

# Malaya, 1948

## Britain's Asian Cold War?

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### Introduction

Between 8:30 and 9:00 a.m. on 16 June 1948, three Europeans were shot dead in the Sungei Siput area of Perak in northern Malaya. The three were estate managers of rubber plantations, and the perpetrators were guerrillas in the “mobile corps” of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). The shootings were the culmination of a long series of attacks and “outrages” against estate managers in Penang, Selangor, and the southern state of Johore. Late that afternoon, the colonial government declared a state of emergency in Perak and Johore that was extended, two days later, to the whole of Malaya. An immediate casualty was respect for civil liberties. Under emergency regulations the authorities enacted a range of draconian measures, including a ban on “seditious” publications; the introduction of coercive powers of detention, arrest, trial, deportation, and “banishment”; the establishment of the death penalty for anyone carrying unauthorized firearms; and the registration of the entire adult population. On 17 July 1948 the government banned the MCP itself and carried out more than a thousand arrests.<sup>1</sup> The Malayan Emergency had begun.<sup>2</sup> Although the state of emergency lasted until 31 July 1960, the outcome of the insurgency—the complete defeat of the Communist rebels by the

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1. Various MCP “front” organizations were also banned, including the New Democratic Youth League, the Indian New Democratic Youth League, and the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army Ex-Servicemen's Association. By the end of 1948, 1,779 Communists were held in detention, and another 637 as well as 3,148 family members were deported. Every person over twelve was photographed, fingerprinted, and issued with a National Registration and Identity Card.

2. Although the conflict in Malaya bore many of the characteristics of a colonial war, the misnomer “emergency” was used throughout the twelve years. Similarly MCP guerrillas were labeled “bandits” (and later “Communist terrorists”), and the British counterinsurgency was termed the “Anti-Bandit Campaign.” The reasons for this are discussed in Phillip Deery, “The Terminology of Terrorism: Malaya, 1948–52,” *Journal of Southeast Asia Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (June 2003), pp. 231–247.

British and colonial army, police, and security services—was ensured by 1958.<sup>3</sup>

In mid-1948 the British Labour government led by Clement Attlee was preoccupied with the containment of the Soviet Union in Europe.<sup>4</sup> By then, the bolts of the Iron Curtain had tightened: The democratically elected government in Czechoslovakia was displaced by a Soviet-engineered coup d'état,<sup>5</sup> Soviet attacks on the Marshall Plan had sharpened, and the eleven-month Berlin Blockade, which to British government officials resembled incipient war, had commenced. The specter of another catastrophic European conflict haunted the British Foreign Office.<sup>6</sup> Its pugnacious Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, worked indefatigably—and, ultimately, successfully—to persuade the United States to participate in a military alliance, the nascent North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), that would provide Western Europe with a bulwark against Soviet expansion.

When the crisis broke out in Malaya, however, Great Britain was suddenly obliged to look eastward. The Cold War in Southeast Asia became a reality. With an empire stretching from India to Singapore, Britain had long seen a special role for itself in the Far East. In addition to maintaining links with the Commonwealth countries, Britain had close ties with Siam, a treaty with Burma, friendly relations with the French and Dutch (each anxious to re-colonize Indochina and Indonesia respectively), and a direct presence in Hong Kong, Borneo, and Malaya. Britain's interest in the region was economic as much as strategic, and the Attlee administration for both reasons was nervous about the possible encroachment of Communism into Southeast Asia:

3. The year 1958 witnessed an unprecedented level of MCP surrenders that undermined the insurgency. See Kumar Ramakrishna, "Content, Credibility and Context: Propaganda, Government Surrender Policy and the Malayan Communist Terrorist Mass Surrenders of 1958," *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Winter 1999), pp. 242–266.

4. Ann Deighton, ed., *Britain and the First Cold War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), chs. 2, 9. Labour was in office from 1945 until 1951, when it was defeated by the Conservatives led by Winston Churchill.

5. On the Foreign Office's awareness of the Soviet Union's complicity in the coup and the murder through defenestration of Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk, see Igor Lukes, "The Czechoslovak Intelligence Service and Western Reactions to the Communist *Coup d'État* of February 1948," *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (October 1993), p. 81. British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin regarded the coup as a defining moment. On 25 February he told the U.S. ambassador: "We are now in a crucial period of six to eight weeks which will decide the future of Europe." Quoted in Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945–51* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1992), p. 350.

6. According to the historian Alan Bullock, most Britons at the time were convinced "that there was a real danger of the Soviet Union and other communists taking advantage of the weakness of Western Europe to extend their power. We know now that this did not follow, but nobody knew it at the time. This was a generation for whom war and occupation were not remote hypotheses but recent and terrible experiences." Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary 1945–1951* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 345.

[T]here is a distinct danger that, as measures are developed for the security of Europe and the Middle East, pressure [from the Soviet Union] upon South East Asia will increase. Conditions there are generally speaking favourable for the spread of Communism, and if the general impression prevails in South East Asia that the Western Powers are both unwilling and unable to assist in resisting Russian pressure . . . eventually the whole of South East Asia will fall a victim to the Communist advance and thus come under Russian domination.<sup>7</sup>

A crucial Western power that was “unwilling”—but not “unable”—to be drawn into the region, despite the persistent exhortations of Bevin and Foreign Office officials, was the United States.<sup>8</sup> Until the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, the U.S. State Department avoided any significant commitment—political, economic, or military—in a region that it considered primarily a British and French sphere of influence.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, at least until 1950, Britain had to act on its own in Malaya. From 1948 until 1957, when the back of the MCP insurgency was broken, the British sank immense resources into the campaign. By October 1950, Britain had committed twenty-one infantry regiments, two armored car regiments, and one commando brigade, totaling nearly 50,000 troops.<sup>10</sup> The British government spent at least £520 million, and an official estimate put the overall cost at £700 million.<sup>11</sup> By late 1948, the state of emergency in Malaya was costing

7. Colonial Office Memorandum, 23 March 1949, CO 967/84, National Archives of the United Kingdom (henceforth NAUK).

8. Indicative of Bevin's more bellicose position was the seminal Cabinet paper he wrote in March 1948 pointedly titled “The Threat to Western Civilisation,” attached to Memorandum, 3 March 1948, CAB 129/25 (CP 48/72), NAUK.

9. “Report of Discussions of Far Eastern Affairs in Preparation for Conversations with Mr. Bevin,” 13 September 1949, 890.00/9–1349, transcribed in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1949, Vol. VII, pp. 1204–1208 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS*, with appropriate year and volume numbers). The Foreign Office believed that “the full development of [Southeast Asia] can only be brought about with United States assistance, but at present there is an obvious reluctance on the part of the Americans to risk a further loss after their experience in China.” “The United Kingdom in Southeast Asia and the Far East,” Memorandum from Ernest Bevin, 18 October 1949, CP (49)207, CAB 129/37/1, NAUK. Richie Ovendale suggests that the U.S. administration was “wary” because it was “conscious that much of Asia was unconvinced of its devotion to peace, its lack of imperialistic ambition, and its interest in Asian freedom and progress.” He also refers to American “naivety and selfishness” at this time. Richie Ovendale, “Britain, the United States, and the Cold War in South-East Asia, 1949–1950,” *International Affairs* (London), Vol. 58, No. 3 (Summer 1982), pp. 447, 462–463.

10. E. Shinwell, Secretary of State for War to Cabinet Defence Committee, Top Secret Minute, 24 October 1950, DO (50)92, CAB 21/1682, NAUK. The combined numbers of police and troops expanded from 11,000 in 1947 to 69,000 in 1951. For an excellent discussion of British force deployments during the Malayan Emergency, see Karl Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia: Britain, Malaya and Singapore, 1941–1968* (London: Curzon, 2001), ch. 4, esp. pp. 143–149.

11. “Review of the Emergency in Malaya from June 1948 to August 1957 by the Director of Operations, Malaya” (Secret), p. 19, Item 1968/4248, Series A452/2, National Archives of Australia (NAA).

Britain 250,000–300,000 Malayan dollars a day.<sup>12</sup> In 1951 alone, the emergency cost the British government £69.8 million.<sup>13</sup> This is especially significant when we consider the state of the British Exchequer in the late 1940s. World War II had drained the British economy to such an extent that it could scarcely meet existing commitments, let alone accept new ones. The very economic viability of the country seemed in doubt, especially during the “dollar gap” crisis of 1947. As one of Attlee’s chief advisers wrote in December 1947:

[W]e are a bankrupt nation. It will tax our strength and determination to the utmost during the next years to provide for our necessary imports by exports. Until we succeed we shall only keep alive through the charity of our friends.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, exports in 1947–1948 had been crippled by a severe fuel crisis, the product of an unusually cold winter that gripped most of Europe. Fears of imminent economic depression were widespread. These problems arose at a time when government spending had been sharply increasing to create an elaborate welfare state. A vast program of state socialization in sectors ranging from coal mines to national health moved ahead, but the government’s capacity to pay for its domestic legislation was in doubt. Austerity, far from being a mere catchphrase mouthed by British leaders to justify continued wartime rationing, was of crucial influence on diplomatic relations and strategic initiatives.

This economic imperative explains, in part, the relentless British pressure (especially throughout 1947) on the United States to commit itself to the fight against Communism abroad. The Marshall Plan and the Berlin airlift testified to that commitment in Europe, but in Malaya the story was different. The U.S. refusal to help Britain in Malaya became evident on 22 June 1948, four days after the declaration of a state of emergency in the Malayan Federation, when the deputy commissioner of police for Malaya met with the U.S. consul in Kuala Lumpur to request assistance. Specifically, he wished to acquire ten thousand U.S. Army 30-caliber Winchester carbines and two million rounds of ammunition. These guns, he claimed, would be “ideal” for the special constabulary then being formed to counter the Communist insurgency but were unobtainable from the manufacturer. The consul declined to approve the request and instead simply recommended that the deputy commissioner contact the Malayan Chief Secretary. At a subsequent meeting the

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12. Malaya Department of Information, *Communist Banditry in Malaya: The Emergency, June 1949–December 1949* (Kuala Lumpur: Standard Engravers and Art Printers, 1950), p. 8.

13. “Briefs (Economic and Financial) for the Secretary of State’s Visit to Malaya: 10. Cost of the Emergency,” n.d., CO1030/403, NAUK.

14. Memorandum by Sir Henry Tizard, COS(47)251, DEFE 5/6, NAUK.

consul noted that the deputy commissioner had told him “despondently” that he was referring the matter to the British Colonial Office.<sup>15</sup>

The question that therefore arises—and is a core concern of this article—is why at this time of acute financial difficulty, without crucial American support, the Labour government committed itself to a costly campaign in a colony whose demand for *Merdeka* (independence) seemed on the verge of being realized.<sup>16</sup> This article answers that question in three ways. First, it surveys and challenges contemporary and historical judgments concerning the origins of the Malayan Emergency. Second, it shows that these origins cannot be understood without recognizing the influence of indigenous pressures and internal developments that were more crucial than the role of the external Cold War dimension. The article thereby restores the agency of “local” actors. Third, it suggests that the MCP insurrection, far from being meticulously prepared and carefully coordinated as is often alleged, was inadequately planned and poorly executed. In line with other relatively recent interpretations, this article presents a more subtle and complex picture of the origins of the Malayan Emergency than many earlier studies have portrayed.<sup>17</sup>

## Contemporary Assessments

The predominant explanation for both the origins of the insurgency and Britain's determination to defeat it, an explanation put forth at the time and, as we shall see, still accepted by commentators today, was the external threat of Communism posed by the Cold War. An official report, marked “secret” and written by the Director of Operations in Malaya, Lt. Gen. R. H. Bowen, summarized this view:

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15. “Discussion of Present Situation in Malaya with Government Authorities,” William M. Blue, Kuala Lumpur, to Secretary of State, 28 June 1948, 846E.00/6–2848, Record Group (RG) 59, General Records of the Department of State, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

16. Independence was achieved during the Malayan Emergency on 31 August 1957. An analysis of the pressures for decolonization and the steps along the way is outside the scope of this article. As A. J. Stockwell concludes, the insurgency probably “did not in itself determine the speed or the manner of Britain's departure from Malaya.” A. J. Stockwell, “Insurgency and Decolonization during the Malayan Emergency,” *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (March 1987), p. 80. Karl Hack concludes that the question of the Emergency's impact on decolonization remains “unanswerable.” See Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, p. 137. For an excellent overview of the path to decolonization, see A. J. Stockwell, “British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya, 1942–52,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (October 1984), pp. 68–87.

17. Notable exceptions are A. J. Stockwell, “A Widespread and Long-Concocted Plot to Overthrow Government in Malaya?” The Origins of the Malayan Emergency,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (September 1993), pp. 72–79; and T. N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

The Malayan Communist Party campaign is part of a wider Soviet-inspired drive to obtain control of what is strategically and economically one of the most important areas of South-East Asia. . . . In June 1948, on the instructions of the Cominform issued at two conferences in Calcutta four months earlier, the MCP started a campaign of murder, sabotage and terrorism designed to paralyse the Government and develop into armed revolution.<sup>18</sup>

These assertions—of Soviet inspiration, Cold War expansionism, MCP initiation, and, significantly, Calcutta as the conduit for instructions from the Soviet-led Communist Information Bureau (Cominform)—were echoed in various forms by the Attlee administration. When the British secretary of state for the colonies, Arthur Creech Jones, justified his authorization of the banning of the MCP and allied organizations in July 1948, he referred to the MCP as “the nerve centre of the whole subversive movement.”<sup>19</sup> Both the Colonial Office in October and the Cabinet Malaya Committee in November 1948 emphasized the “substantial grounds for regarding the Malayan outbreak as stimulated by Moscow” and the existence of a “Communist plot” to overthrow the Malayan government by armed force.<sup>20</sup> A lengthy memorandum prepared for the Cabinet by the permanent under-secretary of state in October 1949 warned of dangers that “will affect the whole security of South-East Asia” from “a powerful Communist Fifth Column, corroding from within.”<sup>21</sup> Moscow’s role was emphasized by the head of Security Intelligence, Far East, who warned that the Soviet Union in all likelihood controlled the growing local Communist parties in Southeast Asia.<sup>22</sup> The Soviet connection was also stressed by the government’s Russia Committee: “The Soviet Legation at Bangkok was clearly designed to be the centre of Soviet activity in the whole of South East Asia and Soviet couriers passing through Singapore en route for the Far East or Australia were a constant source of danger.”<sup>23</sup> One of

18. “Review of the Emergency in Malaya,” p. 3, 1968/4248, A452/2, NAA. This document was made available to the Australian prime minister’s department by the British High Commission in July 1967 for a meeting concerning defense and security arrangements in the South Pacific; it was declassified in 1998.

19. *Parliamentary Debates*, 23 July 1948, 5th Ser. Vol. 454 (1948), p. 787. Only the Communist MP, Willie Gallacher, challenged this assessment as “a foul slander” and “an attack on the Malayan working class.” *House of Commons Debates*, 23 July 1948, 5th Ser., Vol. 454 (1948), p. 790. On the role of Creech Jones, see Kenneth O. Morgan, “Imperialists at Bay: British Labour and Decolonization,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (May 1999), p. 236.

20. “Communist Activities in the Colonies: Fortnightly Reports,” 1948, CO 537/2638, NAUK.

21. “The United Kingdom in South-East Asia and the Far East,” 27 October 1949, CAB 129/37/1, NAUK.

22. Tilman Remme, *Britain and Regional Cooperation in South-East Asia, 1945–49* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 133.

23. Minutes of Meeting, Russia Committee, 14 October 1948 (Top Secret), FO 1110/33, NAUK. Similarly Lt. General Briggs believed that “the roots [of the uprising] may well lie outside Malaya, in

these “couriers” was L.L. Sharkey, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). After attending the Calcutta conferences,<sup>24</sup> Sharkey traveled to Singapore and, according to the Russia Committee, “played a considerable part in persuading the Malayan Communists to adopt a policy of violence.”<sup>25</sup> Evidence to substantiate this allegation comes from Chin Peng, who recently wrote that “Sharkey’s words [that in Australia, strike-breakers were murdered] had inspired us to the point that, as the meeting progressed to its final stages, there emerged total commitment among those present for a toughening of our policy towards strikebreakers.”<sup>26</sup>

The link between the September 1947 inaugural conference of the Cominform, which postulated the “two camp” thesis, the Calcutta meetings, and “the marked increase in Communist activity in South-East Asia immediately afterwards” was also endorsed by the South-East Asia Department of the Foreign Office.<sup>27</sup> A top-secret joint memorandum submitted to the Cabinet defence committee by the minister of defence and the secretary of state for war located the Malayan Emergency in a wider context, arguing that strong armed action “against the guerrillas in Malaya is a vital step in the ‘cold war’ against Communism in the Far East. The Malayan campaign is not isolated and must be considered in relation to the Far East theatre as a whole.”<sup>28</sup> Britain’s chief intelligence officer in Malaya, Major Harry Fisher, stretched the geographical context to include Europe. In a conversation with the U.S. consul in Kuala Lumpur, he suggested that the terrorist campaign “was merely one phase of a war which would soon break out in Europe over the Berlin situation.”<sup>29</sup> The U.S. consul also reported that the Chief Secretary of Malaya, Sir Alexander Newbould, subscribed to the “rather widely held belief that Moscow is making a push in the East now that she seemed to be stopped temporarily in Europe.”<sup>30</sup> Creech Jones expressed a similar view. “Once the path

Russia in particular.” Statement by Sir Harold Briggs, 20 April 1950, CAB 104/263, NAUK. Briggs was appointed “Director of anti-Bandit Operations” in Malaya in March 1950. He arrived in Kuala Lumpur on 3 April 1950.

24. Two Calcutta conferences took place. The first, organized by the World Federation of Democratic Youth and the International Union of Students on 19–25 February 1948, was attended by the MCP delegate, who did not take part in the second conference, organized by the Congress of the Indian Communist Party on 28 February–6 March. Sharkey attended both.

25. Minutes of Meeting, Russia Committee, 14 October 1948, FO 1110/33, NAUK.

26. Chin Peng (pseud.), *My Side of History* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003), pp. 204–205.

27. “Outline of Communist Strategy in South-East Asia,” 15 August 1949, FO 1110/189 (PR 2887/11/913), NAUK.

28. “Present Situation in Malaya.” Background Paper for Defence Committee, 24 October 1950 (Top Secret), DO (50)92, CAB 21/1682, NAUK.

29. Blue to Acheson, 24 October 1948, 846E.00/10–2448, RG 59, NARA.

30. “Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No. 10 Dated June 28, 1948,” Confidential Memorandum, 23 June 1948, 846E.00/10–2848, RG 59, NARA.

of the Communists was blocked in Europe,” he wrote, “there would be a very concerted effort in the East.”<sup>31</sup> This was consistent with the prevailing belief that “Western consolidation in Europe under the Marshall Plan was forcing the Kremlin to search for new opportunities for expansion in Southeast Asia.”<sup>32</sup> Hence, British officials at the time believed that success in Malaya would be “a vital step in the ‘Cold War’ against communism in the Far East.”<sup>33</sup> The Cold War framework shaped their understanding of and response to the Malayan insurgency.

Such assessments were not confined to private discussions, closed committee meetings, and top-secret memoranda. Residents of Malaya who owned radios were able to hear similar views expressed, albeit in a more extreme form, during a lengthy broadcast over Radio Malaya on the evening of 7 July 1948 titled “The Conflict in Malaya.”<sup>34</sup> The language used during the broadcast by the recently appointed UK commissioner-general in Southeast Asia, Malcolm MacDonald, was often lurid, vitriolic, and morally charged, akin to the rhetoric then emanating from the Committee on Un-American Activities of the U.S. House of Representatives.<sup>35</sup> “It is the Communists,” MacDonald declared, “who are now trying to impose upon you a vicious, tyrannical rule. . . . Our action will not cease until their wicked movement has been utterly destroyed.” The aim of the Communists, he said, was “to establish gangster rule in Malaya,” and therefore the British government would have to combat the MCP “until their power has been broken and they themselves are exterminated.”<sup>36</sup> Only then would there be “safety for your homes.” The “terrorist outbreak,” according to MacDonald, “is part of a deliberate plan by the Malayan Communists to stage a violent revolution and capture the govern-

31. Report No. 15, 22 June 1948, CO 717/172/52849/9/1948, NAUK.

32. Sean Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War, 1945–1991* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 79.

33. Memorandum by Minister of Defence and Secretary of State for War, 24 October 1950, DO(50)92, Pt. 2, PREM 8/1406, NAUK.

34. Text transmitted to Department of State, 9 July 1948, 846E.00/7–948, RG 59, NARA. MacDonald, the son of former Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, had been a British MP since 1929. From 1935 to 1948 he had served as Secretary of State for the Colonies, Minister of Health, UK High Commissioner in Canada, Governor-General of the Malayan Union, and Governor-General of Malaya, Singapore, and British Borneo. His views were authoritative and respected. According to one writer, he was “one of the most influential and persuasive diplomats that Britain had ever sent to Malaya.” J. P. Ongkili, *Nation-Building in Malaysia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 82. Indeed, some have argued that British policy on Malaya was influenced primarily by MacDonald’s conviction that external pressures (whether China or the Soviet Union) had determined the MCP’s action. See Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *The Left Wing in Southeast Asia* (New York: William Sloan, 1950), p. 154.

35. See Edward H. Judge and John W. Langdon, eds., *The Cold War: A History through Documents* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), pp. 61–62; and Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), ch. 5.

36. Similarly, Creech Jones referred to the need to “liquidate the guerrilla bands.” “The Situation in Malaya,” 1 July 1948, CP(48) 171, CAB 129/28, NAUK.

ment of this country. That is a sober statement of fact.” The broadcast was intended simultaneously to alert the populace to the gravity of the threat and—by exhaustively outlining the harsh countermeasures that had been taken or were planned—to fortify and reassure listeners. Among those listening was the U.S. consul general in Singapore, Paul Josselyn, who told his superiors in Washington: “Do not consider MacDonald’s accusation and warning exaggerated . . . public has frank statement difficulties confronting govt [sic] and its determination to suppress disorder.”<sup>37</sup>

Besides the desire to resist Communist expansion at the outset of the Cold War, another reason for Britain’s decision to undertake a large military commitment at a time of fiscal pressures and resource constraints was the economic potential of the region. Once the Japanese were defeated in 1945, the British were determined to return to Malaya. This second colonial occupation occurred because of Malaya’s dollar-earning capacity. As Creech Jones told the Cabinet (but not Parliament):

During 1947 the total value of the exports of Singapore and the [Malayan] Federation together was £151 million of which dollar exports accounted for £56 million. [Malaya] is by far *the most important source of dollars in the colonial empire* and it would gravely worsen the whole dollar balance of the Sterling Area if there were serious interference with Malayan exports.<sup>38</sup>

In 1948 the United States imported 727,000 tons of rubber, more than half of which came from Malaya. Of the 158,000 tons of tin imported by the United States, all but 3,000 came from Malaya. Measured in U.S. dollars, rubber shipments from Malaya exceeded in total value all domestic exports from Britain to the United States. From 1946 to 1950, Britain earned \$700 million from rubber exports to the United States.<sup>39</sup> Any interruption of that supply by the insurgency would seriously impair the British economy. In 1948, Britain was still struggling to maintain the value of its currency, and the “dollar gap” seemed to be getting wider. This financial crisis made earnings from the “Sterling Area,” in which Malaya was the linchpin, all the more crucial. The security of British business in Malaya was therefore of central economic importance.<sup>40</sup> This economic motivation was not publicly empha-

37. Josselyn to Acheson, 10 July 1948, 846E.00/7–948, RG 59, NARA.

38. Cabinet Memorandum, 1 July 1948, CP(48) 171, CAB 129/28, NAUK (emphasis added).

39. Richard Stubbs, *Counter-Insurgency and the Economic Factor: The Impact of the Korean War Prices Boom on the Malayan Emergency*, Occasional Paper No. 19 (Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 1974), p. 3. Malaya accounted for one-third of the world’s total output of natural rubber, more than half of total output of first-grade rubber, and one-third of total output of tin.

40. According to Nicholas White, the insurgency was “fully recognised as a threat to British business,” and the government tried to restore and maintain business confidence “to the extent that there was no mass exodus of British capital from Malaya.” Nicholas J. White, *Business, Government, and the End of*

sized, for to have done so would have permitted it to be exploited by the British Communist newspaper *The Daily Worker* as well as provide ammunition to the more ardent anti-imperialist “Keep Left” faction within the British Labour Party.

## Retrospective Assessments

The “Communist plot” thesis, usually with its Cold War garb, became the prevalent interpretation of the Malayan Emergency. The view that, at the Calcutta conference in February 1948, leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) transmitted to the MCP a directive to take up arms is, according to Yeo Kim Wah, “the orthodox view and by far the most widely accepted version of the communist uprising in Malaya.”<sup>41</sup> In most respects this is correct. Not surprisingly, historians writing during the early Cold War years fell overwhelmingly into this category. Ian Morrison, Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, Philip Mosley, Victor Purcell, M. R. Masani, Harry Miller, Lucian Pye, J. H. Brimmell, and Alex Josey all subscribe to the “orthodox” view.<sup>42</sup> This interpretation took root and foreshadowed the more recent historiography of the Malayan Emergency. For example, in a book published in the early 1990s, Robert Jackson claims that at Calcutta the MCP delegation “received fresh instructions from Moscow” that “ordered [the MCP and other Southeast Asian Communist parties] to go on the offensive” and launch a “carefully orchestrated” insurrection. Reiterating the traditional Cold War-inspired view, Jackson argues that the Soviet Union’s intention was to divert Britain’s attention and military resources from Europe to Asia and thereby

*Empire* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 123. See also “Malaya and the Sterling Area,” 26 April 1950, Paper No. 5, CO 537/6089, NAUK.

41. Anthony Short, “Correspondence,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (September 1970), p. 155.

42. See Ian Morrison, “The Communist Uprising in Malaya,” *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 17, No. 24 (December 1948), pp. 281–286; Thompson and Adloff, *The Left Wing in Southeast Asia*, p. 155; Philip E. Mosley, “Soviet Policy and Revolutions in Asia,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, No. 276 (July 1951), p. 96; Victor Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1954), p. 132; M. R. Masani, *The Communist Party of India: A Short History* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), pp. 89–90; Harry Miller, *The Communist Menace in Malaya* (New York: Praeger, 1955), p. 76; J. H. Brimmell, *Malayan Communist Party: A Short History* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1956), pp. 19–20; Lucian W. Pye, *Guerilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 84; and Alex Josey, *Trade Unionism in Malaya* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1958), p. 21. See also the intriguing 43-page booklet published in April 1956, *Soviet Imperialism and the Malayan Communist Party*, in “Australian Secret Intelligence Service—Records on Singapore and Malaya—Part 2,” Item 13, A7133/3, NAA. The booklet’s “tone,” plus the fact that no author or publisher was listed, suggests that it emanated from the Information Research Department, a clandestine anti-Communist propaganda unit operating out of the British Foreign Office but linked with and funded from the same source as MI6 (the Secret Intelligence Service), which distributed unattributable material to select recipients.

facilitate “a major [Soviet] political offensive in Europe,” particularly in the Balkans, Berlin, and Italy.<sup>43</sup> Donald Mackay concurs, arguing that after the Berlin airlift began in June 1948 the Soviet leader, Josif Stalin, was “in urgent need of some diversionary activity to deflect the attention of the Western powers.” Consequently, the Soviet Union—the “Almer Mater of international revolution,” as Mackay puts it—sent a “fiery cross” around the region with which it “set South East Asia alight.”<sup>44</sup>

Less evocatively, Frank Trager concludes that Calcutta was “the signal for the post-war re-entry of the Soviet Union into South and Southeast Asia,” and Brian Crozier contends that all of the Southeast Asian insurrections of 1948 were “part of a pre-determined plan worked out in Moscow and Calcutta.”<sup>45</sup> Richard Clutterbuck implies that the Calcutta conference is what sparked “armed revolution throughout Southeast Asia” and the “outbreak of rioting, sabotage and assassination in Malaya.”<sup>46</sup> Robert Thompson expresses even greater certainty about this point: “In the case of Malaya, it is now known that instructions were received from Moscow” at Calcutta. The MCP, he maintains, “was a well-placed pawn which Russia could not fail to use, and if necessary sacrifice, in the cold-war period.”<sup>47</sup> Other writers, who agree that MCP strategy was shaped by the international Communist movement, have maintained, albeit with little evidence, that the Chinese Communist Party, not the CPSU, was the driving force.<sup>48</sup> However, even the U.S. State Department at the time rejected this view.<sup>49</sup> Privately, several British officials (though

43. Robert Jackson, *The Malayan Emergency: The Commonwealth's Wars 1948–1966* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 12–13.

44. Donald Mackay, *The Malayan Emergency 1948–60: The Domino That Stood Still* (London: Brassey's, 1997), p. 29. The Berlin airlift in fact did not begin until 24 June, after the Malayan Emergency commenced.

45. Frank N. Trager, *Marxism in Southeast Asia: A Study of Four Countries* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 268; and Brian Crozier, *Southeast Asia in Turmoil* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1965), p. 64, echoing the judgment in his earlier book, *The Rebels: A Study of Post-War Insurrections* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 148.

46. Richard L. Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 185. See also Richard Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution in Singapore and Malaya 1945–1963* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 56.

47. Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 28. O'Ballance is less monocausal than Thompson; he attributes the MCP revolt to a “number of combined factors” but still believes that the Calcutta conference was the “main consideration.” Edgar O'Ballance, *Malaya: The Communist Insurgent War, 1948–60* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 76–77.

48. See, for example, Donald Hamilton, *The Art of Insurgency: American Military Policy and the Failure of Strategy in Southeast Asia* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), p. 54; Gerald de Cruz, “Correspondence,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 1970), p. 125; and Charles B. McLane, *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia: An Exploration of Eastern Policy under Lenin and Stalin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 390, 399.

49. “There appears to be little substantiating evidence that the conflict is an extension of the war in

not the Secretary of State for War, Emanuel Shinwell), were also skeptical, as A. J. Stockwell has found.<sup>50</sup>

## **The MCP in the Post-1945 Era**

The notion that Soviet instructions, transmitted in Calcutta, provoked armed uprisings in several Southeast Asian countries is questionable. As with many allegations of Communist plots, tangible evidence for this view (as opposed to the mere appearance of cause and effect), is extremely thin. A different interpretation of the origins of the Malayan Emergency emerges when we take account of the history of the MCP and the postwar conditions in Malaya.

Immigrant members of a leftwing faction of the Chinese Nationalists (the Guomindang) introduced Communism into Malaya in the 1920s.<sup>51</sup> After the expulsion of Communists from the Chinese mainland in 1927 and the abortive attempt by the Communist International's Far Eastern Bureau in Shanghai to establish the Nanyang (South Seas) Communist Party, the MCP was formed in Singapore in early 1930. In the mid-1930s the party reorganized and gained control of sections of the labor movement, including its spearhead, the Malayan General Labour Union. Once the Sino-Japanese war began in 1937, the MCP formed an "anti-Japanese" united front within the Chinese community and established new cells in both urban and rural areas. Even so, the party lacked a mass base, and its support never extended into the predominant Malay population.<sup>52</sup> Following the Japanese invasion of Malaya in 1942, the MCP established the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) and began to receive arms, ammunition, and guerrilla training from the British.<sup>53</sup> The MCP set up a military wing that gained valuable experience in guerrilla fighting—a wing that was revived in 1948. The MCP emerged

China." W. W. Butterworth, Director of the Far Eastern Division, to C. S. Reed, Director of the Southeast Asia Division, 9 July 1948, 846E.00/7-848, RG 59, NARA

50. Stockwell, "A Widespread and Long-Concocted Plot," pp. 72-79.

51. The following brief overview is drawn from Brimmell, *Malayan Communist Party*; Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya*; Cheah Boon Kheng, *The Masked Comrades: A Study of the Communist United Front in Malaya, 1945-48* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1979); and Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation, 1941-1946* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983).

52. Roughly 44 percent of residents were indigenous Malay, some 38 percent were Chinese (most of whom had been imported by the British to work on rubber plantations), and the remainder were of Indian descent. Of the estimated 12,500 full-time MCP members in 1947, only 35 were Malays, and 760 were Indian. See P. B. G. Waller, *Notes on the Malayan Emergency: Strategies and Organisation of the Opposing Forces* (Menlo Park, CA: Stanford Research Institute, 1968), pp. 10-11.

53. The British mission was codenamed Force 136, a small unit within the Far East Special Operations Executive, led by Col. Spencer Chapman.

from the war stronger and with greater support, tarnished only by the savage justice meted out by the MPAJA to alleged collaborators and traitors after peremptory mass “trials.” At the end of the war, the 23-year-old Chin Peng, who headed the illegal MCP during the entire period of the emergency, marched in a victory parade in Singapore and was awarded the prestigious Order of the British Empire.<sup>54</sup>

When the British returned to Malaya in late 1945, the MCP yielded. Under the authoritative and charismatic leadership of the Vietnamese-born general secretary, Lai Tek (also known by his peculiar alias “Mr. Wright”), the party did not follow the example of the Vietminh and the Indonesian Communists in waging an anti-colonial armed struggle. Instead, the MCP cooperated with the British Military Administration, relinquished its arms, disbanded the MPAJA (each member, once demobilized, received 350 Malayan dollars and a bag of rice),<sup>55</sup> and supported a united-front strategy of open politics and covert permeation. During the first eighteen months after the British reoccupation, the MCP focused on strengthening its prewar role in the trade union movement. By 1947 it controlled, through the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions, 214 of the 277 registered unions.<sup>56</sup> This hard-won success became pyrrhic when the leadership of the party disintegrated. This internal crisis was a central reason for the MCP’s decision to abandon peaceful agitation in favor of armed struggle.

On 3 March 1947, on the eve of a specially convened MCP Central Committee meeting, Lai Tek disappeared and was never seen again.<sup>57</sup> He took with him not only his vast knowledge of the MCP’s infrastructure but also the bulk of the party’s considerable funds.<sup>58</sup> Evidence later emerged that he had

54. He never actually received this decoration because it was annulled after it arrived from London at the outset of the Malayan Emergency. For Chin Peng’s biographical details, see Gene Z. Hanrahan, *The Communist Struggle in Malaya* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1954), Appendix 111, p. 137. See also Peng’s autobiography, *My Side of History* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003), esp. chs. 7–10.

55. However, the MCP retained or buried a significant cache of arms, some of which had been abandoned by the British at the start of the war and others that had been obtained from the Japanese at the end of the war. The MCP also withheld about twenty percent of the wartime drops of arms it had received from the British. All of these weapons were redeployed during the Malayan Emergency.

56. This was assisted by widespread economic grievances in the immediate postwar years. In 1946 basic wages had been fixed at prewar scales while the cost of living was 300 percent higher than in the prewar period. Housing was characterized by high rents, short supply, and overcrowding. Official food rations were inadequate, and the cost of rice on the black market was exorbitant.

57. For a thorough account of the strange case of “Mr. Wright,” see Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya 1948–1960* (London: Frederick Muller, 1975), pp. 38–43. See also O’Ballance, *Malaya*, p. 72; Harry Miller, *Jungle War in Malaya: The Campaign against Communism, 1948–60* (London: Arthur Baker, 1972), pp. 34–36; and Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence*, pp. 53–54.

58. Lai Tek absconded with approximately 350,000 Malayan dollars plus many valuables, creating an acute shortage of funds for the MCP. See “Malaya-Political Intelligence Summary for May 1948,” Minute by D. J. Kirkness, CO Eastern Department, CO 537/3752, NAUK.

been a triple agent working for the British Special Branch in Singapore both before and after World War II *and* collaborating with the Japanese Kempeitai intelligence service during the war.<sup>59</sup> His betrayal seriously compromised the MCP. The information he supplied led, for example, to the “Batu Caves massacre” in September 1942, when a large number of senior party members were captured and beheaded by the Japanese. The information turned over by Lai Tek also resulted in the capture of large supply and ammunition dumps by the Selangor police in February 1947, just weeks before his defection.<sup>60</sup>

Although Chin Peng immediately assumed leadership of the MCP, the fallout from the Lai Tek affair was enormous. The party took at least twelve months to recover.<sup>61</sup> The paralysis of the MCP during this period has been documented by others and will not be detailed here.<sup>62</sup> What is important, for this article, is that after the MCP rank-and-file learned about Lai Tek’s defection, Chin Peng came under strong pressure to repudiate the policies of his discredited patron. These policies, as noted earlier, had been moderate: Lai Tek was the architect of postwar cooperation with the British and peaceful penetration of student and worker organizations. “But for him,” noted a British intelligence report in 1948, “an attempt would have been made in 1945 or 1946 to organise a more militant campaign by the Communists.”<sup>63</sup> His presence had been a powerful barrier to aggressive militancy. Moreover, Lai Tek’s removal of actual or potential rivals, combined with the information he turned over in his role as triple agent, resulted in the elimination of Communist leaders in the all-important party center in Singapore. The leadership structure in the wake of his defection was characterized by youth, inexperience, and a lack of discipline. The more radical middle-level cadres, who had taken part in the wartime resistance and were committed to the ideals of the MPAJA, were in the ascendance. Their demands to resort to violent insurrection found increasingly receptive ears within the MCP hierarchy. All of this was at least six months before the Calcutta conferences.

Another purely internal factor—the interplay between labor unrest and colonial repression—also contributed to the MCP’s adoption of a more militant posture. Although labor-industrial relations in postwar Malaya were

59. For an account of Lai Tek’s activities in the 1930s and during the Japanese occupation, see Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya*, p. 84, n. 4; and Cheah, *Red Star over Malaya*, pp. 82–100.

60. “Appendix 1—Lai Tek. Communist Leader,” Memorandum from H. T. Pagden to Colonial Office, n.d., CO 537/3757, NAUK.

61. The organizational confusion and internal division in 1947–1948 was attributable to this, not to “Moscow’s failure to provide overall guidance.” Brimmell, *Malayan Communist Party*, p. 19.

62. See, in particular, Short, *The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 41–43.

63. *Political Intelligence Journal*, 30 June 1948, Serial No. 12/1948, p. 443, CO537/3752, NAUK. It was Lai Tek who most strongly argued, at the 8th Plenum of the MCP in January 1946, for the reaffirmation of a reformist rather than revolutionary policy.

highly complex and varied by class, race, and region, certain patterns can be discerned.<sup>64</sup> First, the old-style paternalism of the interwar years had dissipated. One of the most regulated labor regimes in the British Empire had been abruptly dismantled in 1942. The immediate postwar period, when the labor market was in disarray, found a workforce less compliant and more independent. Chinese contract workers, who were less bonded to their employers and more mobile, were no longer willing to tolerate exorbitant charges for the necessities of life. Employers bristled at this erosion of labor control, which gave rise to rebelliousness and the rapid growth of unionism.

Second, the popularity, resources, and scale of the General Labour Union, renamed the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU) in late 1946, were—by prewar standards—immense. The activities of the PMFTU were wide-ranging (sponsoring schools, overseeing small businesses, conducting industrial negotiations) and its membership base diverse (itinerant workers, rickshaw drivers, small-scale vendors, contracting gangs, craft guilds, and others). By April 1947, PMFTU membership was 263,598, or more than 50 percent of the total workforce. The union was legal, constitutional, and militant—and it was controlled by the MCP.<sup>65</sup> In April 1946 the government of the Malayan Union, anxious to restore stability to a restless workforce and an unsettled economy but also hoping to break centralized Communist control of the trade union movement, introduced the Trade Unions Ordinance requiring the supervision and registration of all trade unions. This restrictive policy remained in force until early 1948 and was the prelude to the end of the PMFTU. Although the PMFTU had organized a successful general strike on 29–30 January 1946, it backed away from open conflict in the face of Britain's superior strength and resolve. Undoubtedly, the “moderate” hand of Lai Tek also played a role. But some MCP activists were dissatisfied with the union's lack of revolutionary fervor, and their frustration was compounded by the leadership crisis of March 1947 when a strike wave was engulfing the country. In the twelve months from April 1947, 512,000 workdays were lost in Malaya and 205,000 in Singapore.<sup>66</sup> Many were wildcat strikes initiated

64. For a more comprehensive discussion, see Charles Gamba, *The Origins of Trade Unionism in Malaya: A Study in Colonial Labour Unrest* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1960); M. R. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970); and Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*. These sources are essential to the sketch that follows.

65. This represented the peak of the MCP's support. After the emergency was declared, the party lost much of its base, and defections and surrenders eroded its full-time membership. An unregistered Communist-run body, the Singapore Harbour Labourers Union, was also a bastion of militant power in Singapore, conducting several successful strikes in 1947, a two-day general strike in April 1948, and an abortive May Day rally on 1 May 1948. Along with the PMFTU, it was banned by the amendment to the Trade Union Ordinance at the end of May 1948. See Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence*, pp. 45–46.

66. See Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya*, p. 200; and Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 137.

without official authorization, and they ebbed and flowed with fluctuations in the labor market. The sources of this industrial unrest were complex and need not concern us here. Suffice it to say that the strike wave was symptomatic of pressure from below that both emboldened and propelled the MCP to adopt a more militant, revolutionary stance.

Third, the response of employers was unyielding and their actions draconian. They rued the erosion of their paternalistic “rights” over the workforce and feared the growing power of the Communist-dominated union movement. To bolster productivity and profit margins during a difficult period of postwar reconstruction, they were intent on restoring stability and order. Their crackdown on labor organizations was assisted—cautiously and perfunctorily in 1945–1946 and more earnestly in 1947–1948—by the colonial administration. The interests of state and business coincided insofar as each was committed to restoring business confidence and curbing the politicization of industrial unrest.<sup>67</sup> Prior to the outbreak of the Malayan Emergency, the employers took the lead in attempting to reimpose discipline. They formed new associations such as the Malayan Planting Industry Employers’ Association and the Malayan Mining Employers’ Association, the former of which recommended flogging, banishment, and even execution for “vicious malcontents,” “agitators,” and other “subversive elements” who masqueraded as adherents of a “utopian political faith.”<sup>68</sup> As the price of rubber dropped in the winter of 1947, the employers dismissed workers and used eviction orders to expel labor activists from their plantations. In mid-1947, during strikes in Kedah sparked by a substantial wage cut, the planters insisted that they would negotiate only with contractors, not with unions. Some introduced their own employment regulations that severely circumscribed union activity. Many employers dismissed union “agitators” and replaced them with non-unionized “scab” workers. The union activists, for their part, engaged in ruthless picket action and violent intimidation of strikebreakers. They threatened the lives of managers and occasionally made good on their threats, prompting managers to evacuate their families to Penang. For many Britons, the terror was actual as well as implied. Militant activity, inflamed by evictions and growing unemployment, was especially evident in the Sungei Siput area in Perak. It was here

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67. The extent to which Whitehall and, in particular, the Colonial Office supported employers’ demands and collaborated with and protected commercial interests in Malaya even as it accepted the argument of a “Communist plot” is a subject of debate. The best analysis of this issue concludes that the Attlee government regarded British employers’ claims as alarmist and self-interested. Moreover, government and business never worked hand-in glove, as alleged. Rather, the government often viewed business with indifference. The Labour government provided protection to ensure that Malaya’s dollar-earning capacity was maintained, not to defend the interests of rubber and tin companies. See White, *Business, Government, and the End of Empire*, pp. 100, 103, 123–124. For a contrasting but less persuasive view, see Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya*, pp. 169, 233.

68. See the report in *The Planter* (Kuala Lumpur), Vol. 23, No. 10 (October 1947), pp. 241–243.

in June 1948 that the murders of three rubber plantation managers triggered the State of Emergency.<sup>69</sup>

The insurrection in Malaya needs to be seen within this broader domestic context. Three factors were especially important: an unyielding, repressive, and more unified body of estate and mine owners increasingly assisted by local authorities, security forces, and police; a less malleable, more militant, and better organized but still restless workforce; and endemic anxiety and violence on the rural frontier.<sup>70</sup> The MCP was aware of the first factor, was influenced by the second, and saw opportunities in the third. From early 1947 on these factors converged, and in May–June 1948 they collided. Although the MCP fell into disarray in the aftermath of the Lai Tek affair, the new leaders of the party were poised to rekindle revolutionary fervor. The MCP was losing its grassroots support in urban areas largely because of the assault on its key “front” organizations by the colonial government, which was taking tough action to curb unrest and restore stability.<sup>71</sup> The party’s strength in rural areas, amid pervasive rivalries and conflicts between individual estate unions, was limited and undependable.<sup>72</sup> The MCP therefore embarked on a revolt for which it was ill-prepared. But its options were few—either jail or the jungle. None of these developments was determined by factors external to Malaya, contrary to the still-widespread view that the revolt occurred only because the MCP received Soviet “instructions” to that effect at the Calcutta conferences of February–March 1948. The international dimension of the crisis is the subject to which we now turn.

## Cominform, Calcutta, and Sharkey

Although it is an overstatement to say that the MCP had “little, if any, connexion with the outside world,”<sup>73</sup> the party had always been on the mar-

69. For a detailed if jaundiced description of these murders, see Harry Miller, *The Communist Menace in Malaya* (New York: Praeger, 1955), pp. 81–84.

70. For the debilitated state of the Malayan Police Force as of August 1948, see A. J. Stockwell, “Policing during the Malayan Emergency, 1948–60: Communism, Communalism and Decolonisation,” in David. M. Anderson and David Killingray, eds., *Policing and Decolonisation: Politics, Nationalism and the Police, 1917–65* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 108–111; and Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 35–36.

71. Especially active in imposing control was the newly arrived commissioner for labor, R. G. Naughton.

72. As the political bureau of the MCP later lamented, “Owing to the then incorrect line followed by our Party, we abandoned a major part of our peasant associations during the period of peace following the Japanese surrender.” Hanrahan, *The Communist Struggle in Malaya*, p. 58.

73. Joseph Frankel, “Soviet Policy in South East Asia,” in Max Beloff, *Soviet Policy in the Far East*

gins of the international Communist movement. The records of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), especially its Political Committee and Executive Committee, contain only fleeting references to “The Situation in Malaya”—a surprising gap in light of Malaya’s importance to the British empire.<sup>74</sup> The paucity of the MCP’s links with other Communist parties also was evident in the discussions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), a party more geographically proximate.<sup>75</sup>

Nonetheless, despite the MCP’s comparative isolation, Malayan Communists undoubtedly were aware of the highly publicized keynote speech by Andrei Zhdanov, a leading Soviet official, to the inaugural conference of the Cominform in the Polish town of Szklarska Poremba in September 1947.<sup>76</sup> The most famous aspect of his report was that the world was divided into “two camps”—a peace-loving, progressive camp led by the Soviet Union and a war-mongering, imperialist camp led by the United States.<sup>77</sup> Zhdanov had Europe, not Asia, in his sights. Because he was seeking to give the “required rigidity to the future structure of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe,” his speech said much about Yugoslavia and little about the colonies in Asia and Africa.<sup>78</sup> Even so, the speech marked the beginning of an aggressive, militant line faithfully adopted by the world’s Communist parties. This new approach, reminiscent of the Comintern’s “class-against-class” offensive in 1929–1932, lasted until the early 1950s; it was doctrinaire in analysis, unrealistic in expectations, self-delusory and, ultimately, self-defeating. It also formed part of the backdrop to Calcutta.

(London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 230. Frankel reports that until the emergency “the Soviet press virtually ignored Malaya, devoting to it only casual communiqués.”

74. See the many files in CP/CENT/EC/01, CPGB Archives, Labour History and Archive Centre, Manchester, UK. Similarly Malaya rarely featured in the international section (written by the Indian-born CPGB theoretician Palme Dutt) of *News and Views*. Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, p. 44, likewise refers to the “lukewarm interest of the British Communist Party in Malayan affairs” in 1947.

75. See, for example, the many items in ML MSS 5021, Records of the CPA, Mitchell Library, Sydney. In the postwar period the CPA was far more concerned with the Indonesian struggle for independence in the Dutch East Indies.

76. The speech was printed in the first issue of the Cominform periodical *For a Lasting Peace, For a People’s Democracy* (No. 1 (10 November 1947), pp. 1–3. Among other things, the Australian Communist Party received several thousand copies free of charge in early 1948. Bernie Taft, interview, 3 March 2001. (From 1947 to 1951, Taft was director of Marx House, the educational “branch” of the CPA. Taft was later Victorian State Secretary and joint National Secretary of the CPA during the party’s embrace of Eurocommunism).

77. The words “two camps” apparently were missing from the drafts of Zhdanov’s speech contained in his personal archive in Moscow. Stalin, who carefully vetted speeches by leading CPSU ideologues and Politburo members like Zhdanov, introduced this phrase in the final version. See Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 133.

78. Ibid. See ch. 4 (“Zhdanov and the Origins of the Eastern Bloc”) for an illuminating discussion of the genesis of the Cominform.

The extent to which the two Calcutta conferences acted as transmission belts of the Cominform “two camp” doctrine to Southeast Asia is hard to determine with any precision. Undoubtedly the new militant line was promoted for the region. Colonial regimes backed by the French, Dutch, and British were slotted into the pro-imperialist camp; the united front was jettisoned; and “neutral” nationalism and all forms of class cooperation were denounced. The conference stipulated that anti-colonial struggles must be led exclusively by Communists. Only the first conference—the one organized jointly by the World Federation of Democratic Youth and the International Union of Students—was attended by a Malayan delegate, the relatively junior Li Siong, who was president of the Malayan New Democratic Youth League, an MCP front organization.<sup>79</sup> Apparently, he was chosen because of his good command of English, but he was an ineffective intermediary for the Cominform. He did not arrive back in Singapore until 22 March 1948, well after the crucial 4th Plenum of the MCP.<sup>80</sup> In the only systematic analysis of the first Calcutta conference, Ruth McVey argues that

the main point made by the conference—that there could be no compromise in the struggle against imperialism—could have led easily to the conclusion that the only remaining path was that of armed struggle. . . . [T]he militant tone displayed by the Calcutta Conference may well have given encouragement and added prestige to the more extreme elements among the Southeast Asian Communists. Later . . . they could look on the conference’s declarations as an ideological justification for their decisions to try the way of violence.<sup>81</sup>

The conclusions drawn by the MCP and the justifications provided by the conference must, however, be delineated from causal connections. Despite the near simultaneity and alleged synchronicity of rebellions in Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, and the Philippines, the impact of Calcutta was far from uniform. The conference had its greatest impact on the Burmese delegates and the least effect on the “most unsympathetic,” non-Communist Filipino delegation.<sup>82</sup> McVey emphasizes the absence of any documentary evidence of the promulgation or passing of secret instructions at the conference, the unsuitability

79. Thus, the delegation did not consist of, as Barber loosely claims, “Communist Party chiefs.” Noel Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs: How Malaya Defeated the Communist Guerillas, 1948–60* (London: Collins, 1971), p. 34. Ian Morrison has suggested that the MCP sent only one delegate because of a “lack of funds.” See Morrison, “The Communist Uprising in Malaya,” p. 282. This is probably correct insofar as Lai Tek’s departure had made the Party destitute.

80. After Calcutta, Li Siong attended a congress in Rangoon sponsored by the Burmese Communist Party. The 4th Plenum of the MCP is discussed below.

81. Ruth T. McVey, *The Calcutta Conference and the Southeast Asian Uprisings* (Ithaca: Modern Indonesia Project of the Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1958), p. 16.

82. Ibid., pp. 20, 23. On p. 21, McVey suggests that the two-camp thesis was adopted by the Burmese Communists “well before” the Calcutta conference.

of such a broad-based conference for the transmission of highly confidential directives, and the existence of internal conditions that had already stoked rebellious inclinations within the Southeast Asian Communist parties. She concludes:

The opportunity and incentive for Communist rebellion were already present in the countries where revolt occurred. It thus does not seem likely that the two-camp message lit the revolutionary spark in Southeast Asia, though it may well have added extra tinder which caused it to burn into flame.<sup>83</sup>

In relation to Malaya, therefore, it would appear that by March 1948 the MCP was cognizant of, and perhaps fortified by, the Zhdanov line and the revolutionary fires burning in neighboring countries, especially China and Indochina. But there is little evidence that the MCP's strategy was dictated by the CPSU or that—as Brimmell alleges—"Moscow's instructions were adopted."<sup>84</sup> Rather, a *conjunction* emerged between international trends and domestic pressures. The lessons from outside were consistent with developments inside Malaya.

What about the role of Lance Sharkey, the general secretary of the Australian Communist Party, who is presumed to have been a Soviet emissary? Once again there is no extant documentary evidence regarding the secret discussions Sharkey held with the leaders of the MCP during his two-week "stopover" in Singapore on his way home to Sydney after attending both Calcutta conferences.<sup>85</sup> Certainly Sharkey, far more than his counterpart in London, Harry Pollitt, found the tough, doctrinaire line very congenial.<sup>86</sup> He was a dedicated Stalinist who had been trained in Moscow and installed by the Comintern as leader of the CPA in 1929. In that capacity, he carried immense authority.<sup>87</sup>

83. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

84. Brimmell, *Malayan Communist Party*, p. 19.

85. However, one former Communist and member of the CPA Victorian State Executive, Cecil Sharpley, wrote, "Sharkey told us, too, how he had been commissioned by the Cominform representatives at the Indian Congress to convey decisions to the Malayan Communists." Cecil Sharpley, *The Great Delusion: The Autobiography of an Ex-Communist Leader* (London: William Heinemann, 1952), p. 111. Unfortunately, though, Sharpley's book is highly unreliable and is full of errors and inconsistencies. See his *I Was a Communist Leader* (Melbourne: Herald and Weekly Times, 1949). He defected from the CPA in April 1949, sold his "revelations" to *The Melbourne Herald*, precipitated the establishment of a Royal Commission into Communism (1949–1950)—which largely exonerated the party of his allegations—and worked closely with the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, one of whose officers ghostwrote Sharpley's autobiography. See "Communism in Australia," E. J. Williams, UK High Commissioner in Australia, to Foreign Office, 29 November 1949, FO 1110/211, NAUK.

86. Relations between the CPA and CPGB were acrimonious from the beginning of 1948. The CPGB was publicly attacked by the CPA Secretariat for its "right wing deviationism" and class collaboration. See *World News and Views*, 7 August 1948, pp. 332–334.

87. See Stuart Macintyre, *The Communist Party of Australia: From Origins to Illegality* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999), pp. 169, 286. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, p. 60, incorrectly describes Sharkey as

But ideological support and verbal encouragement of anti-colonial struggle are not the same as carrying instructions “on behalf of Stalin.”<sup>88</sup> Although Chin Peng may not be a reliable source, his reminiscences in 1999—some fifty years after the events—underscore the need for caution in weighing the role of Sharkey. Chin Peng acknowledged that Sharkey influenced the MCP’s tactics and that the Australian’s visit was “inspiring,” but he insisted unequivocally that Sharkey did not determine the MCP’s strategy.<sup>89</sup> The inference one might draw is that Sharkey gave advice, clarification, and his imprimatur but left the question of a Malayan uprising to local decision.<sup>90</sup> If so, one of the central props of the traditional interpretation—the notion that the MCP was ordered into the jungle as part of an Asian revolutionary strategy developed in Moscow, set in motion at Calcutta, and dictated by Sharkey in Singapore—collapses.

## Countdown to Insurrection?

Even allowing for the absence of external direction in the events of mid-1948, did a clearly formulated plan for revolt exist? Were the murders at Sungei Siput part of this plan? Did the MCP decide on insurrection at some point? The received wisdom suggests that the MCP did indeed plan the action well in advance. Gene Hanrahan asserts that once the “strategic doctrines and tactical directives [were] laid out,” MCP leaders launched “their plan of chaos.”<sup>91</sup> Lucian Pye refers to a “coordinated plan”; Edgar O’Ballance to a “mapped out programme”; Harry Miller to a “blueprint for victory”; J. H. Brimmell to a “fateful decision”; Charles McLane to a “plan of struggle”; Richard Clutterbuck to “launching the armed struggle”; Robert Jackson to a “carefully orchestrated” offensive; and Victor Purcell to “central planning and direction” by “a Central Bureau in close touch with the Central Executive Committee.”<sup>92</sup> These judgments were consistent with Malcolm MacDonald’s “sober

“voluble.” See Macintyre, *The Communist Party of Australia*, p. 361, for a description of Sharkey’s “leaden” oratory.

88. De Cruz, “Correspondence,” p. 125. De Cruz, a high-ranking member of the MCP, later an apostate, incorrectly calls Sharkey “Len” but recalls him “dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s of the decisions arrived at by the [Calcutta] Conference.”

89. Peng stated this at a two-day conference at the Australian National University in Canberra on 22–23 February 1999 (see the coverage in *The Australian*, 15 March 1999, p. 13) and repeated it in his autobiography, *My Side of History*, pp. 202–205.

90. This is supported by Thompson and Adloff, *The Left Wing in Southeast Asia*, p. 154. Sharkey made no secret of his long-standing interest in Malaya. See, for example, his preface in Walter Blaschke, *Freedom for Malaya* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1947), p. 2.

91. Hanrahan, *The Communist Struggle in Malaya*, p. 65.

92. Pye, *Guerilla Communism in Malaya*, p. 84; O’Ballance, *Malaya*, p. 76; Miller, *Jungle War in Ma-*

statement of fact” that the “present terrorist outbreak” was “part of a deliberate plan” to stage revolution and capture government.<sup>93</sup> Thus, with only a few exceptions, the accepted interpretation in Malayan Emergency historiography assumes centralized planning and coordinated decision-making.<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, one of the few observers in Malaya itself, who was more circumspect than those to whom he spoke, was the U.S. consul, William Blue. Separating conjecture from confirmation, he wrote that he had “as yet seen no documentary proof that the present campaign against the Government is ‘Communist-inspired’ as the [British] authorities describe it.”<sup>95</sup>

The “documentary proof” cited in the literature on the Malayan Emergency is usually the three resolutions of the 4th Plenum of the MCP Central Committee, which met in Singapore from 17 to 21 March 1948. Sharkey was among those who spoke at the plenum. One of the resolutions adopted at the plenum emphasized the need to restore party discipline in the wake of the Lai Tek defection. The two other resolutions were more fundamental. One stated that the fight for independence from British imperialism must ultimately take the form of a “people’s revolutionary war,” and the other called on “the masses” to prepare themselves for “an uncompromising struggle for independence without regard to considerations of legality.”<sup>96</sup> The resolutions were about intentions. They emphasized the need to *prepare for* a rebellion. The militancy of the 4th Plenum was less a turning point than a benchmark along a path on which the MCP had been moving since 1947.<sup>97</sup> Clarity, discipline, and coordination, as well as an explicit revolutionary program—normally the *sine qua non* of successful insurrection—were absent. In retrospect, it appears that the MCP anticipated a lengthy period of increasingly combative activity in which both legal and illegal tactics would be employed. The ruthlessness of the British response—first in outlawing the all-important PMFTU, then in introducing the draconian State of Emergency regulations—was unexpected.

laya, p. 38; Brimmell, *Malayan Communist Party*, p. 19; McLane, *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia*, p. 385; Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence*, p. 167; Jackson, *The Malayan Emergency*, p. 13; and Purcell, *Malaya*, p. 132.

93. Text Transmitted to U.S. Department of State, 9 July 1948, 846E.00/7–948, RG 59, NARA. See also “Note on the Situation in Malaya,” 23 February 1955, p. 1, 371/116939, NAUK, for a similar viewpoint.

94. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, p. 61; and Stockwell, “A Widespread and Long-Concocted Plot,” pp. 66–88.

95. “Progress Made in Campaign against Terrorism in the Federation,” Confidential Dispatch No. 44, Blue to Acheson, 24 October 1948, p. 3, 846E.00/10–2448, RG 59, NARA.

96. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, p. 386, drawing on unpublished translations of the 4th Plenum documents.

97. The rapidly ascendant militant wing and the increasingly restless rank-and-file had become disillusioned with the united-front strategy. By 1948 the MCP leaders who were wary of armed struggle had been marginalized.

The timing of the State of Emergency clearly took the MCP by surprise.<sup>98</sup> Consequently, the party's decision to go underground was ad hoc; its retreat to the jungles was made in panic; and its switch from urban to rural revolt was confused. These moves left the MCP's "front" organizations off balance, leaderless, and isolated. In this sense, the decision to mobilize for guerrilla warfare was accelerated by, and partly in response to, the severity of government action in May–June 1948. The notion that the MCP was following a carefully planned strategy—a strategy coordinated by a highly centralized party structure—is fallacious. By all indications, the murders of the three European planters at Sungei Siput on 16 June were not authorized or sanctioned by MCP leaders but carried out instead by a local Communist guerrilla unit acting on its own initiative.<sup>99</sup>

The inchoate nature of the insurgency was confirmed by Malcolm MacDonald, who had been perhaps the strongest and most persuasive voice behind the British Cabinet's decision in July 1948 to outlaw the MCP. On 14 October, he briefed a top-secret meeting in London of the government's Russia Committee. His assessment, unintentionally, casts doubt on entrenched historical judgments and provides a revealing look at the MCP's weaknesses. He stated that the Malayan Communists

had failed because they had not been extreme enough. Murder on a larger scale and sabotage of railways, mines and broadcasting stations might have been very successful. . . . [But] the Communists were, in fact, amateurs drawn from the ranks of unskilled Chinese bandits (not Moscow-trained revolutionaries) and had not possessed the determination required to carry out such an ambitious plan. . . . They had never been able to set up a central control of the insurrection. . . . [A]rms and ammunition were running short and there were no fresh supplies of ammunition or recruits reaching the insurgents from outside the country.<sup>100</sup>

MacDonald believed that if British military operations had occurred on open terrain rather than the jungle, "six weeks would have been sufficient" to defeat the uprising. Although he did not provide the Committee with a timeline for success, the tenor of his remarks conveyed optimism: "At present British forces were engaged in exterminating them [the MCP] in isolated groups."<sup>101</sup>

98. For example, prominent MCP union organizers, including Balan (a member of the Central Executive), Kurup, and Krishnamurthi, were arrested as they were preparing to go underground.

99. See Morrison, "The Communist Uprising in Malaya," p. 285. Similarly, Stubbs, in *Hearts and Minds*, p. 61, says that "lower level cadres" took matters "into their own hands." According to Chin Peng, the murders were a "mistake." Interview with John Davis, who commanded the British mission (Force 136) with the MCP during World War II. Cited in Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence*, p. 168.

100. Minutes of Meeting of Russia Committee, 14 October 1948, FO 1110/33, NAUK.

101. Ibid.

## Conclusion

Six weeks, of course, stretched into twelve years. Despite the MCP's internal problems, the lack of external assistance, and the party's confused slide into armed struggle, MCP insurgents were able to develop a base, drawing on residual support from non-Guomindang sections of the Chinese rural population, to conduct guerrilla operations.<sup>102</sup> As the acting U.S. secretary of state noted at the end of 1948, "in Malaya, the British with up to 50,000 troops under arms have been able to eliminate only about 500 guerrillas, this in the course of an eight months campaign."<sup>103</sup> Britain's inability to crush the guerrillas caused great frustration in London. In March 1950, Defence Minister Emanuel Shinwell informed the prime minister that he was "very disturbed" by the "grave" situation in Malaya.<sup>104</sup> Two months later, the British government's Malaya Committee learned that it should expect "for a very considerable time . . . a rapid recrudescence of terrorist activity" and that Britain must avoid "the danger of relaxing security precautions and of prematurely withdrawing troops."<sup>105</sup> Anxiety became intense after the insurgents ambushed and assassinated the British High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, in October 1951. That same month saw the highest number of casualties among the security forces since 1949. An internal report prepared in 1957 acknowledged, "There is no doubt that in the first two years of its activities the CTO [Communist Terrorist Organization] was a very real threat to the security and economic recovery of Malaya after the war."<sup>106</sup>

The two warring parties, however, were not evenly matched. From 1949 on, the Attlee and Churchill administrations committed much greater quantities of resources, military personnel, and U.S.-made weaponry to the war. In 1950 the British secretary of state for war, John Strachey, declared: "I do not believe that the Army alone, as such, can finish them off. In order to finish

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102. As a joint Colonial Office-Foreign Office memorandum noted in December 1949, "The Chinese Communist Government must be distinguished from the Communist terrorist movement in Malaya, and it should not be suggested that the latter receives any aid from the [former]." Cited from "Attitude to Be Adopted toward Communism in Malaya and China," No. 17, CO 537/6089, NAUK. However, news that filtered into Malaya from China in 1949 was undoubtedly a source of encouragement. Chinese Communist forces took Beijing in January 1949, Nanjing in April, and Shanghai in May. Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949.

103. Cable, 30 December 1948, in *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. VI, p. 615.

104. Shinwell to Atlee, 27 March 1950, No. 1A, CAB 21/2510, NAUK. Shinwell successfully pushed for the creation of a Cabinet Malaya Committee, which met regularly throughout 1950.

105. Malaya Committee Report, Appendix, Parag. 28, 24 May 1950, MAL C(50)23, CAB 21/1681, NAUK.

106. "Review of the Emergency in Malaya from June 1948 to August 1957 by the Director of Operations, Malaya" (Secret), p. 7, 1968/4248, A452/2, NAA.

them off we have got to have a large military effort . . . and an equally large police and administrative and political effort.”<sup>107</sup> The counterinsurgency employed a range of strategies and fought on a number of fronts. Four components of the strategy are worth highlighting. First, a “hearts and minds” campaign, adapted to local conditions, was initiated by General Sir Gerald Templer, the British High Commissioner from February 1952.<sup>108</sup> This campaign severed the umbilical cord between the MCP and its sources of food, recruitment, and intelligence. The insurgents, once isolated from their support base, were far more vulnerable to British military operations. Second, Britain launched a major “population control” effort involving the relocation of more than 50,000 Chinese “squatters,” the creation of nearly 450 “New Villages,” and the mass deportations of detainees.<sup>109</sup> Third, the British and Australians refined their aerial warfare by dropping “safe conduct” passes accompanied by seductive promises of monetary rewards to encourage or accelerate defections. Aerial drops of millions of “strategic” leaflets, including handwritten letters and photographs from surrendered guerrillas, were used in conjunction with “voice-aircraft” to personalize propaganda.<sup>110</sup> British and Australian planes also dropped 1,000-pound bombs, chemical defoliants, and napalm on or near jungle camps.<sup>111</sup> Fourth, the British developed an efficient, synchronized intelligence apparatus by restructuring the Special Branch and giving it a large budget to pay informers. Sophisticated “black” propaganda and psychological operations were coordinated by Hugh Carlton Greene, MI6, and the Information Research Department from Phoenix Park (Commissioner-General

107. “The Military Situation in Malaya,” Memorandum by John Strachey to Malaya Committee, 17 June 1950, MAL C950021, CAB 21/1681, NAUK.

108. Templer invented and popularized the term “hearts and minds,” though fifteen years later he denounced it as “that nauseating phrase.” Cited in Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, p. 1. For a detailed discussion of Templer’s impact, see John Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency: An Analysis of the Malayan Emergency, 1948–1954* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), ch. 5. For a comprehensive analysis of the contribution of propaganda to the “hearts and minds” campaign, especially during the 1955–1958 period, see Kumar Ramakrishna, *Emergency Propaganda: The Winning of Malayan Hearts and Minds, 1948–1958* (London: Curzon, 2002).

109. See Karl Hack, “British Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in the Era of Decolonisation: The Example of Malaya,” *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer 1999), pp. 124–155.

110. See Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, ch. 12; and Frank Furedi, *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third World Nationalism* (London: Tauris, 1994), p. 219. Susan Carruthers notes that 54 million of the 147 million anti-Communist propaganda leaflets produced in 1953 were dropped on the Malayan jungle. In 1956, more than 100 million leaflets were dropped. Susan L. Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and Colonial Counter-Insurgency 1944–1960* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), p. 95.

111. See Cabinet Memorandum, 21 December 1951, Appendix V11, “Chemical Defoliation,” C(51)59, CAB 129/48, NAUK; Alan Hoe and Eric Morris, *Re-Enter the SAS: The Special Air Service and the Malayan Emergency* (London: Leo Cooper, 1994), pp. 118–133; and Malcolm Postgate, *Operation Firedog: Air Support in the Malayan Emergency 1948–60* (London: HMSO, 1992).

MacDonald's headquarters) in Singapore under the rubric of "Emergency Information Services."<sup>112</sup>

The efficacy of each of these programs in defeating the Communist insurgency in Malaya continues to be a source of considerable debate. Nevertheless, regardless of the precise contribution of each of the components, the combined impact of them was profound. In 1955, Chin Peng made a futile offer to negotiate a settlement, and by 1958 the morale of the MCP had collapsed. In 1960 Chin Peng, still with a large price on his head and accompanied by a small "hard core" of followers, moved to southern Thailand, where he and other remnants of the MCP hid, trained new cadres, and carried out hit-and-run guerrilla attacks along the northern Malay peninsula for the next twenty-five years. A final peace agreement was eventually signed on 2 December 1989. By then, the Cold War was over, and Malaysia had been independent for thirty-two years. However, as this article has attempted to show, Cold War concerns about the spread of Communism shaped judgments about the inception of the Malayan Emergency. Future disclosures from the Russian archives may alter the conclusions presented here, but at least for now the role of the Soviet Union in guiding these events seems clearly to have been overstated.<sup>113</sup>

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112. See Minutes of Meeting, Joint Information and Propaganda Committee, 29 December 1950, CO 537/6579, NAUK; Richard J. Aldrich, ed., *Espionage, Security and Intelligence in Britain, 1945–1970* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1998), docs.12.2–12.4, pp. 163–167; Brian Stewart, "Winning in Malaya: An Intelligence Success Story," *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Winter 1999), pp. 267–283; R. W. Komer, *The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of a Successful Counterinsurgency Effort* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1972), pp. 69–75; Michael Tracey, *A Variety of Lives: A Biography of Sir Hugh Greene* (London: Bodley Head, 1983), pp. 126–135; Jonathan Bloch and Patrick Fitzgerald, *British Intelligence and Covert Action: Africa, Middle East, and Europe since 1945* (Dingle, UK: Brandon, 1983), pp. 71–74; and Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerilla in History*, Vol. 11 (New York: Doubleday, 1975), pp. 868–873.

113. The Cold War International History Project in Washington, DC has asked Moscow-based historians to try to locate files on the Calcutta conferences of 1948. Apparently the only extant British government file is the nine-page document "Report in the Soviet Press on the South East Asia Youth Conference held at Calcutta in February, 1948," FO 371/69744, NAUK.