

malaysia:

divorced nation in a new courtship

The Gateway's Linda Strand interviewed a new U of A faculty member Dr. L. C. Green. Dr. Green has come to the U of A from the University of Singapore.

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By LINDA STRAND

Malaysia—a new word, a new nation, a new time?

In fact, Malaysia is only Malaya written larger and the name respelled, but below the surface Malaysia represents a change in Southeast Asia.

A change to acceptance of relevant western ideas, to independence secured without bloodshed, to regional co-operation, to a concern with world problems, to racial tolerance and co-operation, to a concern with an unique new culture.

Politically, change is probably best understood in terms of development of the new Malaysia—a country enjoying the highest standard of living in Asia outside Japan and the sole example of true democracy in Southeast Asia.

Before the Second World War, the areas which were one day to make up Malaysia were under various administrations. The three Straits Settlements—Penang, Malacca, and Singapore were colonies of the British Crown. In the Federated Malay States, four sultans who were legally sovereign permitted a few British to run their affairs.

The Unfederated Malay States, preferred to have each state run its own affairs. Sarawak and Brunei were British protectorates. British North Borneo (Sabah) was a crown colony.

An attempt to unite these parts of Southeast Asia was made during the Japanese occupation. However, the unitive directive issued by the Japanese was complicated because Japan had returned the northern states of Malaya, which had been acquired in the late 19th century to Thailand.

Shortly after liberation, the sultans of the Malay states to surrendered sovereignty, and Malayan Union was proclaimed.

Nationwide opposition to the Malayan Union caused British to drop the proposal. In 1948, the Malayan states, Penang and Malacca federated.

Pressure for independence continued. In 1957, Malaya became an independent dominion with a federal constitution and Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman. However the sultans were supreme in matters of religion in their own states.

The composition of the population of Malaya was a source of difficulty. Malaya's indigenous population (the Malays) was only a bare majority of the entire population. The bulk of economic power and the majority of the educated personnel and those with civil service training were Chinese, Indian and, to a lesser extent, Eurasian. The Malays were largely a rural agricultural group, primarily because they were ardent Muslims.

As a result, the constitution embodied clauses to protect and promote Malay interests and to provide real equality with the rest of the population by giving them privileged treatment to bring them up to the general standards.

Population composition was also a problem in Singapore. The population was 90 per cent Chinese with the Indians and Eurasians making up the bulk of the remaining 10 per cent. The Malays were a very small minority.

The British administration granted local self-government to Singapore but reserved defense and foreign affairs to a Commissioner General.

In the general elections in Singapore, the government became progressively more left-wing, and Lee Kuan Yew, a left-wing socialist, who leads the People's Action Party, was elected.

Lee Kuan Yew was soon faced with the threat of an internal party revolt of extreme left-wing intellectuals. Vestiges of the nationalist struggle also remained, formed into a underground, the Malayan Communist Party which was primarily Chinese.

All the political parties had maintained, from 1945 on, the need for merger with Malaya. Lee Kuan Yew raised this as a pressing problem as protection against a possible communist take over from within.

Tengku Abdul Rahman and his right-of-centre administration also worried about communist take over in Singapore and feared the facilities of infiltration across the causeway linking Singapore to Malaya.

By the end of 1962, the Tengku accepted the need for a merger, but in order to prevent the swamping of the Malays by the Chinese majority, he proposed a wider federation including Brunei, Sarawak and Sabah. The population of these areas was not strictly Malay but the indigenous population was in some ways distrustful of the Chinese economy. They could form a bulwark against Chinese overlordship.

This concept of a new Malaysia was acceptable to Singapore and was confirmed in a plebiscite. It was also acceptable to Sarawak and Sabah, but not to Brunei.

By this time, Indonesia had asserted itself as the leader of the newly emerging forces. It apparently objected to any territorial arrangement or change it had not inspired or about which it had not been consulted.

Indonesia also realized there were right-wing Moslem organizations in Malaya which were perhaps more sympathetic to a merger with Indonesia than with Singapore.

As a result of criticisms and protests made by Sukarno regarding the proposed Malaysia, the United Nations sent a fact-finding mission to Sarawak and Sabah to ascertain whether the people understood the nature of the proposed union and whether they were prepared to accept it. This mission tended to be positive in its findings.

With the establishment of Malaysia despite Sukarno's objections, Indonesia instituted a policy of positive confrontation with its declared aim being the destruction of Malaysia.

This led to the withdrawal of Indonesia from the United Nations on the specious grounds that Malaysia was elected to the Security Council.

The election was, in fact, in accordance with an agreement made with Malaya to split an elective two-year term with Czecho-

slvakia while the latter was a member of the Security Council. Malaya became Malaysia.

The new constitution of Malaysia retained the privilege clauses relative to the Malay, of Malaya's constitution. The constitution also contained a pledge that Malay, not a general language in Singapore, would become the national language of the entire federation, by 1967 if possible.

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A point to which insufficient attention was paid was the essential difference in nature between Singapore and the other parts of the federation. Although it had been a Crown Colony, Singapore had virtually been independent. It did not have a sultan but had a Prime Minister who represented a



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vital government and a people whose political conscience was extremely developed. It was almost asking for trouble to expect that the Singapore administration, or, for that matter, the people, would be prepared to be treated in the same way as the sultanates.

In the first flush of enthusiasm, there seemed to be a determination on both sides for the new federation to succeed. This will to succeed was emphasized by the need to resist Indonesian confrontation.

The general view of some informed quarters was that if the federation survived the first nine to 12 months, it would probably succeed.

However, the intensification of communalism and the determination of some of the so-called "Young Turks" in the Malay wing of the Malaysian ruling party had many people again expecting another break-up or a fundamental constitutional change.

The outbreak of communal rioting in Singapore in 1964 served to emphasize the strains and stresses under which the new arrangement was laboring. Secession again became a live issue but the general view was that this was being used as a debating and bargaining point.

The secession of Singapore on Aug. 9, 1965 was more unexpected

in timing than in occurrence. The secession itself was the most peaceful revolution in modern times. It took place with the agreement of the central government.

The straw which broke the camel's back was an attempt by the Singapore administration, particularly the Prime Minister, to organize a mass movement for what Mr. Lee described as a Malaysian Malaysia. This was distinct from a Malaysia in which any one communal group might hold a preferential position.

Tengku Abdul Rahman was convinced that to continue within the straight jacket of the Malaysian constitution would result in communal tension and violence.

In the name of peace, the Tengku called on the Singapore administration to take the state out of the federation. When this occurred there was no declaration of emergency and there were no extra police or troops in Singapore. After the initial shock, there appeared to be something in the nature of a sense of relief.

In view of Sukarno's lack of enthusiasm, Singapore did not go ahead with her threatened gesture of reconciliation, while Sukarno was in something of a quandary for he thought that the withdrawal of Singapore from the federation was the achievement of his aim of the disintegration of Malaysia.

Had economic and diplomatic relations been restored between Singapore and Indonesia, Singapore could have been used as a jumping off base for Indonesia to infiltrate more easily into Malaysia.

Economic problems arose for both Malaysia and Singapore after secession. The proposals for a common market were stillborn, the customs barrier at the causeway between Singapore and Johore remained and the regulations were rigorously enforced. Coupled with this was the determination of the Malaysian government to further develop Penang as a free port.

Politically, difficulties also arose because Sarawak and Sabah had joined Malaysia only because Singapore had done so. Their population was intended to balance the Chinese significance. They became restless and their parliamentary leaders felt that they had been treated in a cavalier fashion and had not been given the consideration due their status.

The Tengku's immediate reaction, that any further secession would be regarded as treason and would be prevented by force, was fortunately modified within a matter of days. The talks of secession of these territories has been dropped.

International problems arose for Singapore. Although Malaysia recognized Singapore's independence, as did Great Britain, a number of Afro-Asia countries, perhaps under Indonesian or Chinese persuasion, were rather slow in doing so. This could account for the apparent anti-American statements issued from time to time by Lee Kuan Yew.

Singapore tends to be supported more by the white and European countries than by the Afro-Asian countries because her socialism is more of the traditional European movements than of the new socialism of the new states.

As a small state, with a small military force, Singapore needs to

be accepted by the Afro-Asian group and invited as a full member to any conferences that might take place.

The interpretation that Lee Kuan Yew is a communist because he has talked of handing the military bases in Singapore to Russia is a common misunderstanding. Mr. Lee actually said that if Britain found it impossible to continue to maintain the bases, he would rather offer them to Russia than see them in the hands of the Americans.

This reaction was tied in with the disclosure of an attempt by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to bribe a Singapore security official, and the subsequent offer of a gift to Mr. Lee's party to keep quiet about the bribe. These were official denials from the State Department and the local representative in Singapore despite the fact that Mr. Lee possessed a document, which he showed to the press, apologizing for the incident and signed by the Secretary of State.

In keeping with the present trend, the ultimate mark of independence is membership in the United Nations. Singapore was admitted to the United Nations with the active support of Britain and Malaysia.

This is the first time that an independent state within the Commonwealth and growing out of Commonwealth dependency has become a member of the United Nations before admittance to the Commonwealth.

In the secession agreement, steps were taken by Malaysia to recognize the acceptance of Singapore by the Commonwealth. A similar promise was made by the British government.

At present the Commonwealth admits members following consultation and agreement among present members. It was in this way that Singapore was admitted, although all the members except Pakistan, favored Singapore's membership.

Pakistan declines to recognize or to express any opinion on Singapore's membership. This attitude may be explained because Malaysia upset the Pakistani government in its attitude concerning the debates on the Kashmir war.

Pakistan had severed diplomatic relation with Malaysia, even though continues to maintain relations with India. The situation is aggravated by the fact that a Muslim state, Indonesia gives Pakistan support and holds similar attitudes concerning Commonwealth membership for Singapore.

The future is confused. All that can be said is that Malaysia and Singapore will have growing pains, economic and other crises will occur, and whatever bitterness existed before secession will take a long time to be dissipated.

Both states, at least under their present leaders, are aware that they need each other for survival. The present leaders in Singapore believe implicitly in merger and it is doubtful if this idea has been given up.

In a state of arranged divorce, relations between the former spouses are often far more friendly than they had been during the marriage of convenience. The divorce period may serve as a new courtship followed by a more successful union of Malaysia and Singapore.