

Singapore and Malaysia: A Divorce of Inconvenience

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PORT SWETTENHAM, which serves Kuala Lumpur and its developing industrial satellite at Petaling Jaya, is poorly located and designed. Its berthing and turning operations are difficult, its shore installations confined, and it lacks the banking and insurance and other invisible but essential commercial machinery that have helped Singapore maintain its place as one of the world's great international seaports.

But Kuala Lumpur can no longer depend on Singapore. Its unrealistic expectation that things would get better after Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia last August has not been fulfilled. Relationships that were accepted as mutually convenient and expedient before the marriage have proved distasteful since the divorce. Thus, instead of restoring the status quo ante, which Tengku Abdul Rahman, the Malaysian Prime Minister, fondly hoped would be the case, the separation has only created new divisive trends. Instead of the collaboration that their joint and separate problems demand, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore have embarked on a form of competitive coexistence that is potentially disastrous, not merely to themselves but to all non-Communist interests in Southeast Asia.

Under the Barrier

Recently I visited Port Swettenham with some friends and a Malaysian Cabinet Minister and his wife. Inevitably, the conversation turned to some of the more pressing problems of the region. I had just come from Singapore, where the Lee Kuan Yew government, in urgent quest of means to cope with the unexpected economic burdens caused by its expulsion, had begun to take overt steps to resume its trade, specifically its barter trade, with Indonesia.

Before President Sukarno's policy of "confrontation" officially ended trading relationships, about thirty

per cent of Indonesia's exports went to Singapore; next to the Malayan hinterland, Indonesia was also Singapore's best customer. Tongkangs that came laden with smallholders' rubber and other produce from the Indonesia archipelago went back bulging with consumer goods.

By adroit manipulation of ship registration, the flying of flags of convenience, and other means, the Singapore traders, in connivance with their partners in Indonesia, succeeded unofficially in slipping through some of the confrontation barriers, although the trade statistics in both countries were careful not to reveal the fact. Nevertheless, Singapore's total trade dropped from \$2.4 billion in 1960 to just over \$2 billion in 1964, a reverse that it could afford less than ever once its expectations of a Malaysian common market were dashed by its expulsion from the federation.

It then hoped, somewhat optimistically, to pick up trade worth between \$30 million and \$60 million a year by turning the island of Pulau Senang, a former penal colony some twelve miles from the main island of Singapore, into a barter center, with the proviso that the Indonesia traders would not have access to Singapore proper. They were to be confined to a narrow policed channel and were permitted to land only on designated and supervised stretches of the shore; they could remain only so long as it took to make their transactions before being ushered out through the same channel. As Singapore saw it, these precautions, coupled with increased naval patrols, would take care of Kuala Lumpur's fears that the trade might provide a cover for the smuggling of men and weapons into Malaysia.

But this was not the view of the Malaysian Cabinet Minister. He regarded Singapore's attempt to resume barter trade as a breach of the separation agreement between Sin-

gapore and Malaysia that neither would enter into any treaty or agreement with any third country damaging to the interests of the other. From this point of departure, he assailed the Lee Kuan Yew government in the bitterest terms and outlined the measures Kuala Lumpur could take to bring it to its knees. Pointing to the Port Swettenham wharves, he said, "We can build storage tanks here and divert all our shipments of latex and palm oil away from Singapore. We can do it and we will if Singapore behaves like this."

Since Malaya's rubber exports, which amount to about forty per cent of the world's supply, traditionally go through Singapore, such a diversion would indeed be a certain way of destroying the island's economic hopes. "If you were to do that," I said, "you would cause the economic collapse of Singapore and force a Communist take-over."

"I'd rather have the Communists than Lee Kuan Yew," said the Cabinet Minister. "We've dealt with the Communists once and can do it again. Lee Kuan Yew is worse than the Communists."

IN THE EVENT, Singapore's efforts to persuade the Indonesia barter traders to risk their necks along the policed corridor leading to Pulau Sedang have proved no more fruitful than its attempts to reassure Kuala Lumpur. Early in January, Tengku Abdul Rahman described the barter plan as a hostile act and said that Malaysia was prepared "to use peaceful methods" to stop such a move. "Singapore must realize the prosperity of Singapore very much depends on goods which come from here," he said.

On January 23, Tan Siew Sin, the Malaysian Finance Minister, said that a ministerial committee had made a special study of Singapore's separation from Malaysia and concluded that the export of Malaysia's rubber could be diverted from Singapore to ports on the mainland. As chairman of the committee, Tan told an interviewer: "A customs order on one sheet of paper would do the trick. If it came to a push I think we could stop every pound of rubber from going to Singapore."

But the threat could not be car-

ried out that easily. Nor is there any real likelihood, as Tan made clear in a subsequent statement, that it will be translated into action. Still, as symbols of the deteriorating relationship between these two interdependent states whose association once promised hopes of stability in the southern tier of Southeast Asia, the barter controversy and the Port Swettenham threat are painfully apposite.

Typical of these new divisive trends was an even more bitter quarrel that developed in February, when the Second Battalion of the Singapore infantry regiment that had been serving in Borneo as part of the multinational Malaysian security forces returned home after completing its tour of duty. Instead of returning to their permanent quarters, however, the Singaporean troops were obliged to pitch tents because Kuala Lumpur's Royal Malaysian battalion, stationed in Singapore under the terms of the separation agreement, refused to vacate the Singapore battalion's barracks until the Singapore government provided suitable alternative accommodations.

The controversy raised immediate fears in Singapore that Kuala Lumpur was trying to turn the island into a Malaysian satellite. In Kuala Lumpur the reaction was that Singapore was trying to break the separation agreement, which in turn raised new fears in Singapore that Kuala Lumpur might be tempted to use military force if Singapore pursued economic and political policies of which it disapproved. Fortunately wiser counsels eventually prevailed, and in mid-March it was announced that Singapore had agreed to find alternative accommodation for the Malaysian battalion in exchange for the return of defense equipment that Malaysia had been holding.

The Hazards of Separation

In retrospect, it is easy to see that Lee Kuan Yew's vigorous, even ruthless, approach that proved so necessary and so effective in the malodorous Singapore political scene could not have been translated into the conservative councils of Kuala Lumpur without provoking personal as well as political animosities. While Singapore remained a mem-

ber of the federation, however, even the most violent personal clashes precipitated by Lee's intellectual superiority, arrogance, and drive were confined to the family circle. Today, the causes for conflict not only remain but have been exacerbated and raised to the level of international quarrels. If Kuala Lumpur had used force to bend Singapore to its will a year ago, there would have been a storm, but it would have remained an internal matter. Today such an act would be an act of war.

In a more equable political climate, the recognition of the hazards that separation has raised for both territories would have led to expedient co-operation on vital issues. To expect such pragmatism in Southeast Asia, however, is utopian to begin with, and in the case of Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, it underestimates the antagonism that divides the two ruling elites. They



are set on courses which may not lead to collision but which threaten to foment the mutually undesirable conditions that Kuala Lumpur hoped to avoid first by merger and later by separation.

To Singapore, Malaysia meant above all a common market. "One of the most compelling factors why we went into Malaysia was because we wanted the broader base, so that industrialization and capital accumulation could take place with less sacrifice," Lee Kuan Yew told a Singapore audience. Singapore's contribution of forty per cent of its revenue to the federal budget was the price it had to pay for an outlet for the productive energies and industrial skills of its population,

which is expanding by four per cent a year.

But separation resulted in the imposition of immediate trade and tariff barriers. Although it clearly had the most to lose in any trade war, Singapore was first off the mark with the imposition of duties and quotas on manufactured goods coming from Malaya in competition with its own industries. Manufacturers in Malaya ruefully began to think of suspending operations that had been initiated only on the assumption that Singapore's more active market would be freely available.

UNDER strong commercial pressures in both Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, the two governments agreed last September 8 to remove quota restrictions on trade across the causeway that links Singapore with the Malay peninsula. Hope rose high on October 8 when the Singapore government announced that all obstacles to trade between Singapore and Malaysia would be eliminated immediately by the lifting of the licensing and quantitative restrictions on commodities contained in the common market list drawn up by the two countries.

These hopes were soon disappointed. The following day, Kuala Lumpur announced new tariffs to protect Malaysian manufacturers. Forty-eight hours later, Singapore replied with its own list of some 150 protective duties on goods manufactured in numerous foreign countries but also in Malaya.

Singapore went on to pass the National Reregistration Act, which is designed to classify all residents of Singapore as citizens or non-citizens. Since many thousands of Singapore's inhabitants have only the vaguest idea where they were born and even more frequently are unable to produce the documentary proof required, the task is more formidable than the government anticipated. But the desired result—the creation of the machinery to exclude Malaysians from Singapore citizenship, and also from the Singapore labor market, except where they possess useful professional, technical, or commercial skills—is likely to be achieved.

The Singapore government has no intention of throwing out Malay-

sians already established with their families, but it is determined to halt the flow of thousands of Malaysian migrants into the island. Since the specter of rising unemployment constantly haunts the government, this restriction on immigration may be prudent, but it is also another of the many steps that have led the two states to move further and further apart.

The Need for a Common Market

High commodity prices, a seemingly assured world appetite for tin, and a continued demand for rubber have helped to maintain Malaya's prosperity at a level that must seem to reflect an excessive abundance of riches to most of its Asian neighbors. Yet the tin reserves are limited, and rubber, despite the efficiency of the Malayan plantations and extensive replanting of high-yielding stocks, faces increasing competition from synthetics. The need to industrialize is fully appreciated in Kuala Lumpur, and the first post-separation budget was a deliberate invitation to foreign capital interested in industrial development. There is little likelihood, however, that such investments will be forthcoming in the degree that the country's needs dictate. "The simple truth is that without a Singapore-Malaysia common market there can be no industrialization worth speaking of," said an unusually frank editorial in the *Straits Times*, which is published in both Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. "It can only be hoped that the ill-conceived trial of strength which has been inaugurated will quickly convince the contestants of their individual puniness, and of the great need they have for co-operation." It has not done so.

The Tengku occasionally talks of what may be if Singapore "has a change of heart," and Tan Siew Sin in his Malaysian budget did not rule out the participation of Singapore in a common market, though he insisted that there would have to be a substantial, though unstated, quid pro quo. For their part, the Singapore leaders have indicated that they are not interested in taxation without representation.

After separation, two of Singapore's senior Cabinet Ministers visited East, Central, and North Africa,

Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, India, and other nearby Asian countries. One result was that Russian and Yugoslav trade missions agreed to visit Singapore. With one offshore island reserved for the highly contentious and evanescent barter trade, the Singapore government also plans to turn another into a tourist playground, complete with dog tracks and "massage parlors."

No one pretends that barter, Russian trade, or the encouragement of offshore vice is going to solve Singapore's economic problems. Between 15,000 and 25,000 new jobs must be provided every year. Dr. Goh Keng Swee, who moved from Finance to Defense after separation, says that over the next five years this goal will require the setting up of about two hundred factories, each employing about two hundred to 250 workers and producing two hundred different products. Singapore will then need a .002 per cent share of the market of the United States, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. If the western powers are not prepared to open their domestic markets to industrial goods from Singapore, he claims, the island's unemployment situation will get out of control and open the door for pro-Communists to win power in Singapore through free elections.

WHILE Singapore will settle for trade, Malaysia wants aid. In his budget speech last November, Tan Siew Sin mentioned \$330 million in foreign loans and \$300 million in foreign aid and grants. Tun Razak, Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister and the Tengku's announced heir, subsequently raised the direct-aid ante to more than \$600 million. "Thus, more and more, a sense of unreality pervades the Singapore-Malaysian economic and political scene," the *Far Eastern Economic Review* commented. "It is hard to see the two countries approaching the West with great success."

One of the more melancholy aspects of the situation in both states is that the government in Kuala Lumpur reflects the best hopes of the British colonial administration of a decade ago; the Singapore government, though different from anything anyone planned, is also better than anyone expected. As the Com-

munist insurgency slowly came under control in the mid-1950's, the British worked to create a Malayan government that would be conservative and predominantly Malay and that would be willing and able to co-operate with the leading members of the Chinese community, who were likewise conservative. This is precisely what has been achieved.

As the Singapore leaders are well aware, any conceivable alternative in Kuala Lumpur at the present would be much worse. If the Malay ultras ever get their hands on the Malaysian government, there will be no more racial unity, and the Malayan National Liberation League, which has now established its headquarters in Peking, will find few obstacles to fomenting a new war of national liberation.

In Singapore the alternative to Lee Kuan Yew and the People's Action Party is Communism. With the collapse of the extreme left-wing Barisan Sosialis Party, the official opposition, Singapore has become, however temporarily, a one-party state. Its real opposition, the Communist Party, is outlawed. Even in the present circumstances, however, the Communists could probably command close to thirty per cent of the popular vote. If economic hopes are not realized, or if the newly created Family Planning and Population Board fails in its ambitious goal of cutting the birth rate from about sixty thousand to thirty thousand annually, it scarcely seems possible that the People's Action Party can remain in power.

THERE is a chance that the Communist alternative can be avoided. The Tengku and Lee Kuan Yew met in Singapore for a golf match and informal dinner on March 21—their first encounter since secession. The Tengku also invited Lee to bring a golf team to Kuala Lumpur for a match with Malayan government members. This is his customary way of approaching difficult problems, and it is not impossible that a compromise may be worked out at the nineteenth hole. In other parts of Southeast Asia, the complexity of the problems often defies solution. In the Singapore-Kuala Lumpur feud, there is nothing that could not be solved by common sense.

VIEWS & REVIEWS



Scoring the D Train

FREDERIC V. GRUNFELD

EDGARD VARESE was always something of a mystery man. I remember that when Aaron Copland nominated him for a New York *Times* list of the five (or ten) most influential contemporary composers, people wrote in letters to the editors saying, the others we know, but who is Varèse? Whereupon the paper ran an explanatory one-column picture of him as though it were introducing, for the first time, a young Ditson winner or a Guggenheim Fellow. That was a dozen years ago, when he was almost seventy and had already achieved most of the glorious work with which he proposed to overthrow the existing order of music. In the subsequent decade, which coincided with the advent of electronics in every branch of music-making, Varèse's name began to be heard with increasing frequency and amplitude on the modernist circuit. And before he died last November 6, at the age of eighty-one, he had at least been able to enjoy some of the pleasures of belated recognition—the satisfaction of seeing the light of comprehension going on here and there—at the avant-garde festivals, the European radio stations, and the recording studios of New York. For the apostles of *musique concrète* in Paris and Darmstadt, Varèse became the prophet and patriarch of a whole new dimension in music: “Webern liberated silence, but Varèse emancipated noise,” writes Heinz-Klaus

Metzger in the *Darmstädter Beiträge zur neuen Musik*.

Varèse, as any photo of him will attest, was easily the most extraordinary-looking composer since Hector Berlioz. With beetle brows, a shock of wavy hair that rose straight up from his forehead, and a fiercely benevolent-belligerent gaze, he seemed to be the personification of what people in the 1920's called an “anarch of the arts.” He used to laugh about his troubles with the musical Establishment (“Laughter,” he liked to say, “is the only internal massage man has at his disposal”), but nothing could reconcile him to the red-plush world of Fifty-seventh Street. “When I see and hear some of the things that are done in the name of music, I don’t want to be known as a musician. Call me rather a worker in intensities, frequencies, and rhythms.”

I REMEMBER with what Olympian scorn he used to speak about his neoclassical colleagues, who still found it necessary to write for such “anachronisms” as violins and cellos. “We find it necessary to replace obsolete tools by others that are required by new needs,” he told his students at a Columbia University summer session in 1948, “and we find that Boulder Dam expresses us better than the Egyptian pyramids or Gothic cathedrals. But in music a composer must still be satisfied with instruments which, like the strings,

had already attained perfection two centuries ago. Although for daily use human ingenuity has found something more convenient than the hand pump, we continue to blow into a complicated and obsolete mechanism of tubes, while an inadequate system of notation does not permit us to notate even the sounds that these instruments can produce.” He himself always preferred instruments that were struck instead of stroked, beaten rather than bowed. In the days before the tape recorder enabled him to work directly on tape, his scores called for instruments that most people thought of as noisemakers: sirens, chains, anvils, ratchets, *clavé* sticks, maracas, cowbells, desiccated calabashes, and even the so-called lion-roar, or *xambomba*, used by Mediterranean children to make ear-splitting noises at fiesta time. He had a decided aversion to strings, and soon after he came to America from France, at the end of the First World War, he virtually gave up using them.

Percussion was his natural element, not only because it was most expressive of the machine age but also because the sound of it was in no way compromised by classical allusions. When he composed the now classic *Ionization* (1931), in which thirteen players manipulate a total of thirty-seven percussion instruments, he was, in effect, producing “electronic” music before the electronic means for it had been in-