

GDN-11  
 Greater Malaysia I  
 Communalism and Communism

12 Road 5/35  
 Petaling Jaya, Selangor  
 Malaya  
 30 December 1961

Mr. Richard H. Nolte  
 Institute of Current World Affairs  
 366 Madison Avenue  
 New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte,

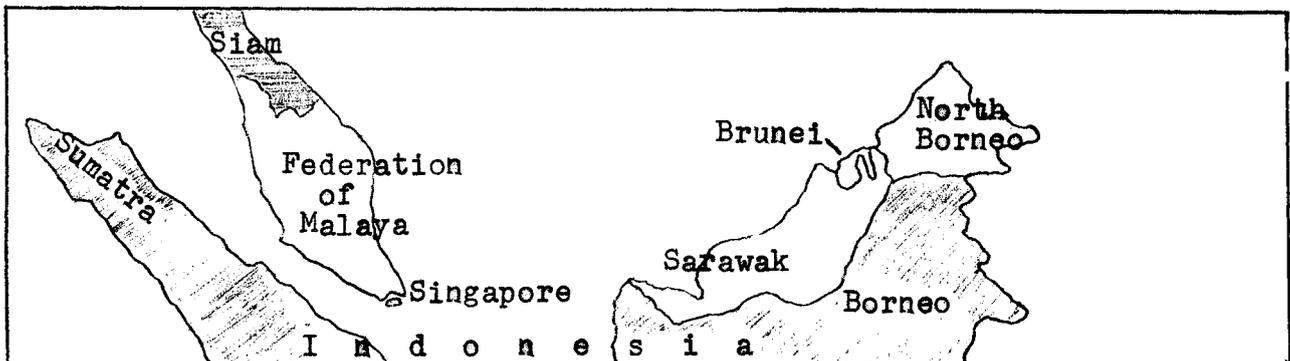
With all the naivete of a new arrival in the Federation, I used to ask, "When will the Federation merge with Singapore?"

The stock answer was, "Not in my life time. The Malays in the Federation are so afraid of the million Chinese in Singapore that they'll never let them in." The independent Federation and the semi-independent State of Singapore seemed destined to a separate existence; at least that was the case until the end of May this year.

At the end of May, Tengku (prince) Abdul Rahman, Malaya's non-ideological Prime Minister addressed a meeting of the Foreign Correspondents' Association in Singapore. In an almost off-hand manner, bracketed by casual observations on such things as the ease of learning Malay, the Tengku proposed greater economic and political ties between Malaya, Singapore, and the three Borneo territories: North Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak.

This was a political breakthrough of major proportions. In the seven months since the first suggestion, the Tengku's Greater Malaysia Plan has rapidly gained momentum and its imminent realization is one of the most important political events on Southeast Asia's horizon.

Even the name has proved to be particularly seminal for the glib politicians and journalists always hungry for a well-turned phrase. Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's brilliant Cambridge-trained Prime Minister, recently returned from talks with the Tengku proclaiming that Greater Malaysia is in orbit and will land safely with Singapore's independence in 1963. The Tengku once talked of Mighty Malaysia, but as this gave pause to some rather paranoiac Indonesians, he promptly switched to Happy Malaysia. Now the Socialists, offering the major opposition to



the plan, talk of Sorry Malaysia.

Singapore and the Federation are undoubtedly the two most important parties to the merger, in which the Borneo territories have acted somewhat as a catalyst. The big two are politically and economically more mature than the Borneo territories, but this greater maturity also makes their merger the single most difficult problem to be solved in working out the arrangements for Greater Malaysia.

Singapore has actively campaigned for merger for many years. The Peoples Action Party, Singapore's governing party, has always maintained that the two form one integral unit and their merger is historically and economically inevitable. Singapore needs the Federation as a hinterland for its entrepot trade and as a market upon which to build an industrial base. The PAP also argues that the Federation needs Singapore, still the financial and commercial center of Southeast Asia, and warns that the Federation could not afford to have a hostile island state on its doorstep.

Since before their independence in 1957 the Malays in the Federation have continued to view with alarm Singapore's large Chinese population. The basic situation can be seen in the following table.

	Population 1962* (in millions)		
	Total	Chinese	Malays
Federation	7.5	2.8	3.7
Singapore	<u>1.7</u>	<u>1.3</u>	<u>0.2</u>
	9.2	4.1	3.9

Presently the Malays in the Federation outnumber the Chinese by about 4 to 3. If Singapore's population were added, the Chinese would outnumber the Malays by about 200,000. By 1982 the margin will be about half a million in favor of the Chinese.

When to this is added the doubtful - from the Federation's point of view - loyalty of what are called the Chinese-Chinese in Singapore (and the Federation), the divisive force of communalism comes into sharper relief. As late as early May of this year the Tengku observed that the incomplete loyalty to the state of many Singapore Chinese had caused his government to reject merger. Singapore's PAP government has sought to build the foundations for merger by strengthening the solidarity of the state and by building a Malayan consciousness among its population.

Until the end of May this year, the situation was very much like that described in 1959 by Warren Unna (see INCWA newsletter WWU-15). Singapore played the role of the eager, impassioned suitor, with Malaya playing the very reluctant virgin.

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 \* These are projections from the 1957 censuses. For the Federation, Department of Statistics, The Population Census of 1957; for Singapore, Saw Swee Hock, The Population of Singapore, unpublished M.A. thesis University of Malaya in Singapore, Department of Economics.

Why the sudden change? Why did the Tengku reverse his position and drop this bombshell of a proposal?

"Because he was told to, of course!" was the reply of one informant who does not share the general high regard for the Tengku's political sagacity. There were undoubtedly the backroom deals and discussions in this as in any important political move. The precedent for this merger in the past connections between Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo territories through the Straits Settlements, and Great Britain's hastily displayed interest and approval of the plan gave rise to the probably correct conjecture that Great Britain played a large role in whatever clandestine caucuses were held prior to the May announcement. Perhaps more important, however, are the manifest reasons that have come to light in the discussions of the past seven months.

Although this was not mentioned immediately, a large part of the impetus for Greater Malaysia comes from the threat of Communist subversion. In this Singapore is considered the weakest link in the Southeast Asian Commonwealth territories. It is felt here (and in Singapore) that an independent Singapore could not withstand the force of this subversion and would soon fall to the Communists from within. This would then form a base of operations for the subversion of Malaya, against which the Federation could probably not defend itself. Merger will give the Federation government greater control over Singapore's internal security, allowing it to check the work of the Communists.

It is primarily this reasoning that has convinced Malayan leaders that merger must come. In my interviews with them, the politicians here are beginning to sound like a phonograph record. "We are accepting the lesser of two evils. We are afraid of the power of the Singapore Chinese, but we are more afraid that if we don't let them in they will fall to the Communists and we will certainly be next." Anti-Communism is still a force that unites many of the diverse elements in Malaya's political scene. After the twelve bloody years of the Emergency, Malaya's leaders harbor no doubts that in Communism they face a tough and well organized conspiratorial force.

The actions of the Communists and their front organizations in Singapore lend credence to this view. The Barison Socialis Party is the most open in its opposition to Greater Malaysia. It is currently agitating for an end to colonialism. This is seen here primarily as a ruse to get rid of the Internal Security Council, which keeps Communist activities under surveillance and keeps the hard core Communists locked up. This means that the Communists are placed in the unpopular position of opposing merger, for so long as Singapore is not fully independent they can carry on their struggle under the guise of anti-colonialism. Lee Kuan Yew sharpened these issues recently when he observed that Communists interned by the British became martyrs in the same class as Nehru or Nkrumah. With independence a Nehru or a Tengku would lock up the Communists as people seeking to destroy independence.

Other arrangements have helped to convince the Federation that merger is both possible and desirable. It is likely that Singapore will enter Greater Malaysia with less than full equality as a state in the Federation. Singapore will maintain local autonomy in all matters except internal security, defense, and foreign affairs. The details of citizenship are not yet completely worked out, but it seems that there

will be a distinction between Federation and Singapore citizens. In some respects Singapore will be entering merger as a second class territory. The opposition uses this as an argument against merger; they want complete merger or complete independence. From here the argument often degenerates into a semantic discussion of what the term merger means, as if considerations of etymological purity should force national policies to be shaped by a dictionary.

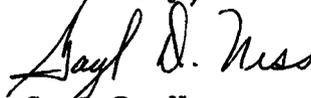
Nonetheless, a large share of Singapore's leadership is willing to accept this second class status. As early as 1955 David Marshall, then Singapore's Chief Minister (now state assemblyman and leader of The Workers' Party), offered the Tengku a merger in which Singapore would accept any Federation conditions, being interested only in keeping its free port status. Merger has not lost any of its appeal since 1955, and not only for economic reasons; merger will save the necks of all Singapore's non-Communist political leaders. Lee Kuan Yew is also counting on merger to provide the opportunity for the advance of his brand of democratic socialism and to save it from totalitarianism of both the left and the right.

The three Borneo territories have played the important role of catalyst in this merger. I'll have more to say about them in my next newsletter, but I should say here that it has been evident from the beginning that the possibility of the three Borneo territories adding their largely indigenous Malaysian populations to the union has helped to quiet the fears of the Federation Malays that merger would find them overrun by Chinese.

With a total population of about ten millions, Greater Malaysia will bring important economic benefits to all the territories involved. The increased size of the home market and the greater ease with which goods and people will move about will provide strong stimulants for economic growth in all five territories. However, the basic issues involved in this union are not economic ones. It is perhaps not too much of an oversimplification to say that it has been communalism that has kept the territories divided, and it is the threat of Communism that will bring them together.

Many of the world's new nations harbor territorial aspirations beyond their own frontiers. It is Malaya's vastly good fortune that her actual moves beyond her borders involve no violence or aggression. At a time when other nations are either splitting apart or finding it necessary to use force to build larger unities, Malaya is able to build a larger unity in a manner that is both peaceful and functional for economic and political development. This may be attributed simply to an accident of history, or perhaps to the rather calm mediocrity of Malaya's leadership. Whatever the cause, the rationality and the peacefulness of this move present a striking contrast to much of what one sees in the new states of the world today.

Sincerely,

  
Gayl D. Ness

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