges on land and agriculture were positively attractive to Chinese voters. All in all, the various planks in the Alliance election platform satisfied the different class interests of the Chinese community, from the capitalist towkays to the petty traders down to the squatter population in the New Villages. Chinese hopes and expectations were high, and a sense of well-being and harmony prevailed between the different social groups within the MCA, and between the party and the Chinese community at large.

Aside from independence, two other major issues - citizenship and education - were issues which would draw the support of Chinese voters regardless of class and social origins. Although it is true that all Chinese resident in Malaya were unhappy about the stringent conditions governing the acquisition of Malayan citizenship in the Federation of Malaya Agreement, the problem of Chinese education was in fact the "hotter" issue with the Chinese community at large, because the very existence of Chinese education in Malaya was threatened by the 1952 Education Ordinance and the 1954 White Paper on Education. The pledges made by the Alliance on Chinese education helped reduce fears regarding these policies. The Alliance promised to review the 1952 Education Ordinance and it was clear that an Alliance government would oppose the aims of the

Ordinance since the Manifesto (in the version designed for mass circulation) stated that the Alliance would allow "vernacular schools their normal expansion" and would "encourage rather than destroy the schools, languages or culture of any race living in this country".¹ The MCA efforts to fight the 1952 Education Ordinance had finally produced positive results; it now stood to reap the goodwill of the Chinese community during the Federal Elections.

The UMNO was willing to accommodate the interests of Chinese education because it was able to make similar promises regarding the development of Malay education and language in the Manifesto. The Alliance promised that more money would be allocated to finance the expansion of Malay government schools as well as privately-run Islamic schools, which predominated in the rural areas. Most important, the Manifesto promised to make the Malay language the national language of the country. This pledge reflected the personal commitment of the UMNO English-educated leadership to the issue as much as popular demands by the Malay community at large. Tunku Abdul Rahman's statements on the question showed the deep commitment he felt about the status of the Malay language. When the 1952 Education Ordinance was debated in the Federal Legislative Council, the Tunku obviously did not favour the intention of the colonial administration to abolish Chinese and Indian schools in the country. In his speech defending the right of the different

1. Alliance Manifesto....., p.3.

communities to be educated in their own language, he also made an important point regarding the status of the Malay language: "Let the Chinese be taught in their schools, let the Indians be taught in their schools.... Our only concern is that ... Malay must remain an official language of this country."¹ The Alliance therefore promised to uphold the right of the different races to an education in their mother tongues; however, the Malay language was to be accorded a more privileged status than the Chinese and Indian languages. Malay voters could then deduce that the usage of the Malay language was to have top priority in the educational system of an Alliance-governed independent Malaya.

Citizenship for non-Malays was the other issue affecting the interests of Chinese from all class and social backgrounds. The stringent citizenship provisions of the Federation of Malaya Agreement of 1948 prevented the overwhelming majority of Chinese then resident in the country from getting the franchise. The MCA national leaders had since that time argued persistently for the liberalisation of the citizenship provisions, particularly for the granting of citizenship to non-Malays based on the principle of *jus soli*, as has been shown in the earlier discussion of the proceedings of the Communities Liaison Committee. Whilst the Chinese voters wanted a pledge from the Alliance to grant *jus soli* to non-Malays, the Malay voters completely opposed it. It is not an exaggeration to say that citizenship was the most divisive of all the racially salient issues in the first half of the 1950s;

1. Proceedings of the Federal Legislative Council, 20 September 1951, p.260.

the Malay community had fought for the demise of the Malayan Union because it promised to grant citizenship based on jus soli to non-Malays and the community was not prepared to see the advantage it had gained taken away in 1955. The Alliance leadership, therefore, had to work out a way of dealing with this seemingly intractable issue.

It decided that the only way of resolving the conflicting interests of Malay and non-Malay voters was to actually disclaim that it was going to make any decisions on citizenship. In the abridged Manifesto, the Alliance stated that it would press the British Government to appoint a special Independent Commission to investigate the terms of Malayan independence and make recommendations on constitutional reforms. One of the main duties of this Commission would be "to study the nationality problem in the country so that it can be satisfactorily resolved". The public stand of the Alliance on citizenship was this: it did not hold out any promises to non-Malays, but instead attempted to reassure them that the problem would receive serious consideration in the immediate future.

The MCA leadership, however, knew that the UMNO national leaders had conceded far more to the non-Malay demands on citizenship than what the Alliance had made known in public. The Alliance position on the matter in its full Manifesto designed for limited circulation and the Tunku's views in an election policy paper on citizenship make this clear. The Alliance top leadership could afford to be less circumspect on the issue of citizenship in its comprehensive Manifesto because it was protected by the restricted circulation of the document. In this document, the Alliance

expressed its willingness to grant citizenship to the large majority of non-Malays resident in the country, although this was expressed in more an implicit than explicit form;¹

As a result of the Federation of Malaya Agreement of 1948, a problem of a large alien population has been created in the Federation.... An independent Malaya cannot tolerate this state of affairs.... To meet this situation, it is essential that Independent Malaya must create unity and a common loyalty among her peoples, and this will not be achieved if half her population were to remain aliens.

While the willingness of the Alliance to grant citizenship to the majority of non-Malays was implicitly made in the above, the statement on the same subject made by Tunku Abdul Rahman in his platform paper was totally explicit and clear-cut. The Tunku stated that the UMNO and MCA national leaders had privately agreed that citizenship based on jus soli should be given to non-Malays as part of a deal in which Malays would be guaranteed special rights;²

The principle of jus soli is almost universally adopted and practised. In the Federation, if this principle were adopted, the special position of Malays must be safeguarded, because Malays are weak economically and they have a genuine fear that their legitimate interests might be relegated to the background; if the principle of jus soli is recommended by the Special Independent Commission to be written into the Constitution, the Alliance pledges that the special position of the Malays will be safeguarded and likewise written into the Constitution.... The Alliance ... feels that the genuine aspirations of non-Malays and the

1. Menuju Kearah Kemerdekaan, p.36.

2. Paper on citizenship prepared by Tunku Abdul Rahman, 18 March 1955.

legitimate interests of Malays could be met by accepting the principle of jus soli and the principle of the special position of Malays be written into the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya....

The above is quoted at some length because, as we shall see in the next chapter, the issues of citizenship and special rights dominated the intra-Alliance talks to draw up the Alliance proposals for the Independent Constitution, and the Tunku's views as expressed above were an important point of reference for the UMNO and MCA negotiations. Tunku Abdul Rahman also made an announcement of the same fact to a meeting of the MCA General Committee which was convened in June 1954 to get the support of the MCA Chinese-speaking leaders for the Alliance boycott of government bodies. Addressing the MCA delegates, the Tunku said: "... the principle of jus soli has been accepted by UMNO".¹

Despite the fact that the UMNO's views on jus soli were only aired in private to the MCA top leaders, and on one occasion during a closed session of a meeting of the MCA General Committee, the Alliance leaders were careful to ensure that Malay sentiments be placated if news of this private assurance given to the MCA should leak out. Both the MCA and the UMNO top leadership were in agreement that the goodwill of Malay voters was paramount to the interests of the Alliance during the Federal Elections because Malay voters then formed 84.2% of the total electorate; Chinese voters formed 11.2%

1. Speech by Tunku Abdul Rahman at the Central General Committee Meeting of the MCA held on 13 June 1954.

and the others a mere 4.6%.¹ Therefore, while the UMNO national leaders wished to please their MCA friends and accommodate Chinese interests, they would not do so at the expense of alienating the Malay vote.

The insurance taken out by the UMNO to retain the loyalty of its Malay supporters during the Federal Elections was its pledges on special rights. While the Alliance did not make any specific promises on citizenship in its widely-circulated Manifesto, that was not the case with special rights. The abridged Manifesto stated that the Alliance would "safeguard the special position of Malays"; and the comprehensive Manifesto declared; "... the Alliance pledges that the special position of the Malays will be safeguarded and written in the Constitution...."²

The MCA leaders made no objections to the public statements made on the special position of the Malays because they were satisfied with the private assurances given to them by the UMNO on citizenship. Besides, they felt that the Manifesto's pledges on Chinese education were enough to draw in the Chinese vote. Furthermore, the Alliance platform on economics and finance, land and agriculture were also beneficial to certain class interests within the Chinese community; the platform on economics and finance attracted the support of the capitalist towkays, and the policies

1. Ratnam, p.186.

2. Alliance Manifesto...., p.1; Menuju Kearah Kemerdekaan, p.37.

on land and agriculture held out security of land tenure to the half million strong Chinese New Village population. At the same time, the class interests of Chinese petty traders, farmers and fishermen were likewise accommodated.

The Alliance platform on economics and finance was drawn up by H.S. Lee, one of the most successful Chinese businessmen in Malaya and also the president of the Associated Chambers of Commerce, the bastion of Chinese capitalist interests in Malaya. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that capitalist interests in the country should be so well served by the Alliance economic plank. In fact, the larger part of the economic plank was based on recommendations submitted to the Alliance National Council by members of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce.¹ These economic policies emphasised a strong commitment to free enterprise and other classic features of a capitalist economy such as the granting of tax exemptions for newly established business enterprises and the relaxation of exchange controls to attract foreign investment into Malaya. In addition, there would be no nationalisation of local private industries, British and other foreign concerns in the country. The UMNO national leaders left the task of drawing up the Alliance economic platform to the MCA leaders, because they felt that they lacked the commercial experience and background to deal with business policies. It must be remembered that there were hardly any UMNO leaders who were then engaged in commercial and industrial

1. "Memorandum on Federal Elections" by Henry T.W. Wong, Secretary of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce, mimeo., 6 January 1955, TCL Papers, TCL/111/295.

enterprises; the present breed of successful Malay entrepreneurs is very much the product of the New Economic Policy introduced in the country after 1969.

The Alliance agrarian platform, drawn up by the UMNO leadership, reflected awareness of two important considerations: that Malay voters formed nearly 85% of the total electorate, and that these voters were mainly poor farmers and fishermen. The UMNO leadership had always believed that the level of welfare for such deprived Malays should be improved, and this belief had formed the basis for its insistence on Malay special rights; the numerical importance of the Malay rural vote in the Federal Elections made it even more pertinent and necessary for the UMNO to take immediate action in this respect. The Alliance Election Manifesto consequently placed a great deal of emphasis on agrarian policies which were designed to benefit the majority of the Malay population living in rural areas. Both the Alliance Manifestos, the comprehensive and abridged versions, spelt out in careful detail the types of measures which an elected Alliance Government would implement related to land, agriculture, fisheries, rural welfare and so on.¹

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1. The major promises made by the Alliance in these areas consisted of the following: (a) Land policy - to develop and expand Malay reservations which were unsuitable or inadequate for farming; to establish land settlement schemes to provide land and livelihood for the landless. (b) Agriculture - to improve the marketing and transport systems serving agriculture; to make loans easily available to farmers and smallholders; to provide agricultural education; to improve farming methods; to diversify crop cultivation; to establish and expand cooperative societies for farmers. (c) Fisheries - to increase catch by employing the most efficient methods of fishing; to provide proper storage and transport facilities for the fishing industry; to help fishermen in finding suitable employment during off-seasons. In addition to the above, the Alliance pledged to improve the overall quality of life for rural Malays by improving and expanding educational, medical, housing and other social welfare services in the countryside.

While it is clear that the Alliance agrarian platform sought primarily to benefit Malay interests, the MCA leadership did play a part in influencing the platform in a manner which was advantageous to Chinese interests. The MCA leadership's influence on the Alliance agrarian platform is discernible in three ways: in persuading the UMNO leadership to exclude a comprehensive program of drastic economic reforms from the Election Manifesto; in obtaining a pledge from the UMNO to ensure security of land tenure for Chinese agriculturists; and in getting the UMNO to soft pedal on a pledge made to Malay fishermen which would have harmed the interests of Chinese middlemen in the fishing industry.

When the UMNO and MCA delegates met to discuss the contents of their Election Manifesto, the UMNO leaders had already formulated a program to improve Malay welfare.¹ However, none of the recommendations contained in the UMNO memorandum were included in the Alliance Manifesto, as the UMNO and MCA leaders agreed that the elections were not an opportune time to publicise the contents of the document.

The UMNO memorandum had recommended that government should introduce radical economic reforms to increase the Malay standard of living. It declared that there should be "drastic and direct Government involvement" in every sector of the Malayan economy to ensure that Malays would have "rapid and active participation in the economic life of the country". The document then outlined the

1. "United Malays National Organisation: A Memorandum on the Economic Position of Malays", mimeo., February 1953.

types of special rights which Malays would have in education, agriculture, industry, trade and commerce. Malay special rights in these areas were to be implemented through the legislative and executive arm of the state. The scope and range of state interventionist action envisaged by the UMNO to implement Malay special rights was indeed far-reaching. In the agrarian sector, for example, the UMNO's proposals for improving rural Malay welfare, radical by any standard, involved the abolishing of private enterprises connected with the processing, transporting and marketing of agricultural produce, and their replacement by state-run cooperatives. The memorandum declared that only government-sponsored cooperatives should be allowed to exist to service the needs of Malay farmers and "all other private undertakings should be abolished by law". It added that in mainly Malay areas "no individual produce buyer should be permitted to operate". The memorandum further stated that private marketing organisations would be banned and replaced by state marketing boards; and State Agricultural Banks would be the sole source of credit for Malay agriculturalists. In other words, the major purpose of these agrarian reforms was to eradicate the role of the middlemen in the subsistence economy of the Malay peasantry. It was widely held that the dealings of middlemen, most of them Chinese, had created Malay rural poverty, chiefly through the practice of charging exorbitantly high interest rates on credit loaned to Malay agriculturalists. Therefore, the UMNO sought to abolish non-Malay control over the Malay peasantry, even though these middlemen provided services which included the financing, processing and marketing of the produce of the Malay peasant

household, and the provision of agricultural goods and other daily necessities, albeit often on terms unfavourable to the Malay peasant clients.

The memorandum likewise argued that state legislative and executive action should be implemented in the fields of education, trade, commerce and industry to increase the level of Malay performance in these areas. The memorandum proposed that, among other things, Malays should receive preferential treatment in the distribution of educational grants and places in educational institutions, and in the allocation of business licenses and bank loans. It also stated that "in the management of estates, factories and mines, the employment of a percentage of Malays on the staff should be made compulsory". In addition, it should also be compulsory for "estates, factories and mines to employ a percentage of Malays where a large number of labourers (are) employed".¹ The UMNO memorandum on the economic position of Malays was carefully studied by the MCA national leadership and its reaction was noted in the election policy paper, prepared by Leong Yew Koh, called "Memorandum on the Economic Aid to Malays". A study of this paper reveals that the MCA national leadership had no objections to the UMNO claim that Malays ought to receive special treatment to improve their economic welfare. The paper stated that "the political stability and well-

1. There is a striking similarity in the principles underlying these measures proposed by the UMNO in 1953 and those subsequently implemented by the National Front Government under its New Economic Policy after 1969.

being of the country" depended upon a marked improvement in the standard of living of Malays. The MCA national leadership also agreed with the UMNO that government legislation should be introduced to bring about an improvement in Malay welfare. However, the MCA top leadership sharply disagreed with the UMNO on the scope and extent of government intervention on behalf of the Malay community. It argued that legislation benefitting the welfare of Malays should only be implemented if existing non-Malay economic interests were left unharmed. The MCA top leadership outlined the areas where Malay special rights should and should not be introduced.¹

In the agrarian sector, the MCA top leadership was adamantly opposed to the proposed banning of private enterprise as a means of safeguarding the interests of the Malay peasantry. Specifically, it completely disagreed with the UMNO that the function of the middlemen be eradicated. Its argument appears to have been based on two premises. First, the prohibition of private enterprise in the rural areas would severely damage the business interests of Chinese petty traders and retailers living there and performing,

1. The MCA memorandum recommended that Malays should receive special treatment in the following areas: (a) loans to be made easily available to Malays by state-controlled banks to enable them to set up businesses in urban and rural areas; (b) education centres and training facilities to be set up to equip Malays with the necessary managerial, commercial and technical skills to participate in commerce and industry; (c) licenses to be reserved for Malays in forestry, saw-milling, tin mining, rubber and other agricultural produce enterprises, and in other businesses such as the running of restaurants, hotels, petrol kiosks, rice and provision-dealing and public transportation; (d) land to be set aside in urban centres for Malays to run their businesses; and (e) where absolutely necessary, the government would legislate to promote the economic interests of Malays.

amongst other services, middleman services for Malay kampung dwellers. The business interests of wealthy towkays in the bigger urban centres would also be adversely affected, for they had considerable financial dealings with the rural Chinese petty bourgeois class, particularly through credit and goods provided to rural Chinese traders. Since urban towkays and rural petty traders constituted the backbone of the MCA leadership from the national down to the grass-roots level, the MCA top leadership discouraged the UMNO from restricting, let alone banning, their business activities.

Apart from the vested interests which the MCA top leaders had in arguing against the banning of private enterprise in the agrarian sector of the economy, the leaders had another reason for believing that such an action would not solve the problem of Malay poverty. A curtailment of Chinese business activities would not result in an increase in Malay wealth because, they reasoned, the wealth of Malaya lay not in the hands of the Chinese but with British and other foreign concerns. The MCA argued that British and other foreign companies controlled a much greater share of the country's wealth than Chinese business houses. Because of this, the MCA leaders argued, the source of Malay poverty did not stem from the activities of Chinese businesses in the rural and urban areas. They tried to persuade the UMNO top leadership that the solution to Malay poverty lay in limiting the control exerted by foreign interests in the plantation, mining, industrial and commercial

sectors of the Malayan economy.¹

The MCA top leadership was greatly concerned that Chinese support for the Alliance not be alienated during the country's first Federal Elections. They therefore persuaded the UMNO leadership to avoid all mention of the contents of both the UMNO and MCA memoranda on the economic position of Malays in the Alliance Election Manifesto. They assured the UMNO national leadership that they supported the latter's claim for Malay special rights; however, they pointed out that the elections were not a suitable occasion for publicising the MCA's stand on the matter, as it would surely drive away non-Malay support for the Alliance.

The UMNO national leaders complied with the MCA's views on the matter, largely because they themselves had no desire to introduce highly communally divisive issues into the elections campaign. Although the non-Malay electorate was not more than 15% of the entire electorate, it was important to the UMNO national leaders that they have the goodwill of the non-Malay community, because the issue of independence was at stake and the Alliance coalition could not afford to lose the support of any racial group in the country. The whole matter was thus left out of the Election Manifesto and the Chinese public was not informed about the private

1. See article by Tan Siew Sin in the Malayan Mirror, Vol.1, no.2, 28 June 1953. Tan Siew Sin provided statistical evidence to back up his claim that British and other European companies owned and controlled a greater share of the country's wealth than Chinese companies. The same conclusions were reached by a non-Chinese who studied the problem. See Puthuchery, J.J., Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy, Donald Moore, Eastern Universities Press, Singapore, 1960.

MCA national leaders' agreement to the case for Malay special rights. One may note that the UMNO national leaders on their part had not disclosed their private views on citizenship for non-Malays to the Malay public for the same reason of wishing to avoid controversial and high-charged communal issues in the elections campaign.

A second feature which bore the mark of MCA influence on the drawing up of the Election Manifesto was the platform on fisheries. In the comprehensive Manifesto, the UMNO leadership pledged to improve the standard of living of Malay fishermen through various measures. One of these read: "to find ways and means of preventing the fishermen from being indebted to middlemen". Since many MCA lower echelon leaders and supporters were engaged in middlemen activities in the fishing industry, the inclusion of a pledge to make Malay fishermen less dependent on the services of middlemen in the popularly-circulated Manifesto would be injurious to the standing of the MCA within the Chinese community at large. The English-educated MCA top leaders likewise needed the linkage services of the Chinese-speaking business leaders in the party to mobilise grass-roots Chinese support for the Alliance in the elections. Recognising these political facts, the UMNO leaders agreed to exclude the fisheries pledge in the broadly-circulated Manifesto. The inclusion of the pledge in the comprehensive Manifesto, however, was deemed necessary by the UMNO national leaders for they wanted to show Malay community leaders that they were aware of the major problem of indebtedness faced by Malay fishermen (and farmers) and were prepared to deal with the issue.

The third area of MCA influence on the Alliance agrarian platform was the policy pertaining to land. The MCA national leaders made a positive contribution here by obtaining a pledge from the UMNO to ensure security of land tenure for Chinese agriculturalists, especially the newly settled squatter population in the New Villages. In the comprehensive Manifesto, the Alliance promised to replace the practice of issuing land licenses based on Temporary Occupation Licenses (T.O.Ls.), which were normally valid for one year, with longer term leases. The Manifesto stated that this would give "the occupiers of land security of tenure, and ... a 'touchable, seeable stake' which they would, in consequence, protect and develop". Furthermore, good agricultural land was to be made available to all farmers irrespective of race.

The promise contained in the Alliance Election Manifesto to secure an improvement in the deal for Chinese squatters stemmed largely from the efforts of the MCA national leaders, who, besides being sympathetic to the plight of the squatters, were also aware that the land issue was the key reason behind the alienation of the majority of the rural Chinese population from the authorities during the Emergency. The MCA national leaders had consistently argued that Chinese squatters had to be given greater security of land tenure if the government was to make any headway in weaning the Chinese rural population from supporting the Communists during the opening years of the government anti-insurgency campaign. The MCA national leaders argued that the Alliance coalition had to hold out the promise of security of land tenure to the half million Chinese New Villagers if the coalition wished to gain the allegiance of that

sector of the Chinese community, and at the same time diminish the influence exercised by the MCP over the rural areas populated by Chinese agriculturalists. This point was forwarded in a party document drafted by Tan Siew Sin in February 1952 and subsequently circulated to the members of the Alliance Roundtable in mid-1954.

The paper declared:¹

The squatters, most of whom are of Chinese origin, should be given permanent titles to the land they occupy, thus giving them a stake in the country, and such land should not be less than five acres for each family. They must also be assisted with a view to increasing production per man per acre.

It appears that the UMNO national leaders were responsive to the argument of the MCA on the subject, largely because the circumstances created by the Communist insurgency made it necessary for the Alliance, in its aspiration to form the first government in independent Malaya, to appear at least to have the interests of the squatter population at heart. Although the Emergency was well under control militarily in early 1955, the MCP could nevertheless continue to remain a significant thorn in the side of the authorities if land grievances amongst the Chinese New Villagers were left to fester. The UMNO agreed that it was politically intelligent to offer greater security of land tenure to Chinese squatters, for this would kill two birds with one stone; the MCP would find the New Villages a less fruitful base to operate in, and the MCA would receive more positive commitment from the Chinese lower classes living in the rural areas. These potential MCA supporters included

1. A Statement of the Aims and Objectives of the Malayan Chinese Association (printed pamphlet), n.d., (c.1954).

not only the full-time farmers but also seasonal agriculturalists, who comprised plantation workers and tin mine labourers temporarily made redundant by a fall in the demand for labour in the plantations and mines in the vicinity of the New Villages.

While the UMNO national leaders were aware that it was politically desirable to remove a major source of discontent prevalent among the rural Chinese population, it also had to consider how the Malay peasantry would react to pledges of liberal land tenure to Chinese farmers in the Alliance Manifesto. The UMNO national leaders were not blind to the fact that the Malay peasantry would regard any liberalisation of the existing system of Chinese land tenure as a serious encroachment upon its traditional rights to agricultural land in Malaya, which had been upheld by the colonial government and enshrined in the system of Malay Reserves. Because the UMNO national leaders wished to please the MCA on the matter and yet retain the support of the Malay masses at the same time, they agreed that a pledge ensuring greater security of land tenure for Chinese agriculturalists would be included in the comprehensive Manifesto but would be worded more ambiguously in the abridged Manifesto distributed to the masses. The abridged Manifesto stated that the Alliance would "ensure the security of land tenure to agriculturalists", and "ensure vegetable growers of security of tenure by replacing Temporary Occupation Licenses with Leases". The significant difference between the two Manifestos is that whereas the comprehensive Manifesto promised to replace T.O.Ls. with longer term land leases, the abridged Manifesto deliberately did not state whether the land leases would be short or long term ones.

Furthermore, the comprehensive Manifesto promised to make agricultural land freely available to all farmers regardless of race. The abridged Manifesto did not mention this pledge. It would appear that the differences between the two Manifestos were created by the Alliance national leadership to allow MCA election campaigners to assure the New Villagers that they faced brighter prospects concerning security of land tenure under an Alliance Government; at the same time UMNO campaigners could tell Malay kampong dwellers that an Alliance Government would not whittle away their established rights to rural land. In its quest for power in 1955 the Alliance leadership chose to balance itself rather precariously between the conflicting land claims of Malays and non-Malays; the problem was so intractable that it was felt best to leave it aside for the time being.¹

A final pledge in the Alliance Manifesto, for which the MCA was responsible, was the labour plank aimed at getting the vote of the non-Malay rural and urban proletariat. A large part of the labour movement in the country, like the Chinese squatter population, had come under the influence of the MCP in the period immediately after the Second World War in Malaya. Whereas the Alliance pledges on land were an attempt to weaken the Communist hold over the New Village population, its labour pledges were designed to appeal to

1. It was not until the early 1970s that the UMNO leadership began to redress the land grievances of Chinese New Villagers; the problem, however, has yet to be satisfactorily resolved from the squatters' viewpoint. See, Francis Loh Kok Wah, "Beyond the Tin Mines....", pp.232-235.

the predominantly Chinese tin mining labourers, the predominantly Indian rubber estate workers, and the mixed Chinese and Indian urban unskilled and semi-skilled work force. The Alliance promised, among other things, to ensure a fair deal for workers; to achieve full employment; to provide training facilities for workers; to promote the growth of healthy and strong trade unions; and to encourage the expansion of workers' cooperative shops in rubber estates and other areas with a concentrated work force. While it may be said that the implementation of an enlightened labour policy would be inimical to the capitalist interests represented in the MCA - the towkays who were the employers of labour in business, manufacturing, mining and plantation enterprises - it was nevertheless necessary for the party to woo the support of the urban and rural Chinese proletariat during the election campaign.

In conclusion, it can be said that the MCA's activities in the independence movement during the period 1953-1955 constituted a watershed in the development of the party, both in terms of the role it played in the nationalist politics of Malaya and in its relations with the Chinese community. At the supra-communal level, the MCA's joint efforts with the UMNO to grasp the initiative in the independence campaign established it as a leading Malayan nationalist party. By mid-1955, it had evolved from its social welfare origin into a well-organised political party with a larger membership and greater financial resources than the UMNO. The party's cooperation with the UMNO in sponsoring the National Convention and holding the boycott of the Federal Legislative Council and other government bodies was instrumental in speeding up the timetable for independence in Malaya.

The MCA English-educated national leaders won the goodwill and friendship of the UMNO top ranking leaders as a result of their whole-hearted support for the Alliance independence campaign. UMNO goodwill and trust in the MCA's top leadership in turn made it possible for the MCA to advance the interests of the Chinese community at large, as is seen in the liberal pledges on the educational, economic and political position of the Chinese community made in the Alliance Election Manifesto of July 1955. The Alliance pledges on education and citizenship gave the MCA the support of Chinese voters from different class and social backgrounds. The Manifesto's economic platform appealed to Chinese capitalist interests, and the agrarian and labour platforms attracted the sympathy of the Chinese rural and urban proletariat. The Alliance election pledges raised the hopes of the Chinese community and created widespread support for the MCA; there were high expectations amongst the Chinese that their interests would be well served by an Alliance Government in independent Malaya.

The efforts exerted by the MCA national leadership to fight for the repeal of the 1952 Education Ordinance and the sincerity of Tan Cheng Lock's commitment to obtain a better deal for Chinese education and language between 1952 and 1955 created widespread Chinese confidence in the English-educated leadership of the party. A strong bond of party solidarity existed between these two ranking English-educated leaders and the Chinese-speaking lower echelon leaders and party rank and file. United by the common objective of gaining independence as well as by the mutual desire to protect the existing system of Chinese education, the MCA reached the zenith of its popularity with the Chinese community during this period.

CHAPTER 7

AGREEMENT ON THE INDEPENDENCE CONSTITUTION AND DEFEAT
OF THE BREAKAWAY MOVEMENT

This chapter discusses the drawing up of the Alliance constitutional proposals for independence, commonly referred to as the Merdeka (independence) compact or bargain, and its impact upon the development of the MCA from early 1956 to the declaration of independence in August 1957. The Merdeka compact produced two countervailing trends in the MCA: at the supra-communal level, the party continued to play as pivotal and important a role as it had done in the years 1953-1955 discussed in the preceding chapter; at the intra-communal level, the standing of the MCA within the Chinese community began to decline. Although the MCA leaders were successful in bring^{ing} Chinese concerns into the political mainstream while at the same time negotiating the bargain which led to independence, a wide segment of the Chinese community was dissatisfied with the compromises made by the English-educated top echelon leaders on the issues of special rights and language, and a breakaway movement emerged from within the party.

7.1 The Merdeka Compact

The Merdeka compact was presented to the Reid Constitutional Commission, which had been appointed by the British Government to make recommendations regarding the terms of Malayan

independence.¹ However, the constitutional proposals ultimately recommended by the Reid Commission differed significantly from the Merdeka compact, particularly on the subject of special rights, language and a number of other racially-salient issues. The Reid proposals on these issues benefitted non-Malay interests more than the Alliance proposals, yet the MCA national leadership supported the UMNO in arguing for the inclusion of the Alliance, not the Reid, proposals in the Federation of Malaya constitution. It is vital that we understand the motives of the MCA top leadership in supporting constitutional proposals which were highly unpopular with the lower echelon party leadership and membership, and with the Chinese community at large.

The MCA top leadership's seeming disregard of Chinese objections to the Merdeka compact gave rise to a breakaway movement within the Party. A key question is: why did the movement fail to supplant the MCA top leadership which had negotiated the unpopular constitutional proposals? In other words, we have to examine the process in which the English-educated leadership overcame the challenge to its position, reimposed control over the party rank and file, and regained the allegiance of the Chinese community.

1. The Alliance Party, after five months of negotiations, April-September 1956, submitted their constitutional proposals to the Reid Commission in a document entitled "Memorandum to the Reid Constitutional Commission", mimeo., 27 September 1956. Although the memorandum contained the constitutional views of the Alliance, it did not represent the final Alliance position on special rights and language. These matters were resolved in mid 1957 after the Alliance leaders held further negotiations to define their final viewpoints following the release of the Reid proposals in February 1957.

To do this, we will turn our attention to the role played by the British Government and the UMNO in influencing and manipulating the relationship between the MCA top leadership, the breakaway movement, and the Chinese community at large.

The Malay, Chinese and Indian Alliance leaders are, or were, the founding fathers of independent Malaya, for it was they who successfully led the campaign for self-rule and prepared the blueprint upon which the Federation of Malaya constitution was based. Where differences existed between the constitutional proposals forwarded by the Alliance and the Reid Commission, it was the Alliance proposals which were eventually incorporated into the final draft of the Malayan constitution.

The Merdeka compact was drawn up by an elite group of English-educated Alliance leaders who formed a sub-committee to prepare the documents. The UMNO was represented by Tunku Abdul Rahman, Datuk Abdul Razak bin Hussein, Dr. Ismail bin Datuk Rahman, Ismail bin Mohamed Ali, Mohamed Khir Johari, Senu bin Abdul Rahman, Rahman bin Haji Talib, Abdul Kadir bin Shamsuddin, Abdul Aziz bin Ishak and Mohamed Daud. The MCA negotiating team comprised Tan Siew Sin, Leong Yew Koh, H.S. Lee, Ong Yoke Lin, Dr. Lim Chong Eu, Ng Ee Teong, Too Joon Hing, Yong Pung How and T.H. Tan, who functioned as rapporteur for the negotiating sessions. A conspicuous MCA absentee was Tan Cheng Lock, the party president, who could not attend the negotiations because of poor health. The MIC representatives were V.T. Sambathan, K. Ramanathan, K.L. Devasar,

B. Kaher Singh, V. Manickavasagam and A. Krishnadas.¹

Citizenship, special rights and language were the three major issues which caused division and dissent not only among the Alliance negotiators, but also among the second echelon party leadership and membership, and among the different communities at large. The popular sentiments of the different communities regarding these issues were reflected clearly in vernacular and English press reports of the period.

Typical of the uncompromising and unchanging views of the Malay community were press editorials and reports; resolutions passed by some UMNO branches; statements of leaders such as Datuk Onn of the Party Negara, Boestaman of the Party Rakyat and Dr. Burhanuddin of the Pan Malayan Islamic Association (forerunner of Party Islam); and the deliberations of the Second Malay Congress. These different sources of Malay public opinion expressed four basic common viewpoints on the constitutional question: (1) that citizenship based on jus soli not be given to non-Malays, (2) that Malays have an unquestionable and perpetual claim to special rights, (3) that the Malay language become the sole national and official language in independent Malaya, and (4) that the ceremonial and substantive foundations of the new Malayan nation state be based

1. The Merdeka compact was essentially a bargain between the UMNO and the MCA. The MIC, being a small and poorly organised party which represented less than 10% of the population, played a relatively minor role in determining the outcome of the negotiations. For a discussion of the MIC role in the negotiations, see Ampalavanar, pp.195-199.

upon the Malay cultural and political heritage.¹

UMNO second echelon leaders such as Datuk Mohamed Haniffah sounded constant warnings to their national leaders not to concede any ground related to citizenship, special rights and language to the non-Malays at the Alliance constitutional negotiations.² Equally strong cautioning came from Malay vernacular press editorials. A leader writer in the Warta Negara pointed out that the UMNO was formed in 1946 to unite and lead the Malay community in opposing the Malayan Union. He stated that the main reason why Malays opposed the Malayan Union was because it promised equal citizenship rights to Malays and non-Malays. He then concluded that the victory of the Malays in aborting the life of the Malayan Union would be a hollow one if the UMNO were now to give in to the MCA demand for jus soli and equal citizenship rights.³

Of the Malay political leaders, Datuk Onn was the most vocal and active in calling for a hardline stand. When the Reid Commission released its findings, Datuk Onn organised a number of mass rallies, including a 2,000 strong rally in Province Wellesley on 10 March 1957, to denounce the Reid proposals which recommended that a time limit be placed on the implementation of Malay special rights, and that Chinese and Indian be official languages for a

1. See, e.g., the following press reports: Utusan Melayu, 5 March 1953, 28 April 1956, 12 March 1957, 5 May 1957. Majlis, 31 August 1955, 17 April 1956. Warta Negara, 26 March 1956, 4 January 1957, Straits Times, 3 April 1956.

2. Straits Times, 13 April 1956.

3. Warta Negara, 16 April 1956.

period of time after independence.¹ More significantly, Datuk Onn convened a meeting attended by political rivals of the UMNO such as Dr. Burhanuddin of the Pan Malay Islamic Association and Boestaman of Party Rakyat. The organisers called the meeting the Second Malay Congress, explaining that it was the successor to the First Malay Congress convened by Datuk Onn in March 1946 to oppose the implementation of the Malayan Union. The objective of the Second Malay Congress was to prevent Malays from losing their birthrights under the proposed independence constitution in the same way that the First Malay Congress sought to protect the Malay position which was threatened by the Malayan Union scheme.²

Chinese public opinion (like Indian public opinion) was diametrically opposed to the Malay position. Laukeh leaders of influential and powerful huay kuans and Chambers of Commerce, such as the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, the Perak Chinese Association and the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce, and school teachers organised in the United Chinese School Teachers Association (UCSTA), were the most vocal champions of Chinese rights. These leaders wanted the following concessions granted to Chinese and other non-Malays in the Federation of Malaya constitution: (1) citizenship

1. Utusan Melayu, 12 March 1957.

2. The Second Malay Congress passed five resolutions during its five-day sitting: (1) that Malay special rights not be governed by a time limit; (2) that Malay be the sole national and official language; (3) that Islam be the official religion; (4) that Malayan nationality be called "Melayu" nationality; (5) that independent Malaya be named "The Federation of Malay States". Utusan Melayu, 10 April and 8 May 1957.

based on jus soli for all non-Malays in Malaya born before and after the date of independence; (2) citizenship for those born outside Malaya after a continuous residential period of five years and without a qualifying language test in Malay or English; (3) equal political, economic and cultural rights for all Malayan citizens regardless of race; (4) recognition of Kuo Yu (Mandarin) as an official language, together with Malay, Tamil and English; and (5) multi-lingualism in the country's legislative and executive assemblies.¹

Typical of highly-charged Chinese feelings and arguments justifying the Chinese right to citizenship and equal rights is the vexed editorial cry of a Chinese daily: "What is the meaning of independence for Chinese if Malays become the masters and non-Malays the slaves of Malaya?"² The vernacular press warned the MCA national leaders that if they disappointed the expectations of the community in their negotiations with the UMNO, the MCA would lose the support and allegiance of the community.³

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1. These views were contained in the memoranda submitted by Chinese associations to the Reid Commission. See, e.g., Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce: Memorandum to the Chairman and Members of the Independence Constitutional Committee for the Federation of Malaya, Charles Grenier and Co. Ltd., Kuala Lumpur, June 1956; "The Constitution for Independent Malaya and Political Equality for All People of Malaya", memorandum submitted by the Representatives of Registered Chinese Societies and Associations in the state of Negri Sembilan, mimeo, July 1957; and, Memorandum to be Submitted to the Reid Constitutional Commission by Chinese Organisations in Malacca, Wah Seong Press Ltd., Malacca, 28 July 1956.
 2. China Press, 25 April 1956.
 3. Sin Chew Jit Poh, 13 April 1956.

Given the irreconcilable differences between the Malay and Chinese communities, the UMNO and MCA leaders at the Alliance constitutional negotiations knew that no one set of compromises would satisfy everyone. Moreover, the negotiations would have been greatly complicated had the leaders attempted to consult grassroots opinion at every stage of the deliberations. In the case of the MCA, the party's English-educated representatives insisted on and obtained the mandate of the party general assembly to make the final decisions on behalf of the party and the Chinese community at large.¹ The westernised leaders succeeded in getting the mandate because Laukeh party leaders and members approved of, and had confidence in, the westernised leaders' handling of party matters to that point. In particular, the Laukeh elements in the party were pleased with the westernised leaders' championing of Chinese education and their campaign against the 1952 Education Ordinance, as well as with their successful efforts to obtain a satisfactory deal for Chinese interests in the Alliance Election Manifesto of July 1955.

The Merdeka compact worked out by the UMNO and MCA dealt with a whole range of issues pertaining to the political and administrative structure of independent Malaya, as well as the

1. See, "Sequel of Action Taken by MCA on Constitutional Proposals", mimeo., August 1957.

constitutional position of the different races in the country.¹ The delegates devoted most of their time to working out an agreement on citizenship, special rights and language. Final agreement was reached only after much heated argument, offering and withdrawing of tentative compromises, and arduous and protracted bargaining.

On the issue of citizenship, the UMNO leaders agreed to the following basic terms: (1) citizenship based on jus soli would be automatically given to all those born in Malaya on and after the date of independence; (2) those who were born in Malaya before independence would qualify for citizenship after having resided in the country for five out of seven years preceding the date of application for citizenship; those not born in Malaya would qualify after a period of eight out of twelve years.² The UMNO, after holding off pressure from the MCA for several years - ever since Tan Cheng Lock first brought up the issue at the Communities Liaison Committee deliberations in 1949-50 - had at last decided to agree to the MCA demand for jus soli. UMNO's decision marked a momentous watershed in the history of Chinese political development in Malaya.

1. The Alliance proposals in the "Memorandum to the Reid Constitutional Commission" were arranged under the following headings: (1) Composition of new state, (2) Name of new state, (3) Head of State, (4) Their Highnesses the Rulers and Conference of Rulers, (5) the Legislature: the Dewan Negara and Dewan Rakyat, (6) Elections, (7) Powers of both Houses, (8) the Executive, (9) the Judiciary, (10) Division of Legislative and Executive Powers between the Federal Government and State Government, (11) Fundamental rights, (12) Principles of National Policies, (13) Common Nationality and Citizenship, (14) Special Position of Malays, (15) Definition of Malay, (16) Language, Religion and other miscellaneous issues, (17) Amendments to the Constitution.

2. Ibid., pp.11-16.

It gave citizenship and franchise to nearly half the Chinese population, thus enabling the community as a whole to play an effective role in the political life of the country.

The UMNO finally agreed to jus soli because of three considerations - pressure from Whitehall¹, the need to provide a stable and strong foundation for the new Malayan nation state, and the desire to gain concessions from the MCA on special rights and language.

The British Government had emphasised to the Alliance leaders, time and again, that power should be shared by Malay and non-Malay leaders (although Malays would be the dominant partners), and that future generations of Chinese and Indians should not be excluded from playing a legitimate role in the political, economic and cultural life of independent Malaya. The UMNO leaders believed that Whitehall would only grant independence if nearly all non-Malays could become Malayan citizens.¹ Coupled with the pressure from Whitehall was UMNO's own desire to provide a solid and strong basis for the new Malayan state. Granting citizenship based on jus soli to the immigrant Chinese and Indian population would lay the cornerstone of the foundations for independent Malaya since their loyalty and allegiance would be bound to their new country of adoption.

The final UMNO motivation behind its citizenship decision was the usefulness of jus soli as a bargaining counter to obtain

1. Interview, Tunku Abdul Rahman, 2 August 1976.

unqualified MCA support on Malay special rights and the sole status of Malay as the official and national language of independent Malaya. MCA support for the UMNO was crucial in the light of the Reid proposals which recommended placing restrictions on the implementation of special rights policy and recognised Mandarin and Tamil as official languages for a period of time after independence.

The Alliance proposal on special rights as submitted to the Reid Commission gave a comprehensive elucidation of the issue and raised a number of important points:¹

While we accept that in independent Malaya all nationals should be accorded equal rights, privileges and opportunities and there must not be discrimination on grounds of race or creed, we recognize the fact that the Malays are the original sons of the soil and that they have a special position arising from this fact, and also by virtue of treaties made between the British Government and the various sovereign Malay States. The Constitution should, therefore, provide that the Yang di-Pertuan Besar should have the special responsibility of safeguarding the special position of the Malays. In pursuance of this, the Constitution should give him powers to reserve for the Malays a reasonable proportion of lands, posts in public service, permits to engage in business or trade, where such permits are restricted and controlled by law, grant scholarships and such similar privileges accorded by the Government; but in pursuance of this further

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1. "Memorandum to the Reid ...", p.17. The memorandum further stated: "For the purpose of providing for the special position of Malays, it is necessary to have a definition of Malay.... We therefore suggest the following as a definition: 'A person shall be deemed to be a Malay if (1) He practices the religion of Islam; (2) He habitually practices Malay customs; (3) He habitually speaks the Malay language; and (4) He is a person, or the descendant of a person, who at the commencement of the Constitution, (a) was domiciled in the Federation of Malaya, or (b) had been born in the territories comprised in the Federation of Malaya, or (c) had been born of parents one of whom had been born in the territories in the Federation of Malaya'", p.18.

responsibility of safeguarding the legitimate interests of the other communities, the Constitution should also provide that any exercise of such powers should not in any way infringe the legitimate interests of the other communities or adversely affect or diminish the rights and privileges at present enjoyed by them.

The phraseology above indicates that the MCA negotiators agreed to a number of significant points. Firstly, the MCA recognised that Malays had an undisputed claim to special rights treatment because of this status as sons of the soil, i.e. Bumiputras. Secondly, the MCA acknowledged that Malays had a political position superior to that of non-Malays. Since the British Government acquired legitimacy for its colonial rule in Malaya through treaties made with Malay sultans, the traditional rulers of Malay society, the MCA accepted that modern day Malay political representatives stood to inherit sovereignty from the departing colonial power. Thirdly, the MCA conceded that the Sultans, being the traditional font of authority in pre-colonial Malaya, would be invested with more than a ceremonial role in independent Malaya. The Malay head of state, the Yang di-Pertuan Besar (Agong), would possess substantive powers to safeguard the special position of Malays. He would have powers to reserve lands, government posts, business permits, and other privileges for Malays. Fourthly, the MCA expected the "legitimate interests" and rights and privileges of other communities would not be adversely affected or diminished by the implementation of special rights policy. Finally, the Alliance proposal on special rights did not stipulate whether there should be a time limit governing the implementation

of special rights. This oversight was deliberate, as we shall soon see.

The question of language was the only area where the Alliance delegates did not show an initial common stand. The delegates submitted two sets of proposals to the Reid Commission. The first represented the joint views of the UMNO, MCA and MIC, and the second represented the views of the MCA and MIC only. (A final common stand was produced only after further negotiations were held in view of the Reid proposal recommending multi-lingualism.) The joint UMNO-MCA-MIC viewpoint stated that Malay would be the national language, provided there was "protection of the languages and culture of all races, and of their schools and cultural institutions".¹ It was also agreed by all that English would be recognised as an official language for a maximum period of ten years after independence.

The MCA and MIC asked for the recognition of Kuo Yu and Tamil as official languages for a period of time after independence. They wanted "the use of English, Kuo Yu and Tamil in Councils with the permission of the Chairmen or Speakers for a minimum period of ten years and thereafter until such time as the legislative should decide that the use of language other than Malay is no longer necessary".² The MCA delegates had insisted upon the submission of

1. "Memorandum to the Reid ...", see section entitled: Appendix on Fundamental Rights.

2. Ibid., p.19.

the above proposal largely because MCA Laukeh leaders were organising a breakaway movement to champion the cause of multi-lingualism. In the face of MCA insistence, the UMNO had reluctantly agreed that the Alliance would submit two sets of proposals on language and that the final Alliance position would be worked out after the Reid Commission released its findings.

7.2 The Reid Constitutional Proposals

The Reid Constitutional Commission toured Malaya from March to May 1956, consulting and collating the views of public organisations and influential individuals on constitutional reform.¹ The Commission published its report in February 1957 and the differences between its findings and the Alliance constitutional proposals triggered off further negotiations between the Alliance partners. Whitehall appointed a Constitutional Working Party comprising three representatives of the British Government, four representatives of the Malay Rulers and four representatives of the Alliance coalition (Tunku Abdul Rahman, Datuk Abdul Razak, Ong Yoke Lin and Sambanthan) to resolve the differences between the Reid and Alliance constitutional proposals. The Alliance delegates had the clear cut support of the Malay rulers in the Working Party, for the Alliance proposals on the position of Malay rulers benefitted their interests more than the Reid recommendations.

1. The Commission comprised Lord Reid, and four other members: W.J. McKell from Australia, B. Malik from India, Abdul Hamid from Pakistan, and Ivor Jennings from Great Britain.

The most significant difference between the Merdeka compact and the Reid report was the difference in emphasis placed on the political and cultural identity of the new Malayan nation state. Whereas the Merdeka compact generally emphasised the symbolic and substantive Malay character of independent Malaya, the Reid Report placed greater emphasis on the multi-racial aspect of independent Malaya. On matters related to special rights, language, religion, the position of Malay rulers and Malay land reservations, the Reid Report wanted a greater parity in the treatment of Malay and non-Malay interests than was found in the Merdeka compact.¹

One may assume that the Reid Commission favoured a generally balanced treatment of Malay and non-Malay interests because it felt that institutionalised favouritism for one race, be it political, cultural or economic, would be potentially damaging to the long term stability of independent Malaya. The Reid Commission probably believed that the singling out of Malays for privileged treatment would generate hostility, envy and frustration in non-Malays, and impede the process of national integration and nation-building. However, it recognised that Malays needed special help to improve their economic position, which was far behind that of non-Malays. It therefore recommended that Malays should have special rights, but only for a limited period of time in order to fulfill the objective of advancing the Malay position without harming the long term political stability of Malaya. It recommended

1. Federation of Malaya, Report of the Federation of Malay Constitutional Commission: Appendix II, Draft Constitution of the Federation of Malaya, Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, February 1957. See particularly pp.7, 126-135, 150-152, 173-174, 183.

that special rights not be included in the permanent section of the constitution, but be written as transitional and temporary clauses which would be reviewed for possible removal after a period of fifteen years after independence.¹

On the subject of language, although the Reid report recognised that Malay would become the national language, it also recommended that Kuo Yu, Tamil and English be official languages for a period of ten years or more as determined by the Malayan Parliament.² The Reid recommendation on multi-lingualism recognised the multi-ethnic nature of Malayan society and the implicit desirability of independent Malaya functioning as a pluralistic entity in government, commerce, education, culture and other aspects of community life. The proposal also widened the base for political activity, as non-English and non-Malay-speaking Chinese and Indian leaders would be able to participate in the political processes of independent Malaya. The UMNO, in contrast, wanted to use only the Malay language as the language of government and the basis for state education and state culture, a policy which would exclude vernacular-speaking non-Malay leaders from the corridors of power.

The Reid proposal on religion, like language, recognised the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of Malaya. The Alliance proposal had recommended that Islam become the official religion of Malaya, provided that: "The observance of this principle

1. Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission..., p.183.

2. Ibid., p.173.

shall not impose any disability on non-Muslim nationals professing and practising their own religions, and shall not imply that the State is not a secular State."¹ The Reid Report was silent on the question of an official religion. Instead of endorsing the Alliance proposal, it merely stated that the Sultan of each state should remain the head of Islam in his state and should continue to be responsible for the supervision of Islamic affairs.²

On the question of the constitutional position of the Malay rulers, the Reid Report recommended that the role of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and the Sultans be strictly ceremonial in character. The Commission proposed that all substantive powers and functions of government at the federal and state level be invested with the elected representatives of Parliament and the state assemblies. The only area where Malay rulers would exercise real power was in overseeing Islamic matters of their states.³ The Alliance, in contrast, had proposed that the Yang di-Pertuan Agong have real powers in several areas to protect the special position of the Malays.

In the case of Malay land reservations, the Reid Report proposed placing restrictions upon the creation of new Malay reserves in any state after independence. The Alliance, however, wanted State governments to have the authority to increase Malay reserves

1. "Memorandum to the Reid ...", p.19.

2. Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission..., pp.7, 126-127.

3. Ibid., pp.133-135.

up to a maximum of 50% of the total area available for private use in any state. Furthermore the Alliance wanted the system of Malay reservations to be introduced to Malacca and Penang, the two former Straits Settlements, on the same terms as the Malay states.¹

The Reid Report's and the Merdeka compact's views on citizenship differed over the question of dual nationality, and not the liberal terms governing the acquisition of Malayan citizenship by non-Malays advocated by both. As expected, the Reid Report proposed that non-Malays born on or after the date of independence would automatically become Malayan citizens. Others born in Malaya before the date of independence or outside Malaya could apply for citizenship after fulfilling a relatively short period of residence in the country and passing a simple language test in Malay or English. Unlike the Merdeka compact, which did not endorse dual nationality, the Reid Report recommended that Malayan citizens could also become Commonwealth citizens.² Non-Malays could thus become citizens of Malaya as well as of their former motherlands or other countries which were then member countries of the Commonwealth.

7.3 The Constitution of Independent Malaya

The Constitutional Working Party set up to resolve the differences between the Reid Report and the Merdeka compact overwhelmingly decided in favour of the Merdeka compact. The constitution

1. Report of the Federation of Malaya..., pp.150-152; "Memorandum to the Reid...", p.9.

2. Report of the Federation of Malaya..., pp.128, 131-133.

of independent Malaya thus reflected the dominant Malay perspective on national policy, state religion and culture, and state education.

Islam was recognised as the official religion, and Malay the sole official and national language. English, but not Mandarin and Tamil, was recognised as an official language for a period of ten years after independence. The Yang di-Pertuan Agong and Malay rulers became more than ceremonial heads of state. They possessed substantive powers and functions to safeguard the special position of Malays and to oversee the implementation of special rights policy. They remained the supreme authority of Islam in the Federation and in the Malay States. The constitution also decided against the restrictions on the creation of Malay reservations favoured by the Reid Report. Clauses pertaining to Malay special rights were written into the permanent and not temporary section of the constitution and there was no time limit restriction on the implementation of special rights policy.¹

While the constitution gave Malays special treatment in areas such as government employment, business opportunities, education and land rights, it also contained provisions safeguarding non-Malay interests. In the case of economic opportunities, the constitution stated that the implementation of Malay special rights should not adversely affect the legitimate interests of non-Malays. Article 153, for instance, stated:²

1. Sheridan, A., The Federation of Malaya Constitution: Texts, Annotations and Commentary, Singapore, University of Malaya Law Review, Oceana Publications, New York.

2. Ibid., p.142.

Nothing in this Article shall operate to deprive or authorise the deprivation of any person of any right, privilege, permit or licence accrued to or enjoyed or held by him, or authorise a refusal to renew to any person any such permit or licence, or a refusal to grant to the heirs, successors or assignees of a person any permit or licence when the renewal or grant might reasonably be expected in the ordinary course of events.

and:

Nothing in this Article shall empower Parliament to restrict business or trade solely for the purpose of reservations for Malays.

The constitution also contained a provision Article 89(4) which stipulated that the creation of future Malay land reserves would not impinge upon the existing land holdings of non-Malays.

Constitutional provisions safeguarding the right of non-Malays to practise and propagate their religions and languages also existed. Article 11(1) and (3) provided for freedom of worship and the right of all religious groups to maintain and propagate their religious beliefs. On the question of language, while Article 152 recognised Malay as the sole official and national language, it also stated: "no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using (except for official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other language; and nothing ... shall prejudice the right of the Federal Government or of any State Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in the Federation."¹

It was only in the area of dual nationality that the Reid position prevailed. Although the Alliance was against the proposal

1. Sheridan, p.140.

which recommended that Malayan citizens could become Commonwealth citizens as well, the constitution recognised dual nationality. However, the concept of dual nationality as defined in the constitution was more nominal than real. The constitution made clear that the Federation of Malaya Government would not give the rights and privileges held by Malayan citizens to Commonwealth citizens, and the Government also possessed the right to refuse Commonwealth citizens entry into Malaya.¹ The Alliance leaders, therefore, were not perturbed by the provision of dual nationality in the constitution.

In the above areas which were racially-salient, the British Government decided to base the constitution of independent Malaya upon the Alliance rather than the Reid proposals. This decision stemmed from a number of considerations, a major one being the political standing of the Alliance coalition in Malaya. Having been elected in the July 1955 Federal Election as Malaya's first indigenous coalition party to exercise limited home rule, the Alliance was to inherit power from the colonial administration upon its departure from Malaya. Since the Alliance would rule Malaya until 1959, when general elections were scheduled to be held, Whitehall felt that the Alliance constitutional proposals should be given special priority. It appeared more sensible to accept the Alliance constitutional arrangements for the Malayan people than to impose a settlement worked out by a foreign constitutional commission. Moreover, the Alliance position, which reflected basically the UMNO

1. Sheridan, p.35.

position, received unconditional support from the Malay rulers as well as from the MCA and MIC representatives in the Constitutional Working Party.

One might speculate if the British Government would have as readily consented to the Alliance position if the MCA leaders had not endorsed the UMNO viewpoint. Since Chinese then made up almost 40% of the population, MCA's support of the UMNO position, particularly on the issues of special rights and language, might well have been an important factor in making up the British mind to incorporate the UMNO viewpoints in the independence constitution. Also, the British Government was mindful of the fact that the UMNO was, and was likely to remain, the dominant element in any ruling coalition government of Malaya. It is pertinent, at this point, to ask why the MCA top leadership finally accepted the UMNO viewpoint on special rights, language and other racially-salient issues when acceptance of the Reid proposals would have benefitted the Chinese community more.

7.4 MCA Acceptance of the UMNO Constitutional Position

With all the activity surrounding the Alliance negotiations, the presentation of the Reid Report and the final framing of the constitutional proposals, the momentum towards independence was quickened. The final round of Alliance negotiations, held between March and July 1957, took place in an atmosphere of euphoria. There was a universal desire to secure the immediate realisation of independence and a strong determination to overcome all outstanding barriers along the last stretch of the road to independence. The

MCA, the weaker of the bargaining partners, was anxious not to be cast in the role of presenting obstacles that would delay independence.

The MCA representatives went into the negotiating room with one basic objective - the attainment of citizenship based on jus soli for non-Malays. To obtain this objective, the MCA top leaders were ultimately prepared to make concessions on special rights, language and other issues sought by the UMNO. The MCA top leaders realised that if they failed in their bid to obtain jus soli, not only the political but the economic future of Chinese would be severely threatened. On the eve of independence, MCA leaders were successful businessmen without a secure political base. They knew that the attainment of jus soli and further relaxation of residential and language test requirements governing the acquisition of citizenship would enfranchise the majority of Chinese and thus enable them to protect their considerable economic stake in the country's economy, concentrated in particular in the urban retail trade, the plantation and mining sectors, and in the construction, transportation, light manufacturing and services industries. Chinese votes and party funding from Chinese business quarters would guarantee a secure political base for the MCA in independent Malaya.

The MCA top leaders also knew, however, that the security of their political base depended upon the continued political patronage of the UMNO. They recognised the fact that the degree of political influence which the MCA would enjoy in independent Malaya would be dependent upon the degree of UMNO cooperation. The

British Government, in keeping with its objective of making Malays the dominant political element in independent Malaya, had drawn up Federal and State constituencies in such a manner that Malay representation in independent Malaya would overshadow non-Malay representation for a long period to come.¹ For the MCA to win more than a few seats in Parliament and the state assemblies, it needed to rely on UMNO largesse to allocate to it seats containing a majority of Malay voters, and on UMNO political clout to deliver Malay votes to MCA candidates.

During the Alliance negotiations, the desire to cultivate and retain UMNO goodwill was heavy in the mind of the MCA top leaders. UMNO political patronage was seen as being more essential to the MCA than relations with major Chinese pressure groups, the huay kuans and Chambers of Commerce. The following metaphor describing the relationship between the Malays (i.e. UMNO), the MCA and Chinese associations reflected thinking which was typical of the top leaders: "Nothing can compensate the Chinese for falling out with the Malays, but if the tail Chinese associations is allowed to wag the head MCA, the MCA and the Chinese shall be in mortal danger".² The MCA top leaders believed that the political fate of the MCA and the Chinese community depended upon the UMNO. They felt that no amount of independent action by the MCA or the Chinese

1. Federation of Malaya, Report of the Constituency Delineation Commission, Government Printer, Kuala Lumpur, 1954.

2. Memorandum on the subject of Citizenship of Chinese with regard to the Reid Constitutional Commission (probably written by T.H. Tan), mimeo., 11 April 1956. TCL Papers, TCL/12/11a.

associations would succeed in attaining the objective of jus soli or any other critical goal. Therefore, in their desire to maintain a long term collaborationist relation with the UMNO, the MCA top leaders were prepared to sacrifice the demands of the Chinese associations regarding the constitution, with the exception of jus soli, to the needs of the UMNO.

The MCA leadership had a stake in the continued pre-eminent position of the UMNO in Malay society. The compromises it made on special rights and language stemmed from this very need to help the UMNO maintain its position at a time when widespread Malay anger arising from Chinese demands could be used by Malay opposition leaders against the UMNO. The proposals of the Reid Constitutional Commission on racially-salient issues received vociferous Malay disapproval and hostility.¹ The angry Malay reaction to the Reid recommendations, in particular those on multi-lingualism and a time restriction on special rights, provided a timely opportunity for the UMNO's rival to organise and mobilise Malay opposition to the Reid proposals and to warn the UMNO against agreeing to them. Datuk Onn of Party Negara, Dr. Burhanuddin of the Pan Malayan Islamic Association, and Boestaman of Party Rakyat organised the second Malay Congress to galvanise anti-UMNO feelings and to articulate Malay opposition to the Reid proposals. Faced with an obvious movement to undermine its standing within the Malay community, the UMNO top leaders felt they could not afford to make "Reid-like" concessions on special rights and multi-lingualism to

1. See, e.g., the following press reports: Warta Negara, 27 February 1957, 21 March 1957. Utusan Melayu, 7 and 12 March 1957, 4 May 1957.

the MCA. The UMNO, however, still agreed to jus soli for it was a precondition required by the British Government before it handed power over to the Alliance, and also because it represented the UMNO's own thinking on the matter.

Even in the case of jus soli, the UMNO could not be seen as being the party responsible for making the concession. Steps were taken by the Alliance top leaders to mask the fact that the UMNO had already agreed to jus soli in the Alliance negotiations in mid 1956, well before the Reid Commission published its findings in February 1957.¹ UMNO's acceptance of jus soli was not revealed to the Malayan public, who were told instead: "The three parties of the Alliance - UMNO, MCA and MIC - deadlocked on the controversial question of jus soli ... decided today to pass the baby on to the Reid Constitutional Commission".² Malay hostility towards the UMNO would be neutralised if it was believed that the British Government and the Reid Commission were responsible for giving jus soli to non-Malays. The MCA leaders were anxious to help the UMNO leaders overcome any potential opposition movement, for the efficacy of the UMNO's political patronage lay in its pre-eminent position in Malay society.

The MCA top leaders' concessions on special rights and language were a demonstration of goodwill and a willingness to give public support to the concept that Malays deserved favoured treatment. The MCA top leaders' rationale that Malays had a claim to

1. Minutes of the Alliance Ad Hoc Political Subcommittee held on 11 and 25 June 1957.

2. Singapore Standard, 11 July 1956.

special rights is reflected succinctly in a party press release distributed to party publicity officers:¹

Ever since the advent of the British to Malaya, the Malays have enjoyed their special position. The present Federation of Malaya Agreement acknowledges this fact. So in admitting that the Malays are in a special position, we are not doing anything new. On the other hand, if we do not accept the special position of the Malays, we shall be denying to them what is already theirs.

The circular further stated:

We wish to point out that despite the racial position of the Malays, the other communities in this country have not suffered. We all have prospered during the last 150 years, and there is every reason to believe we shall continue to prosper, as long as there is goodwill and co-operation amongst the races living in the country. We should also remind the Chinese that the Malays are also in a very special position, on account of their voting strength. And yet during the Federal Election they did not use that special position to the detriment of others. On the contrary, the Malays, through the good offices of the UMNO, used their voting strength to help the Chinese in particular.

The MCA leaders believed that UMNO goodwill up to the time of independence had benefitted the Chinese community politically; they wanted to assure the community that as long as the spirit of goodwill and cooperation prevailed between the UMNO and MCA, Chinese interests after independence would not be damaged by their agreement to accept the special position of Malays.

The MCA top leaders believed that the constitution itself afforded grounds for their optimistic assurances to the Chinese community. They felt that the constitution contained sufficient

1. MCA press release, mimeo., 30 October 1956.

safeguards protecting non-Malay interests. In their acceptance of Malay special rights, the MCA delegates at the Alliance negotiation had insisted upon the inclusion of constitutional safeguards providing for the freedom of non-Malays to preserve, practise and propagate their religion, culture and language. The MCA delegates were particularly concerned that non-Malay economic interests would not be seriously weakened by the implementation of Malay special rights. Tan Siew Sin, for example, had insisted that the legal language describing the provision on special rights should be worded as carefully and as unambiguously as possible so that the legitimate interests of non-Malays would not be impinged on. He and the other MCA delegates gave special attention to negotiating the wording of Article 153(a): "Nothing in this Article shall empower Parliament to restrict business, or trade solely for the purpose of reservations for Malays".¹

In addition to the written constitutional safeguards, the MCA leaders believed they had the assurance of the UMNO leaders that special rights would be reviewed after a period of 15 years after independence and eventually terminated. The UMNO delegates at the Alliance negotiations had initially agreed that a time limit on special rights should be written into the constitution.² However,

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1. Minutes of the Alliance Ad Hoc Political Subcommittee held on 26 April 1957. See also the minutes of 2 and 5 April 1957.
 2. Minutes of the Alliance Ad Hoc Political Subcommittee held on 26 July 1956. Reporting back to the MCA Central Working Committee, Yong Pung How and Ng Ee Teong stated: "It had been agreed by the Alliance that provisions should be included in the Constitution for the 'special position of Malays' to be reviewed after 15 years...." Memorandum from Yong Pung How and Ng Ee Teong to the MCA CWC, mimeo., 20 October 1956.

more careful consideration of the subject convinced them that such a move would not be acceptable to the Malay community, a judgement which was in fact vindicated by the hostile Malay response to the Reid proposal on special rights. The UMNO delegates therefore decided that a time limit qualification on special rights should not be included in the Alliance memorandum to the Reid Commission. The MCA leaders agreed to the UMNO position, for they believed that the UMNO intended to abolish special rights eventually. Their confidence stemmed from the fact that Tunku Abdul Rahman had verbally informed the Reid Commission that while the UMNO opposed the inclusion of a constitutional time limit proviso, the Alliance nonetheless intended to review the policy 15 years after independence, with a view to its eventual termination.¹

A final explanation for the MCA leaders' acceptance of the UMNO position was their belief that the constitution itself could be amended at some future date. They thought that as more non-Malays became enfranchised Malayan citizens, and if the number of non-Malay voters exceeded Malay voters with changes in demographic patterns, the non-Malay communities would one day possess the means to amend the constitutional provisions pertaining to special rights, language and other racially-salient issues. However naive this argument may appear, it was nonetheless effectively used by the party top leadership in persuading the rank and file to accept the UMNO position, as illustrated by the final meeting of the Party General Committee held to discuss the draft constitution. Joining

1. Minutes of the Alliance Ad Hoc Political Subcommittee held on 2 April 1957.

in the debate, Dr. Lim Chong Eu successfully argued that the constitution was amendable and that the meeting should accept the draft constitution as the MCA's immediate objective - independence with jus soli for non-Malays - was already assured.¹

The MCA top leaders believed that the Merdeka compact represented a fair deal for the Chinese community. Jus soli had been obtained and written constitutional safeguards existed to protect non-Malay interests in the face of Malay special rights. Moreover, these leaders were confident that the spirit of goodwill and trust between the UMNO and MCA would act as a bulwark against the erosion of the non-Malay position.² The MCA top leadership's confidence and optimism, however, was not shared by a group of Laukeh party leaders who spearheaded a campaign to press for greater protection of Chinese interests in the independence constitution.

7.5 The Abortive Breakaway Movement

It may be recalled that popular Chinese demands regarding the constitution centred on three issues - citizenship for non-Malays based on jus soli, equal rights for all Malayan citizens, and the status of Mandarin as an official language. Chinese demands for the recognition of these issues by the colonial administration

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1. Minutes of the MCA General Committee Meeting held on 7 July 1957.
 2. The optimism of the MCA leaders was in fact borne out by the fact that during the first twelve years after independence, 1957-1969, the UMNO under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman refrained from implementing an assertive Malay national language and special rights policy.

had existed for some years before the beginning of the independence constitution negotiations.

When the MCA westernised leadership mounted its campaign for jus soli in the early 1950s, it had the strong and energetic backing of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce, the huay kuans, educational bodies and other pressure groups within the community. When the Reid Commission toured Malaya from March to May 1956 to sound out the views of the Malayan people on the independence constitution, several Chinese organisations submitted their views to the Commission. Typical of the impassioned arguments justifying the demand for jus soli and equal citizenship rights were the following views of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce:¹

Chinese popular opinion has repeatedly reminded us of the fact that by the terms of the Federation of Malaya Agreement 1948, a very large section of the non-Malay population was deprived of their birthrights and their political franchise. Now that a new Constitution is to be written, they naturally expect to see their rights and privileges restored so that in this newly-born independent and democratic Federation of Malaya, all nationals will become equal subjects enjoying equal rights and privileges and fulfilling equal duties, obligations and responsibilities.... It is our firm conviction that the principle of Jus Soli should be restored as an absolutely necessary provision in the New Constitution, if the country is to have peace and prosperity when independence is attained.

The memorandum submitted by the representatives of Chinese organisations in Negri Sembilan argued for the necessity of jus soli and

1. Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce: Memorandum to the Chairman and Members of the Independence Constitutional Commission....

equal rights in a similar vein, stating that unless political equality were given to non-Malays, "the granting of independence to Malaya would bring about unrest and eventual chaos". It further warned that unless non-Malays were given a stake in the new nation state which was worth fighting for, Malaya would "from the moment of its birth /be/ a ready-made Hot Bed for Communism".¹ According to this line of reasoning, the MCP stood a good chance of renewing its armed struggle if a discontented and largely disenfranchised Chinese population still existed to fuel its activities after independence.

The call for Mandarin to be recognised as an official language was first raised in 1952 by the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce in connection with the controversy over Chinese education stirred up by the Barnes Report. The organisation had requested the High Commissioner, General Templer, to recognise Mandarin as an official language and to drop the Barnes Report in favour of the Fenn-Wu Report on Chinese education.² Although General Templer ignored the request, the cry for the recognition of Mandarin as an official language was taken up by the Chinese press, Chinese associations and educational bodies.³ In mid-1953, Tan Cheng Lock, the party president, wrote to General Templer asking

1. Memorandum entitled "The Constitution for Independent Malaya...."

2. "Memorandum on the Report of the Committee on Malay Education and the Report on Chinese Education presented by the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce", mimeo., c.1952.

3. See, e.g., the following press reports: China Press, 11 August 1954; Nanyang Siang Pau, 7 August 1954, 3 March 1955, 28 September 1955.

him to recognise Mandarin, English, Malay and Tamil, as the official languages of Malaya.¹ A year later, the MCA Chinese Education Central Committee resolved that the MCA should play a key role in getting Mandarin recognised as an official language.²

When the Alliance constitutional talks began in April 1956, the MCA top leaders took great care to consult the views and opinions of party branches and Chinese associations and they obtained their mandate to make decisions on behalf of the party and Chinese community at the Alliance talks.³ However, Laukeh party leaders were fearful that the outcome of the talks would not satisfy their demands. Their apprehension stemmed from the realisation that the MCA was the weaker bargaining partner compared to the UMNO, and that the leaders, being English-educated, might not be assertive enough on Chinese language issues. The Laukeh

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1. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to General Templer dated 12 May 1953, MCA headquarters.
 2. Minutes of the MCA Chinese Education Central Committee held on 21 August 1954.
 3. The views of party branches and Chinese associations coincided because of the overlap in leadership and membership between them. Their views were contained in several memoranda submitted to the MCA Headquarters and the Reid Commission. See, e.g., the following: "Memorandum to the Chairman and Members of the Independence Constitutional Committee Appointed for the Federation of Malaya" submitted by the MCA Penang and Province Wellesley Branch, mimeo., July 1956, and entitled memoranda submitted by (a) the Selangor Hokkien Association dated 3 March 1956; (b) the MCA Baling Branch and Chinese Community dated 29 March 1956; (c) the Perlis Chinese Chambers of Commerce dated 18 April 1956; (d) the Rubber Trade Association of Selangor and Pahang dated 16 April 1956; (e) the Lower Perak Chinese Association dated 19 April 1956; (f) the MCA Kuala Lipis Branch dated 26 April 1956; (g) the Trengganu Chinese Chambers of Commerce dated 10 May 1956; and (h) the Federation of Kwangtung Association dated 1 June 1956. Mimeo.

leaders therefore decided to organise a breakaway Chinese political party, comprising all the Chinese associations, to take over the leadership of the community from the MCA should the MCA top leaders fail to obtain the full range of the constitutional demands of the community.¹

The breakaway movement was spearheaded by four leading MCA huay kuan figures, known popularly as the Big Four. They were Lau Pak Khuan, a founder member and one-time president of the Perak MCA, chairman of the Federation of Registered Chinese Guilds and Associations (which claimed a membership of 1094 organisations), and chairman of other leading associations such as the Perak Chinese Chambers of Commerce, the Perak Chinese Mining Association and the Federation of Kwangtung Associations; Leong Chee Cheong, chairman of the Federation of the Selangor Chinese Guilds and Associations; Cho Yew Fai, vice-chairman of the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall; and Lim Lian Geok, chairman of the United Chinese School Teachers' Association. Lau Pak Khuan, the leading light of the movement was at the time one of the most influential huay kuan leaders in the country.²

1. Kwong Wah Yit Poh, 20 April 1956; Straits Times, 18 April 1956.

2. Lau Pak Khuan was a colourful, interesting and important figure in Perak-based Chinese politics in that period. He played a leading role in founding the Perak MCA and, later, without giving up his leadership in the party, became the President of the National Association of Perak (NAP), a small Malay-based party founded by the Panglima Bukit Gantang to rival the UMNO in Perak. It is not clear why Lau joined the NAP, but it may be conjectured that he acted, in part, out of pique because of personal disagreements with the party national leadership regarding party policies, and because he felt the national leadership had not given him due recognition for his services to the Perak MCA. G.P. Means is mistaken when he notes that Lau was the president of the NAP before he was the president of the Perak MCA and the Perak Chinese Chambers of Commerce. Actually the sequence was the reverse. Means, Malaysian Politics, p.220, fn.18.

Leong Chee Cheong's involvement in the movement is a point of interest. The issue of multi-lingualism was first raised by him in January 1955 when he sent a petition to Tan Cheng Lock on behalf of the Federation of Selangor Guilds and Associations. Leong wanted the MCA to press for the recognition of Mandarin as a language of communication in the Federal Council and state assemblies. He argued that Chinese-speaking MCA Laukeh leaders were, in his opinion, better qualified than the English-educated leaders to represent Chinese interests as the former came from the less elitist backgrounds of the Chinese-speaking and Chinese-educated masses. He stated: "most of them English-speaking Chinese leaders are not conversant with social conditions especially the life of labourers. Their views cannot therefore represent the public opinion sic".¹ Leong's request was politely rebuffed by the party top leaders. T.H. Tan, the Chief Executive Secretary informed Leong that it was then premature and unwise to insist on multi-lingualism for it would retard the Alliance's "progress towards self-rule through the resistance of those at present in authority to changes in our electoral laws".² H.S. Lee, the MCA Selangor chief and a powerful huay kuan leader in the state, was asked by the party headquarters to persuade Leong to drop his demand.³ Although the demand was formally withdrawn, Leong continued to fight

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1. Letter from Leong Chee Cheong to Tan Cheng Lock dated 5 January 1955, MCA headquarters.
 2. Letter from T.H. Tan to Leong Chee Cheong dated 21 January 1955, MCA headquarters.
 3. Minutes of the MCA Central Working Committee meeting held on 21 February 1955.

for his position outside the formal party structure as evidenced by his leadership role in the abortive breakaway movement.

The Big Four sponsored a mass meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 27 April 1956 attended by 900 delegates representing 400 organisations. There were two items on the agenda - to draw up a list of demands of the community regarding the constitution and to form a mass-based party, to be called the Chinese General Association, as a movement to rival the MCA.¹ The meeting drew up four constitutional demands: citizenship based on jus soli for anyone born in Malaya; citizenship for aliens who had lived in the country for five years and without passing a language test; equal rights and privileges, and equal duties and obligations for all Malayan citizens; and acceptance of Malay, Chinese and Indian languages for official use.² The meeting, however, dropped the proposal to form a mass-based party comprising the Chinese associations. In its place, a smaller body called the Council of Representatives of Chinese Guilds and Associations (CRCGA), headed by Lau Pak Khuan and a 15-man Working Committee, was set up. A mass-based Chinese opposition party failed to materialise at the meeting because two of the four leading sponsors, Cho Yew Fai and Lim Liang Geok, withdrew their support for the project at the very last minute. The withdrawal of Cho Yew Fai's and Lim Lian Geok's support for the

1. Kin Kwok Yit Pau, 28 April 1955.

2. "A Declaration of the Meeting of Representatives of Registered Chinese Organisations in Malaya for the Acquiring of Citizenship Rights", mimeo., 27 April 1956.

proposed Chinese General Association at a critical juncture, for reasons discussed below, broke the momentum of the breakaway movement and prevented the emergence of a serious threat to the MCA's political pre-eminence within the Chinese community.

Lacking the open mass backing of Laukeh leaders, Lau Pak Khuan's CRCGA conducted an ineffective campaign to press for Chinese rights.¹ Its activities were largely confined to helping and coordinating the efforts of Chinese organisations in preparing their memoranda to the Reid Constitutional Commission. It continued, with little avail, to press the MCA top leaders to obtain the full range of Chinese demands at the Alliance negotiations.² The most significant and most publicised activity of the CRCGA was the despatching of a delegation to London to meet the Colonial Secretary, the outcome of which is discussed below.

The MCA top leaders viewed the emergence of the breakaway movement with alarm and took immediate steps to check its momentum and to abort its growth. They manoeuvred to break the unity of the Big Four and succeeded in drawing Cho Yew Fai and Lim Lian Geok

1. Lau also formed a second body, the Perak People's Constitutional Rights Committee, which comprised Perak-based MCA leaders such as Ong Chin Seong and Peh Seng Khoon, as well as some Indian leaders such as D.R. Seenivasagam, B. Kanapathi Pillai and John Emmanuel. The body was shortlived, and apart from organising a mass rally attended by some 3,000 people in Ipoh, did not appear to conduct any other significant activities, Kin Kwok Yit Pau, 30 April 1956; Straits Times, 21 April 1956.

2. China Press, 11 March 1957; Sin Lit Pau, 17 April 1957. See also letter from Lau Pak Khuan addressed to Tan Cheng Lock dated 28 August 1956 in which Lau asked the MCA to support his movement.

back to the MCA camp. Both Cho Yew Fai and Lim Lian Geok stated that they eventually decided against breaking ranks with the MCA because of the top leadership's plea for Chinese unity at a time when Malays and Chinese were locked in fierce bargaining over the independence constitution.¹ The MCA top leaders had successfully appealed to the Laukeh leaders not to weaken their bargaining strength at the Alliance talks by splitting up the Chinese community. At the same time, however, the MCA appeared to have benefitted from the emergence of the breakaway movement, for the UMNO was under some pressure to concede, at the very least, to the most minimum MCA demand for jus soli since this concession would help the MCA to destroy the threat from Lau Pak Khuan's CRCGA.

The English-educated leaders further appealed to the Laukeh leaders to place their trust in the track record of the English-educated leaders on Chinese education and language issues. The English-educated leaders had persistently championed the cause of Chinese education and language, and they had spearheaded the campaign to obtain the repeal of the 1952 Education Ordinance which threatened the extinction of the Chinese language in state schools. They had also obtained a deal from the UMNO in the Alliance 1955 Federal Election Manifesto on Chinese education and language which was satisfactory to the Laukeh leaders. Their most recent achievement was the MCA's role in the preparation of a new education policy contained in the Razak Report.

1. Sin Chew Jit Poh, 14 and 25 April 1956.

The colonial administration appointed an Education Commission in 1956 under the chairmanship of Datuk Abdul Razak, the Minister of Education, to formulate a new education policy to replace the 1952 Education Ordinance. Too Joon Hing, a MCA delegate to the Alliance negotiations, was the Assistant Minister of Education and one of the four MCA members on the Razak Education Commission. The Razak Education Report of May 1956, subsequently enacted as the Education Act of March 1957, recognised the principle of using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, thus making Chinese education a permanent feature of state education, at least at the primary school level. Provisions existed making the study of the Chinese language available to Chinese pupils in English-medium schools; in addition, there were safeguards for the continued existence and expansion of private Chinese secondary schools.¹ The Laukeh leaders were on the whole pleased with the Razak Education Report and with the success of the MCA top leaders in achieving Chinese goals.² Furthermore, the MCA top leaders assured the Laukeh leaders that, despite UMNO's objections, they would include proposals recommending Chinese as an official language and multi-lingualism in the Alliance memorandum to the Reid Commission.

The plea for Chinese unity and satisfaction with the top leaders' performance on Chinese education were two of many considerations which persuaded Cho Yew Fai and Lim Lian Geok to formally disassociate themselves from the breakaway movement. On the basis

1. Federation of Malaya, Report of the Education Committee, Council Paper 21 of 1956, Government Printer, Kuala Lumpur.

2. Sin Chew Jit Poh, 9 May 1956.

of the writer's examination of party documents of the period, it may be conjectured that the Laukeh leaders accepted the top leadership's argument that the institutionalised collaborationist basis of political cooperation between the UMNO and MCA in the Alliance, and the goodwill and trust of the UMNO, were indispensable to the attainment of any Chinese political goal. The emergence of an opposition Chinese party, working against the UMNO and challenging the needs of the Malay community, would, according to this line of argument, wholly undo the progress made by the UMNO and MCA in achieving a successful and stable political relationship and in attaining the imminent realisation of independence. One could also say that the Laukeh leaders had a nagging fear that should they persist in setting up a mass-based Chinese opposition party at a time when the constitutional debate had raised the temperature of racial tension, not only would they destroy the realisation of independence, but their action might also cause the outbreak of racial hostilities.

Although the MCA top leaders moved swiftly to check the momentum of the breakaway movement, their success in winning back the allegiance of most of the Laukeh leaders owed more to the manipulations of the UMNO than to their own actions. UMNO took advantage of the dependence of MCA leaders on UMNO largesse, a clientelistic relationship paralleled in many respects by the dependence of the Laukeh leaders on the English-educated leaders. Laukeh party leaders needed the sophisticated cosmopolitan network of English-educated leaders to articulate and represent their interests at the multi-racial political centre. The English-educated leaders, in

turn, were UMNO's political clients, dependent ultimately on the UMNO for their political effectiveness.

UMNO leaders skilfully manipulated events at this critical juncture and were successful in aborting the growth of the breakaway movement by steadfastly refusing to negotiate with the Laukeh leaders and blocking their access to Whitehall. By discrediting the nationalist credentials of the breakaway movement as a Kuomintang-inspired movement, the UMNO succeeded in ensuring that the movement's delegation to London received an unsympathetic reception from the Colonial Office. UMNO's characterisation of the breakaway movement as a Kuomintang-inspired movement had a valid basis.

The Laukeh leaders associated with the breakaway movement and the Big Four who sponsored the mass meeting of 27 April 1956 all had Kuomintang backgrounds. The Big Four, Lau Pak Khuan, Leong Chee Cheong, Cho Yew Fai and Lim Lian Geok; and other leaders of the breakaway body such as Peh Seng Khoon, Ong Chin Seong, Yap Mau Tatt, Toh Seang Ong, Tan Kee Gak, Ong Keng Seng, Chung Swee Thye and Tan Seng Soon, were well-known leaders of the KMTM before and immediately after World War Two. Lau Pak Khuan had been a high-ranking KMTM office-holder; he was a member of the KMTM Central Supervisory Council in 1945-1946 before the KMTM was banned following the outbreak of the Emergency. Even after the ban on the KMTM and the absorption of most of its leaders and supporters into the MCA, these ex-KMTM men continued to display their affiliation and solidarity with the Chiang Kai Shek Government. The ex-KMTM men in the MCA displayed their support for the Kuomintang Government in various ways, most conspicuously through the public celebration of the Double

Ten Anniversary up until 1956. In 1954, for example, Cho Yew Fai, one of the Big Four, was the toastmaster in the Double Ten celebration ceremony organised by the huay kuans in Kuala Lumpur. In his speech to the celebrants, Cho had stated that Chinese in Malaya should make every effort to promote the cause of the Kuomintang Government in its struggle to regain the motherland.¹

The loyalty of the ex-KMTM to Malaya was questioned by the UMNO and other Malay leaders. The following Utusan Melayu editorial reflected typical Malay opinion vis-a-vis the huay kuan leaders who supported the breakaway movement: "Most of the Chinese associations and guilds are based on narrow chauvinism in that they are led by leaders who are generally inclined towards the Kuomintang and are imbued with narrow chauvinism".² When the CRCGA delegation arrived in London to present its views, the Colonial Secretary, Lennox-Boyd, was asked by Tunku Abdul Rahman not to receive the delegation. The UMNO president stated that the delegation was a Kuomintang group which was illegal in Malaya and whose loyalty to the country was suspect.³ Defending his activities and the CRCGA, Lau Pak Khuan stated: "Our loyalty to Malaya is not in doubt. It is because of our loyalty that we are trying to ensure fair treatment and cordial relations between different communities after independence. But there cannot be harmonious relations when nearly half the

1. China Press, 12 October 1954.

2. Utusan Melayu, 26 March 1956.

3. Utusan Melayu, 7 May 1957.

population is dissatisfied".¹

Lau's defence that the CRCGA was a loyal body acting in the interest of Malayan Chinese failed to remove the taint of its Kuomintang connection in the eyes of Whitehall. Lennox-Boyd initially refused to receive the CRCGA delegation, but after the final round of constitutional talks between the British Government and the Alliance delegation was over, he decided to meet Lau and the other CRCGA delegates, primarily to censure them on their activities. He advised Lau and his colleagues to be "loyal Malaysians" and to accept the constitution as worked out by the British Government, the Alliance and the Malay rulers.² Whatever Lennox-Boyd's personal views on the case for Chinese rights were, he could not deal with the CRCGA because of the doubts raised by the CRCGA's links with the Kuomintang Government. He could not be certain if the body constituted a "fifth column" representing the foreign policy ambitions of Taiwan towards Malaya or it was a genuinely Malayan-centred Chinese body.

Condemned by the UMNO and denied access to the British Government, the majority of huay kuan leaders shied away from continuing to support the breakaway movement after the initial burst of organising activities. These Laukeh leaders formed the backbone of the Chinese mercantile class in Malaya and they needed the largesse of official patronage and access to government goodwill to pursue their economic activities. Therefore, while the CRCGA

1. Straits Times, 20 April 1957.

2. Straits Times, 2 June 1957.

represented the Chinese position more accurately than the MCA, it was an ineffective body because its Laukeh backers did not openly support it for fear of jeopardising their own private interests.

The MCA top leaders cleverly used the Kuomintang taint of the CRCGA to silence the opposition of the lower echelon party leaders and rank and file to the Merdeka compact. When the crucial Party General Committee meeting was convened to approve the White Paper on the Constitution, the top leaders indicated that only the "Kuomintang diehards" in the party would oppose the draft constitution. A party second-rung leader and ex-KMTM man, Chin See Yin, described the move as a "cleverly concocted attempt to avoid debate on the White Paper". The tactic succeeded in silencing rank and file protest and the meeting duly approved the draft constitution.¹

Tan Siew Sin and Ong Yoke Lin, two of the MCA representatives to the Alliance constitutional negotiations, had earlier asked for the expulsion of ex-KMTM party leaders who were involved with the breakaway movement. They wanted "rebels" such as Lau Pak Khuan, Yap Mau Tatt, Leong Chee Cheong and Toh Seang Eng to be expelled. They also asked for the dismissal of other ex-KMTM and CRCGA supporters who held office in the state branches of Perak, Negri Sembilan, Johore, Penang, Selangor and Malacca.² The intention to sack the ex-KMTM and CRCGA men from the party turned out to be more of an exercise in bluster than an actual threat. The MCA

1. Straits Times, 4 July 1957. Minutes of the MCA General Committee Meeting held on 7 July 1957.

2. Minutes of the MCA Central Working Committee meeting held on 4 May 1957.

support base was sustained by these same huay kuan leaders and their removal would irreparably damage the strength of the party. The predicament of the English-educated leaders was nicely observed by Chin See Yin in his letter to the party Honorary Secretary-General: "As many important members of the Working Committees of the local MCA are the supporters of the Pan Malayan Federation of Chinese Guilds and Associations /CRCGA/, I don't see how such Working Committees could investigate and submit the names of members who acted in any way injurious to the interests of the Association /MCA/. It would be the case of the 'pot' calling the 'kettle' black".¹ The MCA contained so many ex-KMTM huay kuan leaders who supported the CRCGA that it was not possible for the top leaders to contemplate taking disciplinary action against the culprits.

7.6 The Reconciliation of the MCA and the CCC-Huay Kuan Establishment

The futility of supporting the breakaway movement due to lack of UMNO and British patronage made its leaders amenable to the reconciliatory overtures of the MCA top leadership. Realising the impracticality of taking disciplinary action against the Laukeh leaders, the top leadership worked to obtain the cooperation of the Laukeh leaders to concentrate the party's energy on a matter of immediate urgency. This was a massive citizenship campaign involving all MCA branches and Chinese associations to help Chinese who were eligible for citizenship obtain that right during the first year of

1. Letter from Chin See Yin to the MCA Honorary Secretary-General dated 24 May 1957, MCA headquarters.

independence when applicants were exempted from the Malay and English language test. The MCA top leaders dropped all action to expel Lau Pak Khuan and his CRCGA colleagues and Lau, in return, pledged the services and backing of the Chinese associations for the MCA citizenship campaign.¹ The reconciliation between the MCA top leaders and the CRCGA leaders was formally marked by a Conference of Chinese Associations convened by the MCA on 10 November 1957 to inaugurate the MCA citizenship campaign, which took up most of the party's organising energies well into the early independence period. Public esteem was shown to the Big Four - Lau Pak Khuan, Leong Chee Cheong, Cho Yew Fai and Lim Lian Geok - when the Conference appointed them to sit on the 15-men Working Committee set up to direct and supervise the citizenship campaign.

The return of the CRCGA to the fold of the MCA and the re-imposition of the authority of the westernised leadership over the Laukeh leadership and rank and file was welcomed by the UMNO. Tunku Abdul Rahman was particularly pleased that the MCA top leadership had successfully persuaded the Laukeh leaders to drop the celebration of the Double Ten Anniversary on 10 October 1957, a few weeks after the declaration of independence in Malaya. The UMNO president lauded the "fine gesture" of the Chinese community for demonstrating its "single loyalty" to the new nation state by ceasing to observe the Double Ten,² after having celebrated the

1. Nanyang Siang Pau, 1 November 1957.

2. Straits Times, 12 October 1957.

event for an uninterrupted period of 46 years (except during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya). The demise of the Double Ten Anniversary in October 1957, symbolising the loyalty and allegiance of Laukeh Chinese towards their new motherland, was the first of many subsequent steps taken by Laukeh Chinese to strengthen the bond of brotherhood between the Chinese and Malay communities in independent Malaya.

The Laukeh leaders of the breakaway movement had started off by challenging the MCA westernised top leadership's hold over the Chinese community and had ended up by closing ranks with the party, thus reaffirming the supremacy of the westernised leaders and the pre-eminence of the MCA. They sealed their reconciliation with the MCA by helping the party to spearhead a mammoth citizenship drive and by placing the large manpower and the financial resources of the huay kuans at the disposal of the MCA. It was the joint effort of the MCA and Laukeh huay kuan leaders in helping several thousands of Chinese to obtain their citizenship rights that resulted in the integration of the Chinese community as a legitimate entity in the political life of independent Malaya.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The MCA's pre-independence years 1949-1957 coincided with a political watershed in Malaya's history, a period marked by the early and most turbulent phase of the Emergency, the moves towards decolonisation and the final grant of independence. The period was also a cross roads in the development of Chinese politics in Malaya. The stringent citizenship terms of the Federation of Malaya Agreement 1948 disqualified over three-quarters of the Chinese population for citizenship, and the outbreak of the Emergency in June 1948 gave birth to the belief that most Chinese either actively supported the Communist terrorists or were uncommitted in their loyalty to the Federal Government. The formation of the MCA in February 1949 radically changed the existing state of affairs for the better. Between 1949 and 1957, it succeeded in destroying the myth of Chinese as being disloyal Communist sympathisers or apolitical; it linked up Chinese concerns with mainstream Malayan nationalist developments; it forged a political alliance with the premier Malay party, the UMNO; it brought Chinese influence to bear upon the independence constitution; and it obtained citizenship rights which ensured that the Chinese community had a legitimate political role to play in independent Malaya.

The MCA's achievements in those years made it the pre-eminent mass-based Chinese political party in the country. It

commanded mass support because its policies and activities were relevant to and fulfilled the needs of the community, both those created by the exigencies of the Emergency and others related to the community's ambivalent and vulnerable legal and political position arising from its lack of citizenship and access to the political centre.

It may be recalled that the Chinese community faced an uncertain political future upon the conclusion of the Japanese Occupation in Malaya. The British plan of awarding a common citizenship to Malays and non-Malays under the Malayan Union scheme of March 1946, as a means of forging an integrated Malayan identity, fell apart as a result of intense Malay opposition orchestrated by the UMNO. The Malayan Union scheme was replaced by the Federation of Malaya Agreement in February 1948. The stringent citizenship provisions under the new constitutional arrangement critically affected the position of the Chinese community whose plight was further compounded by two other concurrent events - the outbreak of the MCP insurrection in Malaya and the Communist victory in China.

The termination of the civil war in China, marked by the victory of the Chinese Communist Party in Peking in January 1949, ended the constant two-way flow of traffic of Laukeh Chinese travelling between Malaya and China. Dating back to the earliest days of mass migration to Malaya, Laukeh Chinese had maintained regular and close ties with their home villages and towns in China, returning for their education, to get married and raise families, and to retire. The Communist victory in China forced the majority

of Laukeh sojourners to regard Malaya as their only permanent home. Fearing persecution from a Communist government which had confiscated their properties and businesses, or not wishing to live under Communist rule, the majority of Laukeh Chinese abandoned all intention of resettling back in China. Ironically, their new-born commitment to their home of adoption coincided with the passage of the Federation of Malaya Agreement which rendered them stateless persons in Malaya.

The outbreak and onset of the MCP insurrection further exacerbated the political dilemma of Laukeh Chinese. The MCP and KMTM had been locked in political rivalry to gain the allegiance of the Chinese community during the inter-war years. On the whole, the capitalist section represented by Laukeh huay kuan leaders tended to support the KMTM while the working class and petty bourgeoisie tended to sympathise with the MCP. The Japanese Occupation changed the pre-war patterns of political allegiance. The MCP was the only credible war-time resistance movement and its influence within the Chinese community grew so much that it became the ascendent political force, with its power established in a number of small towns, upon the reoccupation of the country by British troops. During the BMA period, the KMTM resuscitated its organisation in an attempt to revive its pre-war rivalry with the MCP.

The demise of the MCP came, however, not from the challenge posed by the KMTM, which proved to be insubstantial, but from the colonial authorities. As the Malayan Union Administration

stepped up its restrictions on and surveillance of Communist labour and political activities, the MCP lost the position of influence it had enjoyed during the BMA period. Thwarted in its attempt to gain power through working within the constitutional framework and with the colonial authorities, the MCP leadership opted for armed insurrection in June 1948 to establish a Communist state in Malaya. The insurrection called into question the loyalty of the Chinese community, for the revolt was a Chinese-led movement, and a sizeable proportion of the community had sympathised with its leadership because of allegiances built up during the Japanese Occupation and because of its promotion of Chinese labour interests in 1946 and 1947.

The only significant elements of the community which were hostile to the MCP revolt were the Anglophile SCBA leaders and Laukeh huay kuan leaders who had spearheaded the revival of the KMTM during the BMA period. The SCBA was an insignificant social movement in terms of numbers and influence, and the KMTM became inoperative following the imposition of Emergency rule. The anti-Communist section of the community therefore did not possess an institution to articulate and organise its interests.

The formation of the MCA in February 1949 filled an institutional void within the Chinese community which had been created by the insurgency. It came into being out of the realisation by the British authorities, Malay leaders and Chinese towkays that a Chinese political party was needed to mobilise the Chinese masses behind the government's anti-insurgency campaign. Both in

organisation and method of operation, the MCA was an effective and innovative vehicle to serve and articulate the needs of the Chinese political right. It combined the resources of both English-educated and traditional community leaders, with the former drawn mainly from the SCBA, and the latter from the huay kuans and the defunct KMTM. The westernised leaders brought to the party their knowledge of western political ideas and modern party organisation, and the traditional leaders provided a widespread organisational base structured upon the existing huay kuan network. Laukeh support at the lower echelons of the party wedded to top echelon westernised leadership made the MCA a mass-based party capable of dealing with urgent post-war problems in an innovative and capable manner.

The first few years of the MCA were occupied by the immediate problems and needs of the community created by the insurgency, in particular those spawned by the New Village resettlement program. While the Laukeh huay kuan leaders in the MCA were content merely to involve the newly-found party in local level Emergency welfare work, the westernised leaders wanted the MCA to take off in a new direction and participate in the fast-changing, history-making events which were transforming Malaya from a colony into a new nation state. The MCA had carried out social welfare activities because of the exigencies of the Emergency. However, the westernised leadership wanted the MCA to become an overt political party having influence at the political centre and not just performing social welfare work like a prototype Chinese Chamber of Commerce-cum-huay kuan. The westernised leadership

believed that the foremost objective of the MCA was to rectify the precarious legal status of the largely disenfranchised Chinese population. To achieve this goal, as well as to play an effective role at the multi-ethnic centre, MCA leaders had to collaborate with Malay political leaders who would hold the key to power in independent Malaya.

In 1951-1952, the party president, Tan Cheng Lock launched a reorganisation campaign to dispel the party's image as a social welfare organisation, and to centralise and modernise party organisation and machinery in order to prepare the party for participation in electoral politics. The colonial administration introduced local elections at the municipal level - in Penang in December 1951 and Kuala Lumpur in February 1952 - as measures to prepare Malaya for eventual self-rule. When the MCA national leadership made preparations for the party to take part in the Kuala Lumpur local elections and in subsequent local and state elections, it was acutely aware of the severe handicap it faced arising from the numerically inferior position of Chinese voters compared to Malay voters. To overcome this handicap, the MCA national leaders looked around for suitable Malay partners with whom to enter into an electoral pact. The party president, Tan Cheng Lock, and his son, Tan Siew Sin, initially favoured forming a liaison with Datuk Onn's IMP to contest the Kuala Lumpur elections, but party chiefs such as H.S. Lee and Ong Yoke Lin, who headed the MCA in Kuala Lumpur, preferred to work with the UMNO. It was the latter which emerged as the winning combination and out of this initial tentative MCA-UMNO electoral pact in Kuala Lumpur, the Alliance party was created. The

Alliance coalition grew from strength to strength, winning landslide victories in every local and state election held during 1952-1954. The MIC joined the Alliance on the eve of the Federal Election of July 1955, which the coalition won handsomely, capturing 51 out of 52 seats, to become Malaya's first popularly-elected coalition party to exercise limited home-rule.

During the transition from performing Emergency welfare work to participating in electoral politics, the MCA was essentially a hybrid organisation, possessing a modern party machinery at the national level but still remaining a traditional huay kuan-type organisation at the base. The party headquarters was administered by westernised party bosses who were taken up with the running of an effective election-winning machinery, the consolidation of the party's relations with the UMNO, and the advancement of the party's interests in the Alliance independence campaign. The party machinery at the grass-roots level was controlled by Laukeh towkays who exercised influence within local Chinese communities through their domination of local commerce and patronage of Chinese education. These Laukeh bosses ran local MCA branches, which were frequently located in the premises of huay kuans, in the same manner in which they ran the huay kuans and Chinese Chambers of Commerce. Exercising influence which was frequently limited to encapsulated local communities, the Laukeh towkays needed the sophisticated cosmopolitan network of the westernised top echelon leadership to extend and advance their economic and other general interests. The Laukeh towkays' mobilisation of the Chinese grass-roots and generous contributions to party coffers in turn enabled

the westernised leadership to command the attention of the UMNO.

In 1954 and 1955, the MCA, in conjunction with the UMNO, succeeded in applying pressure on the British government to speed up the time-table for independence. The Alliance coalition also succeeded in displacing its political rivals, in particular, Datuk Onn's IMP, in spearheading the independence movement. After the Alliance victory in the Federal Election of July 1955, the MCA top leadership more aggressively propounded Chinese concerns within the independence movement. The UMNO top leadership accepted the MCA as a comrade-in-arms in the independence movement although many MCA party positions, especially at the lower levels of the party hierarchy, were held by well-known ex-KMTM leaders. The UMNO leaders' acceptance of the MCA stemmed largely from their knowledge that MCA party policy was dictated and decided by the westernised party elite whose nationalist credentials were impeccable, especially those of Tan Cheng Lock, Tan Siew Sin and others who had no previous associations with the KMTM. These leaders consciously pursued a policy to wean Laukeh Chinese away from their hitherto China-orientated activities, to inculcate in them a new sense of Malayan-centred political affiliation, and to establish the MCA as the first Malayan-centred Chinese nationalist party.

In mid-1954, the British Government decided to grant independence to Malaya by the end of 1957. The electoral success of the Alliance meant that the British Government could fulfil its intention of handing power over to a multi-ethnic government in which the Malay element was dominant. Whitehall was prepared to grant independence at an earlier rather than later date because

the Communist insurrection had been militarily checked and self-rule for Malaya would furthermore enable the Alliance to destroy any residual appeal of the MCP, which had been conducting its struggle in the name of Malayan independence.

The projection of Chinese concerns into Malayan nationalist politics on the eve of independence involved a series of complicated bargaining processes among the MCA, the UMNO, the Malay rulers, the colonial administration and the British Government. The objective of the MCA in all its manoeuvres was to achieve the maximum constitutional safeguards for Chinese in independent Malaya. Working from a much stronger bargaining position, the UMNO likewise sought to achieve the same objective on behalf of the Malay community. The UMNO, MCA and MIC national leaders opened negotiations to draw up a Merdeka compact for the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities in April 1956. Although the British Government had appointed an Independence Constitutional Commission, the Reid Commission, to recommend a new constitution, it eventually accepted the Alliance proposals as the basis of the independence constitution, in the belief that the Alliance Merdeka compact represented the wishes of the majority of the Malayan people more accurately than the Reid proposals. Furthermore, MCA leaders in the Constitutional Working Party had readily endorsed the UMNO position on special rights and language, although the Reid recommendations on these issues benefitted Chinese interests more.

The MCA top leadership accepted the UMNO terms on special rights and language, which removed a time limit restriction on the implementation of Malay special rights policy, and which recognised

only the Malay language as the national language, because of its priority on other issues and its weaker bargaining position compared to the UMNO. UMNO's superior negotiating position emanated from the Federation of Malaya Agreement 1948, which ensured the supremacy of the Malay position through clauses which enshrined Malay special rights and others which withheld citizenship from the large majority of the non-Malay population.

Fully aware that Chinese without citizenship would remain stateless persons deprived of a legitimate role in the political processes of independent Malaya, the MCA top leadership made the attainment of citizenship based on jus soli its topmost priority at the Alliance independence negotiations. As early as the CLC talks of 1950, Tan Cheng Lock had pressed UMNO leaders to agree to give citizenship based on jus soli to non-Malays. The MCA's efforts, backed enthusiastically by Malcolm MacDonald (the British Commissioner General to Southeast Asia, who had played a leading role in convening the CLC talks), met with partial success in 1952 when Datuk Onn, the UMNO president, agreed to a liberalisation of the 1948 citizenship provisions. The liberalisation enabled nearly half of the non-Malay population to become Malayan citizens, but the principle of jus soli was not conceded.

The MCA top leadership continued to exert pressure on Tunku Abdul Rahman, Datuk Onn's successor in UMNO, to accept its position on jus soli. During the closed-doors top level UMNO-MCA party talks of 1954 which paved the way for the holding of the Alliance National Convention and which prepared the 1955 Alliance Election Manifesto, the MCA leaders obtained Tunku Abdul Rahman's

consent that the UMNO would accept the principle of jus soli for non-Malays. At the Alliance independence negotiations, the MCA top leaders found they had to agree to the UMNO position on special rights and language in order to see the principle of jus soli written into the independence constitution.

The MCA leaders who had negotiated the Merdeka compact had few misgivings that they had "sold out" the political, economic and cultural birthrights of future generations of Chinese. They firmly believed that the attainment of citizenship based on jus soli was the precondition to Chinese political survival, from which all subsequent Chinese rights and privileges in independent Malaya would ensue. In making the concessions on special rights and language, the MCA leaders had hoped that the spirit of cooperation and goodwill which marked the UMNO-MCA relationship in the pre-independence period would help safeguard Chinese economic and cultural interests after independence.

Up to 1956, the MCA had enjoyed a position of unrivalled pre-eminence in Chinese politics. The party's initial Emergency welfare work, its subsequent electoral alliance with the UMNO, its participation in the independence movement and other activities such as working for the repeal of the 1952 Education Ordinance, formed the basis of its widespread popular appeal within the Chinese community. However, between April 1956 and July 1957 the party's political dominance came under threat when a group of second echelon Laukeh leaders spearheaded a breakaway movement to protest against the top leadership's compromises on special rights and language. After an initial promising start, plans to form a

mass-based Chinese party to rival the MCA fell apart and support for the breakaway movement was confined to an insignificant body led by Lau Pak Khuan. The demise of the breakaway movement served further to underscore the essential weakness of the Chinese bargaining position in that the UMNO could manipulate the situation to its advantage.

The UMNO, the power broker of independence politics, was opposed to the breakaway group's demands for equal rights for Malays and non-Malays, and for Chinese to be recognised as an official language. UMNO leaders raised fears that the breakaway movement might be a Kuomintang-inspired plot which would enable the Chiang Kai Shek Government to interfere with the Alliance formula for national integration and nation-building. The fact that the breakaway movement was led by prominent ex-KMTM leaders lent potential substance to the UMNO allegation, although there was no evidence that Taiwan intended to use the Chinese community as a fifth column to advance its interests in Malaya. Worried about the Kuomintang connections of the breakaway movement, Whitehall decided not to receive the delegation sent to London to press its case, and Laukeh leaders who had initially supported the breakaway movement hastily re-pledged their allegiance to the MCA top leadership. Fundamentally dependent on the UMNO for their commercial success, the dissident Laukeh leaders were as ever reluctant to compromise their private interests, a proclivity which prevented the emergence of a mass-based Chinese opposition party in 1956-1957.

The collaborationist politics of the MCA was undoubtedly a highly successful means of political articulation in the development

of mainstream Chinese politics in the pre-independence period of 1949-1957. Chinese community leaders regarded collaborationist politics as being equally vital to the realisation of independence as to the advancement of specifically Chinese interests. After independence, the MCA mode of collaborationist politics to get Chinese votes faced competition from two other channels of political articulation - Chinese-based opposition politics and multi-racial integrationist politics. These two streams of political articulation were already present in the pre-independence period, as exemplified by Chinese-based opposition parties such as the Labour Party, the PPP and the multi-racial IMP. However, the Labour Party and PPP did not command significant support and they played no role in the independence campaign. The IMP, which called for a delay in the time-table for independence, was likewise relegated to the background of the political scene. The widespread consensus of Chinese community leaders that collaborationist politics as practised by the MCA represented the best way of achieving the popularly desired goals of independence and citizenship based on *jus soli* further prevented the rise of Chinese opposition politics during the period. The more chauvinistic and opposition-minded leaders were at that stage willing to drop their demands and patch up their differences with the MCA, as evidenced by the fall-off in support for Lau Pak Khuan's break-away group.

The rise of Chinese-based opposition politics in the post-independence period stemmed from the changing needs of the community and the increasing inability of the MCA to satisfy those needs. With the attainment of independence and citizenship based on *jus soli*,

Chinese economic and cultural needs have assumed greater salience. In the 1960s, Chinese community leaders clamoured unsuccessfully for the recognition of Chinese as an official language. In the 1970s and early 1980s, with the implementation of the New Economic Policy, the community's overriding concerns have been to protect its commercial and educational interests. The MCA leadership's ability to champion Chinese interests since independence has been hampered by its compromises with the UMNO in the Merdeka compact, which recognised Malay political and cultural dominance and which guaranteed Malay economic and educational privileges. In a society where the New Economic Policy shapes national policies on special rights, and where preventive laws such as the Internal Security Act forbid the questioning of any racially salient issue, it is difficult for any group to preach multi-racial policies asking for the abolition of special rights. The MCA, therefore, continues to espouse and practise intra-coalition bargaining with the UMNO as the most effective way of promoting Chinese interests.

The MCA's desire to continue to enjoy the fruits of political power as a member of the present day ruling Barisan Nasional (National Front) coalition government further explains its reluctance to take an anti-UMNO posture on education and other issues of major concern to the Chinese community. Due to the heavy pro-Malay rural bias in the delineation of Parliamentary and State constituencies, a substantial number of MCA Members of Parliament and State Assemblymen get elected to office more from pro-UMNO Malay votes than pro-MCA Chinese votes. Now that the Gerakan

Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysian People's Movement), a former Chinese-based opposition, is a member of the Barisan Nasional Government, the UMNO is even more able to exert a restraining influence on the chauvinistic impulses in the MCA by the implicit threat to increase patronage of the Gerakan at the expense of the MCA through the allotment of seats at election time.

The MCA's seemingly excessive accommodation of the UMNO since 1957 spawned widespread support for Chinese-based opposition parties such as the Labour Party, the UDP, the PPP, United Democratic Party (UDP), the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Gerakan (before it joined the Barisan Nasional Government in 1972).¹ These parties are, or were, multi-racial organisations in theory, but their espousal of equal political, cultural and economic rights for Malays and non-Malays have caused Malays and others to consider them as narrow chauvinistic Chinese opposition parties. The basis of their appeal to the Chinese electorate has lain mainly in their representation of Chinese economic and educational interests as well as in their critical appraisals of the government's implementation of the New Economic Policy and other national policies.

The second non-MCA channel of Chinese political articulation, multi-racial integrationist politics, is an insignificant political force compared to opposition politics. The most vigorous proponent of multi-racial integrationist politics in the pre-independence period was the IMP. Although Tan Cheng Lock was the MCA party president, he and his son, Tan Siew Sin, associated themselves with

1. Means, Malaysian Politics, chs. 14, 18 and 21.

the IMP for a period of time because they believed that Malayan politics should be based along integrationist and not mutually exclusive communal lines. The devastating defeat of the IMP in the Kuala Lumpur local elections and in subsequent local and state elections in 1952-1954 demonstrated that the Malay and Chinese masses were highly race-oriented in political ideology and political behaviour. Lack of appeal for the concept of multi-racial integrationist politics led Datuk Onn, Tan Cheng Lock and other advocates to return to the framework of communally-based politics.

The integrationist approach today remains more an ideal than a practical proposition. Proponents of the cause still argue that the demise of communally-based politics and parties is essential to the long-term stability of the Malaysian pluralist state. They believe that the existence of communally-based parties serves only to heighten racial competition and division, pointing out that a truly Malaysian identity and consciousness would arise only if political ideology and behaviour were based on compatible class interests cutting across racial lines. Most of the English-educated intelligentsia involved in politics are sympathetic toward the integrationist approach, but they are unwilling to leave the communally-based parties for a cause having so little popular appeal. These individuals are found in all of the Chinese-based parties, mostly in parties with an integrationist ideological veneer like the Gerakan and DAP (such as Lim Kheng Yaik, Paul Leong, Goh Cheng Teik and Alex Lee from the former and Lim Kit Siang and Lee Lam Thye from the latter), and less commonly in the MCA (such as Ling Liang Sik and Tan Tiong Hong). The multi-racial

integrationist school is likely to remain an insignificant and dormant strain in Malaysian Chinese political thinking until such time when respected Malay leaders lend it their support.

All the three different channels of Chinese political articulation - collaborationist, opposition and integrationist - possess one common *raison d'etre*, that of advancing the Chinese position in pluralist Malaysia. For the time being, only collaborationist and opposition politics are practical strategies. There is a clear awareness that collaborationist politics benefit from the existence of opposition politics and vice versa. The MCA benefits from pressures applied to the UMNO from public clamour on Chinese issues raised by the DAP in that UMNO top leaders may be more accommodating to Chinese interests in private Cabinet-level negotiations. The DAP in turn benefits from the MCA's collaboration with the UMNO, for the MCA's low profile representation of Chinese interests results in the DAP winning the Chinese protest vote, which is believed to fluctuate between 30%-50% of the total Chinese popular vote in every general election, thus making the DAP the largest opposition party in Malaysia.

While the interplay of collaborationist and opposition politics provides the dynamics for Chinese government and opposition leaders to forward their common cause of advancing Chinese interests, it nevertheless forms the very basis of the Chinese political dilemma in Malaysia. Chinese voting strength is necessarily fragmented between collaborationist and opposition parties and cannot be harnessed as an effective and united political force in order that Chinese representation in the country's legislative assemblies may

be as coherent and united as the Malay voice. Chinese unity as the basis for Chinese political strength will remain an illusory goal so long as the UMNO follows the present policies of selective accommodation of Chinese concerns and the two-pronged strategy of collaborationist and opposition politics is regarded as the most effective means of achieving Chinese goals.

A number of major weaknesses are evident in the present day position of the MCA. Its belief in collaborationist politics and continued reliance on the UMNO for political patronage and concessions prevent it from taking independent stands on Chinese issues which could help it capture Chinese electoral support. On the other hand, when party leaders in Cabinet private negotiations succeed in attaining significant concessions on Chinese issues, they cannot publicise their successes too widely for fear of undermining UMNO's dominant position within the Malay community.¹ Having chosen to remain in the political straight jacket of collaborationist politics, MCA leaders will find their political acumen and wits stretched to the maximum in order to retain the party's position as the premier Chinese political organisation in Malaysia.

Another source of the MCA's current political weakness, apart from the difficulties of operating within the constraints of

1. MCA leaders informed the writer that they have succeeded in obtaining a number of significant concessions from the UMNO. Two major concessions have been UMNO's agreement that the New Economic Policy would only affect Chinese business enterprises set up after 1969, and that the non-Malay quota in every university in the country would be raised to at least 40% by 1990.

collaborationist politics, is the loss of wholehearted backing from huay kuans, Chinese Chambers of Commerce, educational bodies and other Chinese pressure groups. Although the leaders of these organisations no longer play as decisive a role in Chinese community politics as in the pre-independence period, they are still able to mobilise voters and articulate Chinese concerns. Their political and social roles at the grass-roots have been increasingly taken over by Chinese political parties and by national and state level government institutions such as those responsible for health, education, social welfare, housing, employment and labour. Functions of traditional Chinese organisations which stemmed from prototypes originating in China are increasingly less relevant to the post-independence needs of Malaysian Chinese, and the roles of Laukeh huay kuan leaders as local level political brokers have been taken over by a new generation of Malaysian-born Chinese leaders.

Leaders of huay kuans and other Chinese public bodies no longer give their wholehearted support to the MCA, because of disaffection arising from perceived MCA ineffectiveness in advancing Chinese educational and economic interests. For example, a blow to the MCA was the decision by the United Chinese School Teachers Association and the United Chinese School Managers Association, known collectively as the Tung Chiao Chung, to give its backing to the Gerakan during the 1982 April General Election. Leaders of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and well-known huay kuans have influenced Chinese voting behaviour in favour of the DAP during the 1974 and 1978 General Elections,

because of the opposition leaders' representation of Chinese issues, in particular, the Merdeka University issue.¹ Cut off from its once close links with Chinese traditional organisations and other pressure groups, the MCA is even more dependent on UMNO largesse, and as a consequence becomes even more vulnerable to UMNO manipulation in the Barisan Nasional coalition. UMNO leaders, for their part, no longer view the MCA as the sole, or most authentic, advocate of Chinese interests. With the continued viability of the DAP as the opposition voice of Chinese interests and the Gerakan within the Barisan Nasional, the MCA voice threatens to become fainter.

Whatever weaknesses and conundrums the MCA faces at the present, during the period covered by this study, the mode of collaborationist politics practised by the party's far-sighted and able leadership represented a successful means of achieving Chinese goals, and best served Chinese needs and interests at the crucial juncture of Malaya's transition from colony to independent nation state.

1. The Chinese community, led by the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce, the Tung Chiao Chung and the DAP, has long sought government permission to set up a private university, Merdeka University, which would use Chinese as the main medium of instruction. The government has refused to grant permission for the project on the grounds that it is an infringement of the constitution.

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Rt.Hon.Malcolm MacDonald - 24 May and 19 July 1977; 25 January 1978.

Field-Marshal Sir Gerald Templer - 9 November 1978.

MCA Leaders (Past and Present)

- Datuk Chan Siang Sun - 24 June 1976.
 Datuk Michael Chen - 20 May 1976.
 Tan Sri Chong Hon Nyan - 15 November 1975.
 H'ng Hung Yong - 24 March and 25 July 1975.
 Datuk Richard Ho - 20, 27 May and 4 June 1976.
 Kan Toong Foong - 13 August 1975.
 Alexander Lee - 9 April 1976.
 Datuk Douglas Lee - 14 May 1976.
 Tun Sir H.S. Lee - 22 July 1975.
 Datuk Lee San Choon - on several occasions including 21 November 1975 and 21 October 1976.
 Tan Sri Lee Siok Yew - 25 June 1976.
 Datuk Lew Sip Hon - 12 and 13 July 1976; 7 April 1977.
 Datuk Dr. Lim Chong Eu - 3 and 4 September 1976.
 Datuk Dr. Lim Kheng Yaik - 17 January and 23 August 1976.
 Lim Kian Hoon - 16 July 1975.
 Datuk Dr. Ling Liang Sik - 21 May 1976.
 Lock Siang - 11 and 25 July 1975.
 Datuk Loh Fook Yen - 21 November 1975.
 Lui Thye Heng - on numerous occasions during 1975 and 1976.

Datuk Mak Hon Kam - 19 November 1975.
 Datuk Dr. Neo Yee Pan - on numerous occasions during 1975 and 1976.
 Ng Ee Teong - 1 November 1976.
 Tun Omar Ong Yoke Lin - 18 May 1976.
 Ooi Gin Sun - 16 July 1975.
 Shu Soo Neng - 27 February 1976.
 Tan Ken Sin - 1 November 1976.
 Tun Tan Siew Sin - 24 June and 17 August 1976.
 Tan Sri Tahir (T.H.) Tan - 7 May 1976.
 Dr. Tan Tiong Hong - 28 May 1976.
 Wee Chwee Sung - 21 November 1975

Chinese Opposition Leaders

Dr. Goh Cheng Teik - 30 June 1976.
 Lee Lam Thye - 1 June 1976.
 Lim Kit Siang - 30 June 1975.
 Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chee Khoon - 18 October 1976.

UMNO

Encik Abdul Ghafar bin Baba - 12 July 1976.
 Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj - 2 August 1976.
 Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie - 20 August 1976.
 Encik Khir Johari - 26 July 1976.
 Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad - 26 July 1976.
 Datuk Musa Hitam - 25 May and 1 June 1976.
 Tengku Tan Sri Razaleigh Hamzah - 27 August 1976.
 Datuk Senu bin Abdul Rahman - 20 July 1976.

Non-Affiliated Public Figures

Datuk Abdul Wahab bin Abdul Majid - 2 June 1976.
 Tan Sri Philip Kuok - 18 May 1976.
 Mrs. Agnes Wong (daughter of Tun Leong Yew Koh) - 9 July 1975;
 20 February 1976.
 Datuk Zain Azraai - 18 May 1976.