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**‘NATIONALISTS’ RESISTANCE AND COLONIAL REACTION IN  
MALAYA, 1946-48**

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***Abstract***

This article discusses the anti-colonial resistance and British reaction between 1946 and 1948, a critical period in the history of Malaya beginning with the formation of Malayan Union to the declaration of Emergency. The main objective of this study is to elucidate in detail the position and actions of Malay nationalists that came into response to the various re-colonisation policies by the British after World War II, and the counter-measures taken by the British to weaken Malay nationalism and eliminate their resistance to maintain colonial rule in Malaya. This study used qualitative research methods supported by British official documents and the relevant secondary sources. This study shows how the British manipulated the ideological dichotomy inherent in various nationalist movements and accentuated the bipolarity between - Malay/non-Malay, elite/non-elite, right/left, nationalist/communist groups - to create wide chasms and in the process weaken their efforts to seek independence in Malaya. The British also utilised biased historical interpretations and political propaganda to fabricate a negative image of these groups. Communist aggression, for instance, was used widely to justify the intensity of British actions, including their move to declare Malayan Emergency in 1948 to pressurise nationalist movements in Malaya.

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**Keywords:** British colonialism, Emergency, Malay nationalism, UMNO, Malay left, communism.



## 1. Introduction

The Second World War (WWII) ended in 1945 really had changed the political landscape of many nations in the world, in particular, British colonies in the 'Third World'. For the first time in history, British imperialism was challenged by nation considered as weak like Germany and Japan. During the war, Britain's position weakened substantially, while countries such as the United States and the Soviet Union gained prominence. With the political attitudes of US in maintaining its strong 'anti-empire' policy made it difficult for Britain to sustain its empire and the expansion of Soviet Union also became a problem to Britain's position in Southeast Asia. But the British were scared of one thing, the strength of anti-colonial nationalist movements which grew rapidly after WWII. With the growing number of anti-colonial movements and their quest for independence catalysed by global developments, it could no longer be restrained any further. All the events happen in India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Burma, for example, catalysed nationalism (find different words for this) in Malaya. Hence, the anxiety of losing Malaya - a strategically important and resource-rich colony - led the British to adopt a tough stance to settle this problem.

Before launching any full-fledged 'colonial war', the British already adopted several other strategies like weakening the opposition by accentuating the ethnic and ideological differences of nationalist movements to create disunity among them. Another strategy was to use negative propaganda in creating an image that the nationalist movements in Malaya were actually subversive elements. Framing the nationalist groups based on narrow ethnic interests and/or influenced by subversive and communist agents were the main strategies made by the British in making sure that these movements remained unrecognised as legitimate nationalist groups. Since the communist movements such as the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) allegedly trying to achieve their political goals through violence, these local nationalist movements that were labelled as communist groups were also accused of being made up of subversive and terrorist elements.

Thus, this study will discuss how the British officials took advantage of the differences (real or imaginary) between the anti-colonial movement in Malaya, namely Malays/non-Malays, elite/non-elites, right/left and nationalists/communists in the 1940s, to create a deep chasm in their political struggle. This study also elucidates how British officials used political propaganda in their official reports to undermine the nationalist movements by accusing them of being communist agents, terrorists, and trouble-makers. By accusing them of being involved in subversive, terrorist and communist activities and planning to launch an armed revolt via the MCP (with the support of the Soviet Union), the British were able to justify its decision to declare a state of Emergency in Malaya in 1948 and in the process to eliminate the entire anti-colonial resistance.

### 1.1 Britain and Post-War Policies

With the fall of Singapore to Japan in 1942, and the explosion of anti-colonial protests on a large scale in the British colonies from 1946, both incidents triggered fear and panic to the British administrators in Whitehall. The fact of losing Singapore to the Japanese hand was bitter for the British to swallow and even regarded as "...the worst disaster in Britain's history" by British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill (Stockwell 1984, p.68; Harper 1999, p. 35). Soon after the damage of Britain's image as a feared world

power, British's stronghold on its colonies weaken as nationalistic forces demanding for independence grew. Like what happen in Jordan (1946), India (1947), Pakistan (1947), Sri Lanka (1948) and Burma (1948), these countries managed to obtain their independence due to the strong nationalism movements. Hence, Britain was struggling to control these movements as they could not afford to lose another colony that was strategically very important, i.e. Malaya which was known as a 'Sterling Area'.

To further strengthen their position in Malaya, The Malayan Planning Unit (MPU) was establishment in early July 1943. The proposal to establish a federation to combine the whole Malay Peninsula and the Straits Settlements, excluding Singapore, was made to Britain's War Cabinet by the joining Committee from Malaya and Borneo on 9 January 1944, which was eventually accepted and approved in a meeting on 31 May 1944 (CAB 66/45, W. P. (44) 3; CAB 66/50, W.P. (44) 258; CAB 66/65, W.P. (45) 287; and CAB 128/1, C.M. (45) 27). In an effort to tighten its administration, Britain changed its previous administrative principles where now the position of the Sultans and sovereignty of the Malay states were recognized as this was seen as a barrier to the efficiency of administration and in its economic exploitation in Malaya (CAB 66/50, W.P. (44) 762; CAB 129/1, C.P. (45) 133; CAB 129/2, C.P. (45) 199). In short, the formation of the Malayan Union summarised by the British Cabinet was intended to achieve two main goals:

(a) The creation of a Malayan Union (to exclude Singapore in the first instance, but to include the Settlements of Penang and Malacca).

(b) The establishment of a Malayan Union citizenship, with the purpose of granting full political rights in the Malayan Union to all those, of whatever race, who regard Malaya as their true home and as the object of their loyalty (CAB 129/7 C.P. (46) 81).

In essence, the formation of Malayan Union was expected to bring new changes in the administrative system to provide long-term gains in the country's political development and progress after the war. Through the new citizenship policy that was more liberal in its stance, citizenship will be easily accessible to all non-Malays via the *jus soli* principle. If this plan had been implemented, about 83 per cent Chinese and 75 per cent Indians who were in the country during the period will have been entitled for citizenship status (Ratnam, 1967, p. 75). To successfully implement this, the British need to completely remove the powers of the Malay Sultanate except in matters related to Islam (CAB 66/50, W.P. (44) 258). This move will strategically eliminate the sovereignty of the Sultans and the Malay states that had enjoyed prior to 1941 and placing the whole Malay Peninsula in under complete control of the British.

However, this plan was strongly criticised by some former British administrators who viewed the move as a form of betrayal against '...old allies and princes of the soil, the Malays' (Stockwell 1984, 69). The Malays were concerned with two matters: the removal of sovereignty of the Malay states and there will be demographic changes to the population of the country if non-Malays are given citizenship (CO 537/1542). The *jus soli* policy had triggered widespread resistance as it was considered as being insensitive to the Malays According to a report by British administrator, H. T Bourdillon, "In almost all the reactions from popular bodies, as opposed to Sultans, it is citizenship which is attacked" (CO 537/1528). By accepting the non-Malays especially the Chinese as Malaya citizens without considering their alliance and undivided loyalty which still remained towards their motherland, the Malays worried that Malaya will eventually fall to the Chinese and turn to another Chinese state or 'Chinaya' (CO 537/1542).

The manner in which the Malayan Union plan was carried out also infuriated the ‘pro-British’ Malay conservatives. The Malay newspapers such as *Utusan Melayu* emphasized that the Malays have been ‘... kicked from the back [by the British]’ (cited in Stockwell, 1977, p. 510). L. D. Gammans, one of the British representatives had witnessed big-scale protests from the Malays and he also recorded that even the womenfolk went out to rally (Gammans, 1946).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Although many studies have been conducted to elucidate the political development that taking place in Malaya in 1946-48, a gap still exists as historians have failed to connect the development taken place prior to or at least since 1946 until the declaration of Malayan Emergency in 1948. Historians often view the year 1946 as the climax of Malay nationalist consciousness and the failure of the British to face pressure particularly in the form of Malay resistance towards the Malayan Union. Many historians opined that after the British encountered strong opposition towards its plans, they had to “surrender” and rescind the Malayan Union plan. The plan was said to be abolished and replaced with the Federation of Malaya shows the success of the Malay resistance movement against the Malayan Union (Azmi, 2014). This opinion failed to perceive the 1946-57 as a successful period for the British in introducing the Malayan Union when the Emergency of 1948 constitutes a part of the steps undertaken by the British to realise their dreams. As a result of such an interpretation, analysts often viewed 1946 as a basis to weaken the hold of the British colonialists because the latter were forced to face strong resistance from the Malays through the right-wing political party (the United Malays National Organization or UMNO) and this success further accelerated their efforts towards achieving independence for Malaya. This opinion did not place a strong emphasis on the role of the Malay religious-left group in challenging the British and the effect on the attitude as well as the response of the British towards the Malay nationalist movement. The Malay religious-left group was considered as merely a minority group, deprived of Malay support and controlled by an extremely strong communist influence. This initial view was particularly held by local historians (Azmi, 2014).

The second tendency explains Malaya’s political struggle from 1946-48 as a communist resurgence era and the onset of the Cold War era in Southeast Asia (Deery, 2007), and here wide emphasis was placed on the role of MCP and the Malay religious-left which were regarded as being part of the communist element. As such, the only political movement considered capable of challenging the British in this period was the MCP (Furedi, 1994; Stockwell, 1993). The historians, particularly among Western scholars who have been discussing the political development from 1946-48, failed to regard the 1946-48 period as a period of confrontation between the colonial powers and local nationalists, comprising mainly the Malay religious-left group. Furthermore, the influence of the religious group was clearly marginalised since Roff’s writing (1967) reveals that the struggle of this group was mainly over religious issues, and some believe that the religious movement was also influenced by the communists. A glaring weakness found in the earlier view was that they failed to separate the religious-left movement and the communist movement to the extent that it conveniently concluded that the PKM, which was alleged to have controlled the Malay religious-left, was the strongest threat and much feared by the British during this period. It was then pointed out that the British response to the anti-colonial movement especially in 1948 was primarily on the communist threat.

Hence, this writing trying to illuminate the fear that the British faced towards the threat posed by the Malay nationalist movement, and it was not the communists inducing the British to declare Emergency in 1948, making MCP the ‘scapegoat’ to enable the British to justify their action towards the legitimate nationalist movement. In short, this study suggests that 1946-48 denotes a period of confrontation between nationalists-colonialists and not communist-colonialist. As such, this writing challenges the orthodox as well as the revisionist versions that were marshalled by some Western analysts from Furedi in the 1990s to Karl Hack and Philips Deery recently. Although Furedi (1990) also holds that the period of 1946-48 marked the conflict between the nationalist and colonialist, his main weakness was that he regarded the nationalist merely as part of the communist movement or the MCP.

### **3. Research Questions**

What is the truth and reasons behind the British declaration of Emergency 1948 in Malay Peninsula?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to elucidate in detail the position and actions taken by the Malay nationalists in responding to the various re-colonisation policies made by the British after World War II, and the counter-measures taken by the British to weaken Malay nationalism and eliminate their threats to maintain their rule in Malaya.

### **5. Research Methods**

Qualitative method is selected for this study to provide factual data needed to support all the explanations and views regarding the truth behind the declaration of Emergency 1948 in Malaya by the British. During data collection, several archival documents and manuscripts like the Colonial Office, the Cabinet Papers and other British documents and reports will be fully utilized in suiting the objective of this study. On every data collected, it will be analysed and a summary will be made to justify British actions, including their move to declare Malayan Emergency in 1948 to handle the nationalist movements in Malaya.

### **6. Findings**

Although the British-UMNO alliance undertook many campaigns to weaken the left groups, the Malays support for the left-wing independence movements did not show any signs of retreating; in fact, it was actually gaining strength. This happen because there was a growing political awareness among the Malays, including those from UMNO after WWII.

Basically, the efforts taken to weaken these left and the right wing (pro-British) movements did not succeeded because of two factors. First, UMNO was having internal problems rose from political rivalry causing disunity within the party and also problems related to UMNO’s concessions to the British. For instance, there were ‘separatist’ movements in some Malay states who wanted to free themselves from the dominance of the central government as evidence in Kelantan, Kedah and Terengganu. Besides, the

existence of 'left' groups within UMNO that wanted independence had taken a tough stance to defend Malay rights and resist British exploitation. Among them was the Kesatuan Melayu Johor (KMJ - renamed as Lembaga Kesatuan Melayu Johor, LKMJ) led by Dr Hamzah who often criticized and challenged Dato' Onn and other leaders. He accused them of being British stooges who agreed to every British and non-Malay demand (Azmi, 2014, p. 16). Besides, there were major dissensions among the top UMNO leaders themselves, for instance between Dato' Onn and Tunku Abdul Rahman from SABERKAS (a sub-organisation in UMNO). Tunku was vocal in his criticisms against Dato' Onn's political approach in UMNO. This was sparked by Dato' Onn's own actions, to agree on the concessions for the non-Malays as stipulated in the Federation of Malaya plan. He was also criticized because he had failed to demand a clear plan of action towards self-governance which eventually decrease people's support for him. LKMJ which had been critical from the very beginning on Dato' Onn's leadership threatened to leave UMNO if their demands to overhaul UMNO's policy and give greater importance to Malay rights and reject British manipulation was not met. As expected, without a positive response from him, LKMJ disassociated themselves from UMNO (Azmi, 2014, p. 16).

Secondly, the left wing activities were beginning to receive better support from lower class groups, including some UMNO members. Hence, it's weakening influence and position was further aggravated increase support for the left especially PKMM. Left wing and religious activities began to garner support from the members of the lower class society, especially the activities of Hizbul Muslimin, an Islamic-Malay political organisation based in Gunung Semanggol, Perak (Nabir, 1976; Funston, 1980). Their activities were participated by many UMNO members despite numerous warnings from Dato' Onn (Nabir, 1976: p. 197; CO 537/3751). The dissolution of several UMNO branches and the conversion of some Persatuan Melayu Johor (PMJ) to PKMM was a concrete proof on the changes of support among the Malays. This situation did not only made Dato' Onn feel restlessness but to the British as well. British intelligence reports from April to May 1948 stated that left-wing activities were beginning to receive fervent support, while UMNO was '...steadily losing ground to left-wing organisations...' and its leadership open to '...attack by left-wing propaganda' (MSS 1948; CO 537/3751).

The resurgence of religious movements that became an ally to the Malay left and non-Malays also became a great challenge to UMNO and the British. Like the Majlis Agama Tertinggi (MATA) and Hizbul Muslimin under Ustaz Abu Bakar al-Baqir began to gain strong support from the Malays as they were active to fight for the welfare of the Malays, for example in education and economy. Hizbul Muslimin also organised rallies, involving left political movements including PKMM, Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS), and Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API), other non-Malay left parties such as the Malayan Democratic Union (MDU) and even representatives from the MCP in fight for Malaya independence. Religious organisations and the Malay left groups that opposed the British-UMNO's Federation of Malaya formed alliances with the non-Malay bodies giving birth to the Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action (PMCJA)-Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (PUTERA) alliance in February 1947 (CO 537/2148).

Although been accused as radical, the AMCJA-PUTERA alliance maintained moderation in their political agitation by officially sending their suggestions and protests to the British government. However, their voices and demands were completely ignored. The British only accept meeting with UMNO and reject other parties' requests causing those nationalist movements to take stronger measures to pressure the

British. On 20 October 1947, AMCJA-PUTERA launched an initiative known as ‘hartal’ to force the British to listen to their voices and fulfil their demands (Stockwell 1984, p. 94). Meanwhile, there were also violent protests by trade unions activists believed to have been instigated by communist elements, particularly by members of the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Union (PMFTU). These developments were considered as evidence of radicalism among members of the working class who resorted to violence to pressure the British who had imposed various kinds of restrictions to curb union activities that were provocative. British authorities who realised the growing influence and threat of the pro-independence left and religion-based nationalists took the opportunity from the unrest, created by union activists to launch a concerted effort to weaken the entire anti-colonial resistance movements and in the process fortify UMNO. Among the initial measures taken by the British was to ban several groups that were labelled as ‘radical’ such as API and Ahmad Boestamam, the leader was arrested (CO 537/2151). In addition, PMFTU was banned and the union leaders accused of being controlled by MCP were arrested for being too radical. With the murder of three European estate owners in Sungei Siput on 16 June 1948 by the communists and labour union activists, the British declared a state of Emergency within Malay Peninsula on 18 June 1948 and wipe out all traces of anti-colonialism in Malaya.

### **6.1. British Motives and the Declaration of Emergency in 1948**

The British also reasoned that there was an international communist conspiracy to use MCP to initiate an armed revolt against the British, and hence the Emergency Ordinance in Malaya declared in Jun 1948 was absolutely necessary. This ‘threat’, immaterial of whether it was real or imagined, was fully manipulated by the British administrators to associate Malay nationalist movements with communist insurgency and the Cold War campaign that was to be launched in Southeast Asian by the Soviet Union. MacDonald claimed:

There has been a well-coordinated Communist movement in Malaya which has been planning and striving to gain control since 1946 through infiltration into various trade unions, and nationalist and other democratic parties such as the Malayan [Malay] Nationalist Party and the Malayan Democratic League. In April 1948 the leaders of this movement reached the decision that the British would not grant a popularly elected Government with sufficient powers so that they, the Communists, could, by infiltrating into and working on the elected representatives, achieve any sort of power by constitutional means. The Communist leaders then decided that they must strike for power by violent means (cited in Stockwell, 1993, p.75).

The British Colonial Office in October and the Malaya Cabinet Committee in November 1948 also confirmed that the communist threat was real, explaining that there was ‘...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’. This opinion, that there was a communist threat in Malaya as a consequence of the Cold War, was also forwarded via a confidential memorandum jointly drawn up by the Defence Minister and British Secretary of War to the Cabinet Defence Committee. Both parties argued that armed force ‘...against the guerrillas in Malaya is a vital step in the “cold war” [and] against Communism in the Far East’ (Stockwell, 1993, p.75). Generally, the view held by British administration and their intelligence reflected that left-wing nationalists and religious nationalist movements such as PKMM and

Hizbul Muslimin were also part of the communist alliance which was bent on creating chaos and violence (CAB 129/28, C.P. (48) 171; CO 537/1582; CO 537/2175).

The official view of the colonial administrators and British security forces has been produced and reproduced by many historians. Historians, in general, agree that there was an MCP plan to execute an armed revolt against the British, following orders from the Soviet Union (Miller, 1954; Chin, 2009; Hack, 2009). Nevertheless, a close reading of the official document that was only recently released by the British National Archives (previously known as the Public Record Office) indicates that the British authorities did not have any solid evidence to substantiate its action. This was admitted by Creech Jones who stated: “There is no concrete evidence that the Malayan Communist Party is directly responsible for the present lawlessness but extreme political factions and certain trade unions have been infiltrated by communism”.

No decisive evidence has yet been received here [in London] of the direct complicity of the Malayan Communist Party or the P.M.F.T.U. in any of the actual murderous attacks which have occurred but the High Commissioner has stated that he has sufficient evidence to show that much of the violence is due to organised incitement by extremist elements who challenge the authority of the Government (cited in Stockwell, 1993, p. 76).

Furedi explains that the declaration of Emergency was actually a plot by the British to manage anti-colonial resistance that was posing a threat to the continuity of its colonisation of Malaya. It is obvious that the British wanted to quickly eliminate any threats from the anti-colonial nationalist groups so that they could fortify their position and obtain widespread sympathy from the Malays. The rise of radical political movements, especially those that took the shape of Malay/non-Malay cooperation in PMCJA-PUTERA 1947, was of great concern to the British administrators who believed that this alliance was susceptible to communist manipulation and agenda.

The declaration of Emergency 1948 also involved the step taken by the British to restore the faith and trust that the Malay elites had on its power and dominance. This occurred as the chaos and violence that was going in the Peninsula, especially the actions of the trade unions, had induced fear and anger from the Malay elites and European employers who opined that the British, particularly under Edward Gent's administration (Malayan Union Governor) was weak and slow in dealing with the crisis. Hence, they took several measures to restrain and weaken nationalist movements before Emergency was declared. Firstly, British through their long-established propaganda strategy began to frame nationalist movements as subversive and communist movements which used violence and terrorism to start a communist government in Malaya. They also used propaganda and political manoeuvring to create disunity in these movements and highlight racial differences and harness better Malay support for pro-British movements. This was quite easy because there was already a widespread racial conflict between the Malays and Chinese triggered by policies during the Japanese Occupation, which became worse due to communist violence against the Malays after WWII.

By provoking the groups to act violently, the British used this opportunity as an excuse to take legal action against those troublemakers. It was easy to apply pressure on trade unions and instigate their members to react violently as they often reacted on their own without any other groups' interference.



## 6.2. Main Target of Emergency 1948

Emergency laws that were introduced by the British authorities had given extensive powers to create a 'total rule' in Malaya which enabled it to curb all activities that were considered as a threat to its position, by framing the activities as radical and influenced by communism (CAB 129/28, C. P. (48) 171). Nationalist groups which adhered to democratic principles were also not exempted from British aggression and pressure during this period.

Even though the British clarified that the reason it declared a state of emergency in Malaya was because of a planned armed revolt by MCP, the main target was quite obvious. It was to eliminate all political movements that were fighting for independence and not only the communist threat. The groups which suffered the most during this period are rarely given attention by a vast majority of historians. In fact, the targeted groups i.e. the Malay left and religious-political movements suffered great setbacks. In this context, although most historical accounts associate the Emergency with MCP revolt and the effect of the Cold war, MCP was actually the 'black sheep' in British's efforts to eliminate the threats posed by nationalist movements in Malaya.

The struggles of the left and religious nationalists had been made 'invisible' right from the onset so that it is not documented and hence it never existed except in the form of communist threats to enable the British to control and eliminate them easily. This British strategy not only succeeded in confusing people's opinions but had also clouded the opinion of historians up to the point that many believe that political awareness towards the end of the 1940s was pioneered only by MCP, as stated by Stockwell, MCP is '...the only party committed to the liberation of the Malayan people' (Stockwell, 1993, p. 69). The struggles of left and religious groups generally were not been written in most mainstream historical documents. Rather, these groups were accused of being infiltrated by MCP and later controlled entirely by the communists. Yet, in reality, these Malay nationalist groups were not in the MCP's influence.

Through intelligence reports, British realised that the threat of left and religious groups led by PKMM and Hizbul Muslimin were far more dangerous than the threat imposed by MCP since their agenda were supported by the Malays. The British also realised that if MCP managed to infiltrate and take full control of these Malay anti-colonial movements, their threat will become more dangerous. Therefore, as soon as Emergency was declared in Malaya on 17 and 18 Jun 1948, people who were been targeted, arrested and imprisoned without trial by the British were the leaders of the left and religious nationalist groups. According to Hua Wu Yin, '...the large numbers of Malays detained (more than 1000) soon after the Emergency was declared were not publicised in accordance with...communist consideration' (cited by Furedi, 1994, p.197). Just before the Emergency was declared, API was banned and its leader, Ahmad Boestamam was arrested under the accusation that he was a threat to the British. Even the other leaders of the left were not spared either especially those from PKMM who were subjected to the same fate under the Emergency Ordinance. All bans on the left-wings and religious groups and the arrests of their leaders were carried out without any substantial evidence of wrongdoings. These people were imprisoned without any court trials. Interestingly, the British were still uncertain whether they should ban MCP as they did not have any solid evidence about these so-called communist threats. Therefore, although the Emergency was declared in Jun 1948 with one main reason: to stop the planned armed revolt by MCP, but this party was allowed to exist as a legitimate political organisation till mid-July 1948.

The declaration of Emergency, banning of anti-colonial political organisations, the banishment of left and religious leaders and their mass arrests forced the left and religious nationalists with limited options. They were forced to choose either go to jail, joining the UMNO which was allowed a free reign or joining the MCP fighting in the jungles for the sake of independence. With the 1948 Emergency Ordinance, the British had exerted enough pressure which then forced some of the left and religious nationalists who initially been free from communist influence to get involved in the quest for independence via MCP's 10th Regiment for the Malays. The involvement of left and religious groups in this regiment strengthened the perception and colonial propaganda that these groups were in fact under the control of communists' elements and this enabled the British to restrict Malay support towards their cause during the Emergency campaign between 1948 and 1960.

## **7. Conclusion**

This writing had thoroughly discussed how the British authorities succeeded in manipulating the ideological and racial difference inherent in nationalist movements in Malaya to create disunity among the groups. By accentuating the bipolar divisions namely pro-British/anti-British nationalists and Malay/non-Malay nationalists, they succeeded in disuniting and weakening those movements while using pro-British groups as their allies to give an impression to the rest of the world that there were no demands for independence in Malaya after WWII. The main strategy used by the British to restrain the growth of pro-independence nationalist groups was to prevent the Malays from supporting these groups. Hence, the British not only made use of UMNO as their stooge but also made use of MCP as a scapegoat in their effort to divert the Malays from the political movements of the Malay left and religious groups.

With the growing political awareness and strong desire to free the country from the colonists, it contributed to the increase Malay support since the mid-1940s. As UMNO which did not show any interest in seeking independence, they gradually lose their influence. In fact, some of its members and organisations within UMNO began to turn their support to PKMM. By manipulating the facts and branding the violent actions as part of 'an international communist conspiracy that intended to topple the government through an armed revolt', the British declared nationwide state of Emergency in Malaya on 18 Jun 1948. This declaration did not only succeed in weakening the entire anti-colonial movement, but even managed to diminish the magnitude of the anti-colonial struggle in Malaya and frame it as a narrow ethnic-based struggle between MCP, its supporters and the Chinese on one side and the British, UMNO and the Malays on the other. The dismantling of unity among anti-colonial movements and the destruction of the Malay left and religious organisations, as a result of Emergency enabled the British to fully eradicate the threat from anti-colonial nationalists till the declaration of independence in 1957.

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