

Elite intercommunal bargaining and conflict resolution: The role of the Communities Liaison Committee in Malaya, 1949–51

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Between 1949 and 1951, the Communities Liaison Committee (CLC), an unofficial body comprising leaders from the main Malayan ethnic communities, served as a prototype for elite intercommunal conflict resolution during a very challenging period amid an ongoing communist insurgency. Drawing upon previously inaccessible primary sources, this article reassesses the CLC's work towards resolving divisive issues such as Malay economic backwardness, federal citizenship, national identity, education and language in Malaya. This article argues that the CLC played a significantly bigger role than previously recognised and influenced government policy considerably. Equally importantly, it entrenched the concept of consociationalism, which was to shape the Malayan political landscape long thereafter.

Introduction

Malaya's post-war political developments posed a considerable challenge to the returning British colonial administration. The Malayan Union — a system of unitary government imposed on the entire peninsula — announced by the Colonial Office in late 1945 and which came into effect on 1 April 1946, provoked the most serious opposition to British plans.¹ The Malays opposed in particular the introduction of new citizenship criteria that enabled the large domiciled Chinese and Indian communities to acquire Malayan citizenship and the transfer of the Malay Rulers' sovereignty to the British Crown under the Malayan Union. Led by Dato' Onn Jaafar, a Malay leader from Johore, the Malays held nationwide protests against the Malayan

Joseph M. Fernando is Associate Professor at the Department of History, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. Correspondence in connection with this paper should be addressed to: jmfernando@um.edu.my. The author would like to thank the National Archives of the United Kingdom for providing access to documents related to the Communities Liaison Committee, the University of Durham for allowing him to refer to the MacDonald Papers and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore for enabling him to consult the Tan Cheng Lock Papers. He would also like to thank the University of Malaya for providing a research grant to enable him to conduct research at these archives. 1 The Malayan Union scheme brought together in a central administration the Federated Malay States (FMS), Unfederated Malay States (UMS) and the Straits Settlements of Penang and Melaka, and was headed by the High Commissioner. Singapore, because of its special status as a free port and important naval base, remained a separate colony. See A.J. Stockwell, *British policy and Malay politics during the Malayan Union experiment* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1979), pp. 17–38.

Union in 1946. Alarmed by the massive protests, the British entered into negotiations with Onn's newly formed United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and the Rulers.² Following the negotiations, the Malayan Union was dissolved and replaced with the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement, which required a longer period of residence for domiciled non-Malays to qualify for federal citizenship. The sovereignty of the Malay Rulers was also restored.

Overlapping these developments were reactions from the non-Malays. The All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA) led by the Chinese leader Tan Cheng Lock held demonstrations in 1947 to protest the lack of consultation with the non-Malay communities on the constitutional changes.³ The outbreak of the communist insurgency in June 1948 posed a new and more serious challenge to the government.⁴ The insurgency challenged intercommunal relations that had already been seriously damaged by the Japanese Occupation, the immediate post-war racial clashes and the Malayan Union controversy.⁵ Senior British administrators and local political elites considered different approaches to resolving intercommunal problems. One such effort was to encourage private discussion of these issues at the elite level between the leaders of the main ethnic groups. The British administrators, particularly the Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, Malcolm MacDonald, believed that such confidential discussions would help resolve many outstanding issues amiably and improve relations between the communities.

These efforts led to the formation of the Communities Liaison Committee (CLC) in early 1949. The CLC was an informal body of community leaders that met to discuss intercommunal differences and strengthen race relations. The setting up of the CLC was a genuine attempt at achieving national consensus and nation-building. Despite being informal, many agreements reached at the CLC meetings were adopted by the government. The CLC's own records indicate that the body also served as a useful platform for the colonial administration to test new ideas and potential policies with leading Malayan minds. The CLC was in essence an early model of consociationalism, Arend Lijphart's concept of elite ethnic power-sharing in plural societies within a democratic framework,⁶ that was to become more rooted in Malaya following the

2 See Stockwell, *British policy and Malay politics*, pp. 1–108. See also Albert Lau, *The Malayan Union controversy* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991).

3 Stockwell, *British policy and Malay politics*, pp. 93–4. The All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA) was formed on 22 Dec. 1946. The organisations involved in the AMCJA were the Malayan Democratic Union, the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA), the Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM; Malay Nationalist Party), the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), and several trade unions and other non-governmental organisations.

4 Anthony Short, *In pursuit of mountain rats: The communist insurrection in Malaya* (Singapore: Cultured Lotus, 2000), pp. 11–149, for a discussion on the origins of the Malayan Emergency in 1948. See also Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and minds in guerrilla warfare: The Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 42–86; and Richard Clutterbuck, *The long, long war: The Emergency in Malaya, 1948–1960* (Singapore: Cultured Lotus, 2003), pp. 25–41.

5 See Paul Kratoska, *The Japanese occupation of Malaya: A social and economic history* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1998), pp. 299–306. See also Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red star over Malaya: Resistance and social conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation of Malaya 1941–1946* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983), pp. 18–195.

6 See Arend Lijphart, *The politics of accommodation: Pluralism and democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) and *Thinking about democracy: Power sharing and majority rule in theory and practice*. (London: Routledge, 2008).

introduction of electoral politics from 1951 and eventually in the parliamentary form of governance. The CLC deliberations were an attempt by the Malayan elites, with some help from senior British officials, to address major intercommunal problems and to participate in the limited colonial power-sharing arrangement.

The role and influence of this early political body has not been adequately examined, however. While Karl von Vorys's discussion on the CLC is significant, he was not able to provide a substantive discussion of its impact because of the unavailability of relevant Colonial Office records at the time.⁷ Other scholars have briefly discussed the CLC as part of their research on other aspects of Malayan political history. Heng Pek Koon, for example, has rightly noted that the CLC was an effort by the British to promote inter-elite co-operation and a forerunner of successive multiracial political coalitions such as the Alliance.⁸ She felt that the CLC's impact on the development of Malayan politics was far-reaching, but did not examine the work of the body substantively.⁹ Tim Harper argued that the CLC set a pattern for elite intercommunal bargaining in private: 'It set a precedent by which the cardinal principles of public policy would be composed by a process of bargaining in private, and then marketed for popular opinion.'¹⁰ He too, however, only provides a brief discussion of the CLC's deliberations. Other works have also briefly noted the CLC's significance.¹¹ While all these scholars have recognised the Committee's importance to the development of Malayan politics, none has examined its workings and its impact on policy-making in any depth. This is largely due to the previous inaccessibility of the official records of the CLC discussions and related Colonial Office reports.

This article analyses the CLC deliberations to discern the nature of the issues discussed, the body's influence on resolving intercommunal problems through elite bargaining and its impact on government policies. It draws mainly from the official records of the committee's deliberations,¹² the records of CLC deliberations in the Colonial Office files and personal documents of leading participants, in particular, Tan Cheng Lock and Malcolm MacDonald. This investigation shows that the CLC was more influential than previously recognised or acknowledged in earlier studies in shaping government policy on intercommunal issues. The discussions were frank, complex and tough, and at times verged on failure. Nevertheless, the CLC

7 Karl von Vorys, *Democracy without consensus: Communalism and political stability in Malaysia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 96–104.

8 Heng Pek Koon, *Chinese politics in Malaysia: A history of the Malaysian Chinese Association* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 147.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 148. 'The racial composition of the CLC, its style of conducting business and the subject matter it treated set the trend for subsequent communal coalition politics, and prepared the ground for the UMNO–MCA partnership in the Alliance.'

10 Tim Harper, *The end of empire and the making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 149.

11 See Khong Kim Hoong, *British rule and the struggle for independence, 1945–1957* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information Research Development, 2003), pp. 251–2; and Ramlah Adam, *Kemelut politik semenanjung Tanah Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 1998), p. 125.

12 The CLC did not keep official minutes of their meetings but preferred to keep 'Notes' of the main points of discussion at each meeting. These 'Notes' were then distributed to all members of the Committee and served as a source of reference for subsequent meetings. See Tan Cheng Lock Papers (hereafter TCL), TCL023.001, Minutes of CLC meeting, 9–10 Feb. 1949, Johore Bahru (this first record of the CLC deliberations was referred to as 'minutes').

made considerable progress in enhancing intercommunal relations and addressing some key demands of the various ethnic groups. On a broader level, the CLC provided a pragmatic framework for elite inter-ethnic bargaining in private that influenced considerably the emergence of consociational politics in Malaya.

The origin of the Communities Liaison Committee

Previous studies have traced the origins of the CLC to leading Malayan political figures such as Dato' Onn Jaafar and Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) president Tan Cheng Lock. Others have alluded to the important role played by Malcolm MacDonald, the British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia.¹³ Colonial Office documents on the CLC deliberations and the notes of the committee's deliberations reveal that the formation of the CLC was largely the result of MacDonald's initiatives to foster intercommunal ties in Malaya during a critical period. Following the Malayan Union controversy and the introduction of the Federation of Malaya Agreement in February 1948, relations between the communities had deteriorated largely because of stricter citizenship requirements for the non-Malays and the fact that the constitutional discussions had only been held between British and Malay leaders. This was compounded by the revolt against the British launched by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). In June 1948, following a spate of murders of British planters in Perak, a state of emergency was declared.¹⁴ As the majority of the MCP members were Chinese, the communist revolt was viewed by the Malays as a Chinese-led insurrection and this aggravated the tensions between the communities.

Interestingly, the trigger for the chain of events that led to the emergence of the CLC was Onn's visit to London in November 1949 and his discussions with the Secretary of State for the Colonies. His media interviews in London created some political turbulence in Malaya, particularly among the Chinese leaders who felt that Onn had only focused on Malay interests in his talks with the Colonial Office. On his return to Malaya in early November 1949 from a trip to London, MacDonald noted concerns among Chinese leaders over Onn's discussions with the Secretary of State. For instance, Onn had urged the Colonial Office to appoint more Malays as heads of federal departments, sought the appointment of a Malay deputy high commissioner, and requested a £10 million grant from Britain to assist Malay economic development.¹⁵ Newspaper reports of Onn's discussions in London had upset

13 See Heng, *Chinese politics in Malaysia*, p. 59; Ramlah, *Kemelut politik*, p. 125; and von Vorys, *Democracy without consensus*, p. 98.

14 See Short, *In pursuit of mountain rats*, pp. 19–149; and Stubbs, *Hearts and minds*, pp. 42–86, for discussions on the origins of the Emergency.

15 Memorandum by Malcolm MacDonald to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 'Relations between Malays and Chinese in Malaya', 8 Feb. 1949, in University of Durham, Malcolm MacDonald Papers (hereafter MacDonald Papers), 18/2/5. Several Chinese leaders, Sir Han Hoe Lim, C.C. Tan and Tan Chin Tuan, had met MacDonald on his return from London to express their dissatisfaction with Onn's representations on Malayan issues and problems in London earlier. MacDonald noted in his memorandum: 'When I returned from London in early November, I found that serious apprehension existed among the Chinese in the Federation and in Singapore at the apparent emergence of an aggressive Malay nationalism. Dato' Onn's visit to London had brought their fears to a head.' See also *Straits Times*, 11 Feb. 1949, p. 1.

the Chinese leaders considerably.¹⁶ These leaders felt that Onn had made representations only on behalf of the Malays.¹⁷

MacDonald feared that these tensions could aggravate Malay–Chinese relations in the Federation and held several personal discussions separately with leaders of both communities. As a result, he felt there was a need for the Malay and Chinese leaders to come together to discuss outstanding intercommunal political and economic issues and encouraged leaders from both communities to meet. He told Onn about the concerns raised by the Chinese leaders on the latter's return from London and Onn agreed to 'do anything to undo the damage'.¹⁸ It was originally planned that MacDonald would invite these leaders to his residence in Bukit Serene in Johore Bahru, but Onn suggested it would have a more positive impact if he [Onn] invited the Chinese leaders. He told MacDonald: 'You know, I believe it would be better if I invited our Malay and Chinese friends to dine with me at my house. It would be a gesture from us Malays to the Chinese.'¹⁹ MacDonald agreed that this would be better and in late December 1948 Onn held a dinner meeting with Malayan Chinese leaders, including Tan Cheng Lock, at his house in Johore Bahru. The first meeting was very encouraging and was followed soon after by a second similar meeting in Penang hosted by the Penang Chinese councillors. MacDonald participated in both meetings, which produced much goodwill and hope for an amicable resolution of intercommunal issues.

MacDonald's role in these early deliberations is clearly revealed in a note he sent to the Secretary of State on 12 January 1949 wherein he expressed much hope that these talks would later address more serious issues while at the same time indicating a note of caution. 'These two talks revealed a possible basis for agreement between Malays and Chinese on both economic and political questions. It would be foolish to overestimate their importance at this stage, for discussions were concerned mostly

16 Memorandum by Malcolm MacDonald to Secretary of State, 'Relations between Malays and Chinese in Malaya', 8 Feb. 1949, MacDonald Papers, 18/2/5. MacDonald notes in the memorandum: 'The newspaper reports concerning Dato' Onn's discussions in London upset them all greatly. They quoted Dato' Onn's Press interview, in which he declared that in the Colonial Office he pressed [Colonial Under-secretary] Mr. Creech-Jones to agree to the appointment of a Malay Deputy High Commissioner in the Federation, to the appointment of some Malays as heads of Federal departments to a grant of £10,000,000 from U.K. funds for schemes to improve the economic position of the Malays, and to a large expansion of the Malay Regiment. My visitors said that as a counter to this Malay offensive the Chinese of Singapore and the Federation were now considering certain actions. They intended to issue a Press statement criticising Dato' Onn's proposals and urging the claims of the domiciled communities to share political influence and power with the Malays. They also contemplated sending a deputation of Chinese to London to put the Chinese point of view to the Secretary of State as forcibly as Dato' Onn had evidently put the Malay point of view. In addition, they now proposed to form a Chinese political organisation to do propaganda for the Chinese in Malaya.'

17 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 12 Jan. 1949, MacDonald Papers, 21/3/1.

18 Memorandum by Malcolm MacDonald to Secretary of State, 'Relations between Malays and Chinese in Malaya', 8 Feb. 1949, MacDonald Papers, 18/2/5. MacDonald noted: 'He [Onn] said that this discussion should be held. We talked over the membership of the group which should attend, and agreed that about half-a-dozen Malays and half-a-dozen Chinese should be invited. I proposed that I should not be present, but Dato' Onn urged that I should. He feared that otherwise the talks would be fruitless. The two sides would need a consulter and, if necessary, "an arbiter".' MacDonald to Secretary of State, 12 Jan. 1949, MacDonald Papers, 21/3/1.

19 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 12 Jan. 1949, MacDonald Papers, 21/3/1.

with general principles.²⁰ Even at this early stage, it is interesting that the leaders had discussed some major issues including the question of federal citizenship which had been a thorny issue following the coming into force of the Federation of Malaya Agreement in February 1948. It was only after both these initial meetings that a firmer plan for an intercommunal body began to take shape and a group of five Malays and five Chinese, headed respectively by Onn and Cheng Lock, were tasked to continue discussions to work out further details.²¹

At their meeting in Johore Bahru on 9 February the members of the committee (then known as the Liaison Committee of Malay and Chinese leaders) had requested MacDonald to become the chairman of the committee but he declined, preferring to remain a neutral observer.²² He also wanted the participating leaders to take responsibility for the committee's decisions. Onn, too, declined, as he wanted to take an active part in the discussions. Onn then nominated lawyer Dato' E.E.C. Thuraisingham, a Federal Legislative Councillor of Ceylonese origin and a close friend, as chairman and the committee accepted his proposal. The meeting unanimously agreed that invitations should be sent to leading European, Indian and Eurasian representatives to join the committee to make it more inclusive of all the communities.²³ The meeting decided that decisions were to be in the form of 'agreed views' and that implementation was to be discussed only after the committee was able to reach a consensus on each problem.²⁴ It was thus at this meeting in Johore Bahru in February 1949 that the community leaders decided to call the body the 'Communities Liaison Committee' and the CLC was formally constituted. The committee comprised six representatives from the Malay community, six Chinese and one each from the Indian, Eurasian, European and Ceylonese communities. The Indians were a little underrepresented considering the political and constitutional significance of the issues to be discussed and the lone voice was often muted. This drew some criticisms

20 Malcolm MacDonald to Secretary of State, 12 Jan. 1949, 'Political Developments: Co-operation between Malays and Chinese; Communities Liaison Committee', the National Archives (United Kingdom), Colonial Office (hereafter CO), CO 717/183/2 (94).

21 Ibid. 'I repeat that it is too early to feel confidently optimistic about this development. Many difficulties lie ahead. But it is a beginning, and quite a good beginning.' These leaders decided that one representative each from the Indian, Eurasian, Ceylonese and European communities should be invited for the subsequent talks in Johore Bahru to be held on 9–10 Feb. 1949, but this was then deferred till after the Johore Bahru meeting. 'Political developments: Co-operation between Malays and Chinese; Communities Liaison Committee', see Malcolm MacDonald to Secretary of State, 30 Jan. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (90).

22 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 15 Feb. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (81). See also Minutes of CLC meeting, 9–10 Feb. 1949, TCL023.001. The other leaders who attended this meeting were Dato' Panglima Bukit Gantang (hereafter Bukit Gantang, Perak), Zainalabidin bin Haji Abas (Selangor), Mohamed Salleh bin Hakim (Selangor), Dr Mustapha bin Osman (Kedah), Khoo Teik Ee (Malacca), Leong Yew Koh (Perak), Toh Eng Hoe (Perak), C.C. Tan (Singapore), E.E.C. Thuraisingham (Selangor) and Malcolm MacDonald. Syed Abdul Kadir bin Mohamed acted as secretary for the meeting (Yong Shook Lin was appointed as Joint Secretary with Abdul Kadir at the meeting). MacDonald notes that Onn and his colleagues were as keen as the British 'that no barrier should be drawn between Federation and Singapore'.

23 Minutes of CLC meeting, 9–10 Feb. 1949, TCL023.001. See also *Straits Times*, 11 Feb. 1949, p. 10. Invitations were sent to Sir Sydney Palmer, M.N. Cumarasami and Dr J.S. Goonting.

24 Minutes of CLC, 9–10 Feb. 1949, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, TCL023.001. The subsequent records of the CLC discussions were referred to as 'Notes' rather than 'Minutes'.

from the Indian community whose leading political organisation, the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), was already boycotting the Federation Agreement.

Early discussions and the 'economic adjustment'

Despite stating at the outset that it was an informal body of community leaders attending in their personal capacities,²⁵ the CLC quickly entered into substantive discussions of economic and political issues at its second formal meeting on 18 February 1949 in Kuala Lumpur. At the heart of the discussions were Malay leaders' concerns to ensure that real assistance was forthcoming from the government and the Chinese community to improve Malay participation in the national economy, which was dominated by the Europeans and the Chinese.²⁶ This situation was acknowledged by the Chinese leaders who, on the other hand, were eager to liberalise the federal citizenship requirements under the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement and safeguard the vernacular schools and languages.²⁷ They also wanted greater non-Malay participation in the political affairs of the country, including wider representation in the civil service. The political and economic relations between the two major communities invariably were a central element in the CLC discussions. Thus the early discussions, while exploratory and broad-based, were underlined by these broader ethnocentric aspirations.

The initial discussions represented a testing of the waters, each group proposing the discussion of issues that were central to their respective communities. Among the early issues discussed at the preliminary CLC meeting in Johore Bahru in February 1949 were the economic position of the Malays (employment of Malays in industry; assumption of Malays to positions of responsibility in business affairs), the political relations between the Malays and non-Malays (such as the introduction of non-Malays into the Administrative Services) and the qualifications for federal citizenship. The committee then tackled education, which it felt was central to the creation of a Malayan outlook among the diverse population. MacDonald noted in a telegram to the Secretary of State that after discussion of the economic and political relations between the communities:

[...] we were to tackle the problem of education, with a view to the children in Malaya being brought up as Malaysians with a sense of Malayan citizenship and patriotism, instead of a narrow, communal Malay, Chinese, Indian, etc, outlook on Malayan affairs. These discussions would therefore have launched us into the main intercommunal problems.²⁸

25 Minutes of CLC meeting, 9–10 Feb. 1949, in Johore Bahru, TCL023.001. The CLC press release of 10 Feb. 1949 states: 'At present [the] Committee is an informal body and consists of community leaders attending in their individual, personal capacities. They are a group of men of goodwill, exploring the possibility, of closer understandings and co-operation between the various communities.' See also *Straits Times*, 11 Feb. 1949, p. 1.

26 Notes of CLC discussion, 18–19 Feb. 1949, TCL023.002.

27 See Notes of CLC meetings held on 18–19 Feb. 1949, 14–15 Mar., 1–2 Apr., 19–20 Apr., 12 May, 13–14 Aug., 14–16 Sept. and 29–31 Dec. in TCL023.002–TCL023.009.

28 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 15 Feb. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (81).

The CLC was thus also an attempt by the British administration and the community leaders to encourage in the long term the development of a 'Malayan' national consciousness and a greater sense of patriotism that went well beyond merely addressing intercommunal grievances. The discussions, which at times were very intense and emotional, were closely guided by MacDonald who acted as a moderator. The CLC meeting on 9 February 1949 was, however, disrupted momentarily by the activities of the Penang Secessionist Movement, which planned to move a motion for the secession of the northern state from the Federation of Malaya at the Penang Settlement Council on 10 February.²⁹ Interestingly, the motion was to be seconded by the CLC member from Penang, Dr Lee Tiang Keng. The Malay members argued that that this showed there was little goodwill among the members of the other communities towards 'a movement for intercommunal cooperation'.³⁰ They wondered if the CLC discussions should continue. Timely intervention by MacDonald saved the committee from a premature demise. MacDonald said that this was 'an unreasonable and unfair attitude', and argued that the committee should continue its meetings regardless of the Penang secessionists' activities.³¹ After further discussion, the CLC decided that they should proceed with the agreed agenda.³²

The first full meeting of the CLC was held in Kuala Lumpur on 18–19 February 1949 and the committee began to tackle more substantive issues. A frank and vigorous exchange ensued. First among these was the problem of 'economic adjustment', which in essence referred to the poor economic position of the Malays.³³ The economic backwardness of the Malays had always been a cornerstone of Malay demands in the post-war period. Dato' Panglima Bukit Gantang, the Mentri Besar (chief minister) of Perak, who was invited by the chairman E.E.C. Thuraisingham to open the discussions, complained that Malays had been left behind in 'commercial undertakings', and their living conditions had declined.³⁴ He listed a range of economic sectors in which

29 The Penang Secessionist Movement originated from a circular issued by the Penang Chamber of Commerce (PCC) in November 1948 asking the views of certain organisations in Penang on the idea of secession from the federation. The movement led by the PCC chairman, D.A. MacKay, had sought the secession of the state from the federation over economic and political grievances, including the erosion of Penang's free port status, lack of funds from the central government for budget expenditure and 'restricted political rights of the individual'. A public meeting called by the chamber on 13 Dec. 1948 was attended by 216 people. The resolution calling for the secession of Penang from the federation was defeated by 15 votes to 10. See *Straits Times*, 14 Dec. 1948, p. 6, 10 Feb. 1949, p. 6 and 11 Feb. 1949, p. 1.

30 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 15 Feb. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (81). The Chinese members of the CLC, however, made it clear that they 'strongly disapproved', of Dr Lee's action. They pointed out that the most ardent secessionists were the Europeans in that state. After further discussions the committee resolved to send three members of the CLC (Thuraisingham, Khoo Teik Ee and C.C. Tan) to Penang to persuade the Penang Council Members to postpone the motion for secession, carrying with them a letter for MacKay from the CLC. The three-member CLC representatives after meeting members of the Penang Council reported they were confident that the motion would be postponed. Nevertheless, the motion was debated. See also *Straits Times*, 10 Feb. 1949, p. 1.

31 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 15 Feb. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (81).

32 Ibid. MacDonald noted: 'The Johore Bahru Meeting of the Committee were [sic] therefore abortive so far as practical progress is concerned. On the other hand, the fact that the Committee had to take stock of this Penang incident at its very first Meeting, and that it survived, is not a bad sign.'

33 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 7 Mar. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (79). See also von Vorys, *Democracy without consensus*, pp. 96–104.

34 Notes of CLC discussion, 18–19 Feb. 1949, TCL023.002.

the Malays, who he said had previously dominated, had now been overtaken by the other communities and the Europeans. Malay undertakings in the tin mining industry, he noted, had become negligible due to the encroachment of the non-Malays and in the rubber industry, the non-Malays predominated. Malay presence in fishing, coconut plantations and road transportation sectors, he argued, had also declined after 'encroachment' by non-Malays. In addition, Bukit Gantang contended that Malays had suffered a loss of land in the towns as well as on road frontages through sale of land to non-Malays.³⁵ As a result, he summed up, the living conditions of the Malays had deteriorated because of the loss of commercial control in many sectors: 'Malays, who used to be a proud race, were forced to begging and the ultimate result of all these would be discontent, jealousy and hatred,' he told the committee at its first meeting.³⁶ Cheng Lock interjected to say that the points raised by Bukit Gantang were controversial and some 'were past history', and stressed that the committee should confine its work to resolving some of the problems faced by the Malays.³⁷ He noted that the Chinese were also suffering and suggested the formation of limited liability companies with Malay-Chinese capital in equal proportion to address the lack of Malay presence in the commercial sectors. C.C. Tan from Singapore disagreed that the Malays had been reduced to begging, but felt that the problems could be resolved by 'proper and intelligent enforcement of laws' and through some voluntary measures, such as providing financial assistance.³⁸ The British colonial administration was not absolved of some of the blame for the economic backwardness of the Malays. C.C. Tan remarked that in respect of medical and educational facilities, the British administration should 'do their duties to the Malays'.³⁹

As the debate became a little emotional and robust, MacDonald intervened to moderate the discussion. He agreed with the principle of parity between the communities espoused by the Malay leaders, but reminded the committee that they should agree on a common statement of principles on these issues first and then proceed to discuss the implementation of measures to achieve their agreements.⁴⁰ He urged the committee to discuss implementation which could be made by the committee and other measures that could be enforced through legislation. On the latter, he urged the committee to agree on resolutions which should then be forwarded to the government. The committee then discussed practical ways in which the Malays could be assisted economically and some interesting and innovative measures were suggested. There was considerable discussion on the problems faced by the Malays in relation to business. It was observed that certain business sectors such as road

35 Ibid. Bukit Gantang also noted the loss of educational facilities for the Malays, 'through being driven further into the kampongs and away from educational centres'. He claimed that when requests for schools were made the federal government replied that there was a lack of funds. He pointed out that the kampongs also lacked medical facilities and that squatters had encroached into Malay reservations.

36 See Notes of CLC discussion, 18–19 Feb. 1949, TCL023.002. See also von Vorys, *Democracy without consensus*, p. 97.

37 See Notes of CLC discussion, 18–19 Feb. 1949, TCL023.002. See also MacDonald to Secretary of State, 15 Feb. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (81).

38 See Notes of CLC discussion, 18–19 Feb. 1949, TCL023.002. MacDonald to Secretary of State, 7 Mar. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (79).

39 See Notes of CLC discussion, 18–19 Feb. 1949, TCL023.002.

40 Ibid.

transport and haulage were monopolised by the Chinese.⁴¹ The committee discussed ways in which Malay participation in this business could be gradually increased and partnerships between Chinese and Malay businesses developed. It was suggested that where new businesses were being developed in Malay majority areas, priority should be given to Malay businessmen to increase their participation. In the road transport sector, the committee was even able to agree on a proportionate division of the issuing of permits for bus companies based on the dominant population along the routes.⁴² This resolution was subsequently communicated to the federal government.

After the first full meeting of the CLC, MacDonald felt that if sufficient progress was made in relation to the Malay economic position and if the Malays were reassured that they were benefiting from the discussions, it would then be possible to move on to other political questions.⁴³ The discussions in Kuala Lumpur made considerable breakthroughs on intercommunal issues and some concrete measures were identified to address the economic problems. MacDonald observed that the Chinese and other non-Malay leaders showed much readiness to make concessions to the Malays who, on their part, were 'impressed with this and lost something at least of their suspicions of the bona fides of the non-Malays in the Committee'.⁴⁴

Almost a month later, the CLC issued its first formal statement on 15 March 1949 after meeting in Ipoh, stating the committee's purpose and objectives. The CLC's press statement, however, was quite bland despite the intense discussions, merely indicating that all the races should help the Malays and that the committee was examining the various economic activities to achieve this objective.⁴⁵ Interestingly, the draft of this statement was prepared by MacDonald at the request of the CLC members and the text was fully accepted. The statement noted that the committee had held several meetings and had begun examining all aspects of the relations between the communities in Malaya — the economic, social and political — and that these meetings had 'promoted mutual confidence between them'.⁴⁶ The importance of economic assistance for the Malays was clearly emphasised in the statement:

41 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 15 Feb. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (81): 'During the discussion the Malay representatives alleged that the Chinese businessmen bribed to get their business licences and while they admitted that Malay government servants were the offenders, they argued that it was Chinese businessmen who were the recipients. The CLC agreed that as an initial measure the government should be asked to strengthen legislation related to bribery and corruption.'

42 Notes of CLC discussion, 18–19 Feb. 1949, TCL023.002. The committee agreed with Bukit Gantang's formula that in future in areas where Malays predominated new permits would only be granted to Malay companies whereas in areas where non-Malays predominated, Chinese would be allocated 51 per cent of the permits and the Malays and other non-Malays, 49 per cent of the permits. See also von Vorys, *Democracy without consensus*, pp. 98–9.

43 'Our tactics are to complete the discussion of these economic problems before we consider the political aspects of relations between the communities. If the Malays feel ensured [*sic*], as a result of these discussions, that the Chinese and other communities are in earnest in their desire to improve the economic position of the Malays, and that practical results are likely to follow from the Committee's deliberations in this field, then I think the Malays will be ready to be fairly forthcoming in the political discussions.' MacDonald to Secretary of State, 25 Feb. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (79).

44 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 25 Feb. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (79).

45 See *Straits Times*, 16 Mar. 1949, p. 1.

46 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 25 Feb. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (79).

It is the agreed view of this Committee that, in the common interest of all in Malaya, it is of paramount importance that the non-Malays shall make every endeavour to co-operate amongst themselves and with the Malays to improve the economic position of the Malays, so that they — the Malays — can take their rightful and proper place and share fully in the economic life of Malaya.⁴⁷

Following this, the committee examined other aspects of major economic activities such as plantations, mining and road transport to identify ways to increase Malay participation.⁴⁸

In the statement, the committee also noted somewhat modestly that it was an informal and advisory body and had no power to reach decisions that were binding on the government or other organisations.⁴⁹ In reality, as we will see, the decisions and agreements of the CLC were transmitted to the federal government for further action. Considerable progress had been made following the Ipoh meeting on 14 and 15 March; some of the resolutions of the CLC in relation to road transport haulage were discussed with the Commissioner of Road Transport in the Federation.⁵⁰ MacDonald was greatly encouraged:

Their discussions are businesslike and thorough. No issue is baulked [at] and everyone speaks with complete frankness. Nevertheless every subject discussed so far has produced a unanimous agreement. This is largely due to the fact that those present are now prepared for real give and take between their respective communities.⁵¹

Nonetheless, he felt that the real test would come when the political issues were discussed. This was a reference to the anticipated more difficult discussions on federal citizenship and nationality.

The CLC held four meetings in April 1949 and made much progress on issues relating to mining, plantations, trading and other activities and some practical solutions, such as the formation of Sino–Malay companies, were identified. There was, however, some resistance from the heads of departments and leading business figures when the increased involvement of the Malays in the mining, transport, rubber and textiles sectors were discussed. The Commissioner for Road Transport, A.A. Forward, for example, bluntly told the committee that ‘there was no room for expansion in bus services’, and suggested that Malays should acquire shares in existing companies.⁵² J.A. Mead, speaking for the tin mining industry, felt that Malays should change their attitudes towards mining and noted that he had friends who had

47 Ibid. See also Notes of CLC discussion, 18–19 Feb. 1949, TCL023.002.

48 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 25 Feb. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (79).

49 Ibid. The CLC members at this stage of the meeting in Ipoh on 14–15 Mar. 1949 were: Dato’ Onn Jaafar (Johore); Panglima Bukit Gantang (Perak), Zainalabidin bin Haji Abas (Selangor), Mohamed Salleh bin Hakim (Selangor), Raja Haji Kamaruzaman (Perak), Tuan Haji Mohamed Eusoff (Selangor), Tan Cheng Lock (Malacca), Sir S.S. Palmer (Selangor), E.E.C. Thuraisingham (Selangor), Leong Yew Koh (Perak), Toh Eng Hoe (Perak), Lee Kong Chian (Singapore), Dr Ong Huck Chye (Penang), M.N. Cumarasamy (Selangor), E.A. Moissionac (Perak), Yong Shook Lin (Selangor) (Joint Secretary), Tuan Syed Abdul Kadir bin Mohamed (Johore) (Joint Secretary).

50 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 15 Mar. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (68).

51 Ibid.

52 See Notes of CLC meeting, 1–2 Apr. 1949, TCL023.004.

disposed their mining rights to Chinese businessmen.⁵³ The mining industry, he noted, was not willing to take risks to help the Malays with capital. Zainalabidin bin Haji Abas from Selangor, however, countered that the Malays would be prepared to invest in mining ‘if they had confidence that those who were in charge had the necessary qualifications and capabilities to carry out the work’.⁵⁴ A senior official from the Federation’s Economic Adviser’s Department in his briefing on the textiles industry told the committee that Malays were ‘unknown as importers’ and asked why, if the Malay Chambers of Commerce were capable of importing direct, they had not done so in 1947 or 1948.⁵⁵ Zainalabidin responded that the Malays were now interested in textiles. Khoo Teik Eee, also from Selangor, supported his colleague, saying he would like the Malays to come into the trade and asked if it would be possible to help them.⁵⁶ Amid the heated exchanges, CLC chairman Thuraisingham defended the work of the committee. He argued that the CLC’s work was a ‘new aspect’ in enhancing intercommunal relations and it was trying to adjust the disparities that existed in the economy and felt that Malays should be given a percentage of the quota for textiles imports.⁵⁷ The CLC eventually agreed that in future when quotas were issued to traders for importing merchandise, a certain percentage would be reserved for Malay traders.⁵⁸ Some of the recommendations of the committee were sent to the government, but the committee decided against making public their views and recommendations.

With considerable progress made at the meetings in the first two months, the CLC chairman Thuraisingham suggested at the meeting on 19 April 1949 that some political issues should be examined in view of contemporary developments. He was referring to the formation of the MCA in February 1949 and vocal statements made by its leader Tan Cheng Lock as well as the activities of the MIC,⁵⁹ all of which he felt had a ‘prejudicial impact’ on the work of the committee. He noted that some newspapers had given much publicity on the citizenship issue and questioned non-Malay allegiance to Malaya and remarked that ‘this was not strengthening the CLC’s activities’.⁶⁰ There was also some criticism of MCA leader Cheng Lock following remarks he had made to the newspapers implying that the federal constitution was undemocratic.⁶¹ Zainal Abidin noted that Cheng Lock’s remarks had put Malay

53 Notes of CLC meeting, 1–2 Apr. 1949, TCL023.004. See also *Straits Times*, 4 Apr. 1949, p. 5 and 21 Apr. 1949, p. 10.

54 Notes of CLC meeting, 1–2 Apr. 1949, TCL023.004.

55 Notes of CLC meeting, 19–20 Apr. 1949, TCL023.004. The official named, Dawson, told the CLC: ‘There was a danger in giving quota to personnel who could not import. They would sell it. Since we had consulted the traders we would have to consult them again.’ See also *Straits Times*, 16 Apr. 1949, p. 7.

56 Notes of CLC meeting, 1–2 Apr. 1949, TCL023.004. See also *Straits Times*, 16 Apr. 1949, p. 7.

57 Notes of CLC meeting, 1–2 Apr. 1949, TCL023.004. See also *Straits Times*, 17 Apr. 1949, p. 6.

58 Notes of CLC meeting, 1–2 Apr. 1949, TCL023.005. Thuraisingham, Khoo and Palmer later met High Commissioner Sir Henry Gurney and he agreed to take up the matter with the department concerned and the resolution was soon implemented by the federal government.

59 The Indian-based MIC, which was formed in August 1946, was critical of the 1948 Federation Agreement because of the lack of consultation with the non-Malays, particularly over the citizenship proposals, and boycotted the new constitution for a period. See R. Ampalavanar, *The Indian minority and political change in Malaya, 1945–1957* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 77–98.

60 Notes of CLC meeting, 19–20 Apr. 1949, TCL023.004.

61 Ibid.

members 'in an awkward position' while Haji Mohd Eusoffe said such utterances were 'opening up old wounds'.⁶² Another MCA leader, Khoo Teik Ee, managed to defer further discussion by suggesting that the matter should be discussed when Cheng Lock was present.

Despite the altercation, the committee nevertheless agreed that it would consider the issues of federal citizenship, a Malayan nationality, the subject of allegiance to Malaya and the role of the Malayan communal associations in achieving the CLC's objectives at the following meeting.⁶³ Encouraged by this, MacDonald asked the Colonial Office to request the Secretary of State to send the committee a congratulatory message for the progress made in the discussions, but the Colonial Office felt this was premature, partly because the committee was an informal body.⁶⁴ The following meeting in Kuala Lumpur was held only for a day on 12 May, as several senior leaders such as Onn, Cheng Lock and others were unable to attend because of other commitments, and it was agreed that the committee should next meet on 14–16 June 1949.⁶⁵ MacDonald observed that there was some nervousness among some of the members over the upcoming discussions of political issues, alluding to the contentious citizenship issues that had been criticised by the Malay press. The next meeting, however, only took place in August. This was the beginning of a more advanced stage of the discussion of intercommunal issues and grappling with the vexed federal citizenship issue that was to lead to some disagreements and further compromises on several CLC proposals.

Advanced discussions and the question of 'political adjustment'

After an interval of three months the CLC met in Kuala Lumpur on 13 and 14 August 1949 and began to tackle major political issues such as federal citizenship, nationality, self-governance and elections, collectively referred to as 'political adjustment'.⁶⁶ MacDonald, in setting the tone for the discussions, stressed that there should be complete agreement among the leaders on the broader aim of creating a 'united Malayan nation'.⁶⁷ Otherwise, he felt, the political and other problems would become so complicated that a solution to them would be 'extremely difficult'.⁶⁸ One of the principal agreements reached at this meeting was the establishment of self-government with sovereign status and the creation of a 'nationality' that would be open to all qualified citizens.⁶⁹ Second, the committee unanimously agreed that

62 See Notes of CLC meeting, 19–20 Apr. 1949, TCL023.005. MacDonald noted that Cheng Lock's critical comments at a recent Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) meeting about the federal constitution had 'increased Malay uneasiness'. See MacDonald to Secretary of State, 15 Mar. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (68).

63 Notes of CLC meeting, 19–20 Apr. 1949, TCL023.005. See also MacDonald to Secretary of State, 22 Apr. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (67) and 15 Mar. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (68).

64 Note by MacDonald to J.D. Higham, 31 May 1949, CO 717/183/2 (65).

65 Deputy Commissioner-General to Secretary of State, 16 May 1949, CO 717/183/2 (62).

66 The Kuala Lumpur meeting scheduled for 14–16 June 1949 was postponed to August. Sir Roland Bradell replaced Sir Sydney Palmer who had left Malaya; C.C. Tan was replaced by Lee Kong Chian of Singapore and Dato' Hamzah attended the Kuala Lumpur meeting, replacing Bukit Gantang, who was ill.

67 Notes of CLC meeting, 13–14 Aug. 1949, TCL023.007.

68 Ibid.

69 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 19 Aug. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (58). See also Notes of CLC meeting, 13–14 Aug. 1949, TCL023.007. Onn had wanted to include the word 'early' before the phrase

legislation should be introduced for the holding of elections in the States and Settlements as a step towards the introduction of eventual elections to the Federal Legislative Council.⁷⁰ The committee felt that this gradual move would give locals some experience in ‘popular elections’ and administration before the more sophisticated ‘democratic politics’ were introduced at the federal level.⁷¹ The committee affirmed that elections at the level of municipality should be introduced at an early date.

Nonetheless, the key point of discussion was the further liberalisation of federal citizenship, which would pave the way for the introduction of nationality.⁷² There was unanimous agreement that only those who ‘owe Malaya their loyalty and regard Malaya as their permanent home should qualify for citizenship’.⁷³ Sir Roland Braddell suggested that all British subjects born anywhere in the Federation and permanently domiciled there should enjoy the same right to citizenship by law as those born in the Settlements.⁷⁴ This would broaden the eligibility of federal citizenship by operation of law to anyone born in the rest of the Federation. Onn and his Malay colleagues indicated that they were ready to consider this proposal. The Chinese representatives in the committee, on the other hand, suggested that all non-Malays born in the Federation and permanently domiciled there should become citizens automatically by process of law (as suggested in the Minority Report in the Cheeseman Consultative Committee Report) as provided under the principle of *jus soli*.⁷⁵ The MCA also wanted the period of residence required to qualify for citizenship through naturalisation reduced from ten years to five. Braddell argued that the legal conception of domicile as provided by international law, rather than the period of residence, should be the test of qualification for citizenship. Onn reiterated that Malay opinion had become more accepting of these suggestions in recent years and in

‘establishment of self-government’, but this was strongly resisted by MacDonald. Onn had stated during the meeting that he felt Malaya would be ready for self-government within 15 to 20 years.

70 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 19 Aug. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (58). Onn himself expressed the hope that elections to the Johore State Council would be introduced in 1950.

71 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 19 Aug. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (59). An important agreement reached at this meeting was that all federal citizens, ‘without distinction of sex and without the application of any property or literary tests’, who registered as voters should be qualified to vote in the State and Settlement elections. This essentially allowed for a more liberal qualification for the voters.

72 Under Article 125 of the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies, wherever born, shall be citizen of the federation by operation of law if his father had been resident in the country for 15 years prior to the coming into force of the agreement. Under Article 126, a person who is a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies and who has resided in the federation for a period of 10 years preceding the application is entitled to be registered as a citizen in the federation. Under Article 131, a person who is a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies is entitled to apply to become a citizen of the federation by naturalisation if he has resided in the federation for a period of 10 years out of the preceding 12 years. See Federation of Malaya, *Federation of Malaya Agreement 1948* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printers, 1948). See also Heng, *Chinese Politics in Malaysia*, pp. 147–56.

73 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 19 Aug. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (59).

74 Ibid. Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies born in the Settlements of Penang and Malacca automatically became federal citizens by operation of law with the coming into force of the Federation of Malaya Agreement on 1 Feb. 1948.

75 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 19 Aug. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (59). See also Heng, *Chinese politics in Malaysia*, pp. 147–55. The Cheeseman committee had been set up to obtain non-Malay opinion on the federation proposals.

principle accepted that ‘everyone, irrespective of race, who really owes undivided loyalty to Malaya and really regards the country as his permanent home, where he will live and die, should be admitted to the Federal Citizenship’.⁷⁶ He noted at the same time that there was scepticism about the strength of some people’s loyalty. The committee agreed that Braddell should prepare a memorandum on the subject incorporating the suggestions made at the meeting. Broader issues of nation-building, including the issue of a common language, were also discussed. The committee felt that the citizens of the emerging nation-state should speak a common language and that the teaching of Malay should be made compulsory in all government and state-aided primary schools.⁷⁷ MacDonald was quite pleased with the progress achieved at this meeting which he felt took place amid a ‘most comradely spirit’, but again cautioned that these were ‘tentative agreements’ and much further discussions lay ahead on these issues.⁷⁸

Following the meeting of the CLC held in Johore Bahru on 14–16 September 1949 the committee circulated a statement of some of its general agreements with an inherent long-term perspective, the ‘Agreed Views’. Some media reported this statement as a ‘blueprint for Malaya’,⁷⁹ because of the wide-ranging consensus on a number of issues. The five major points stated in this memorandum related to the issue of self-government, elections to municipal councils and state legislatures, the qualifications for franchise, and education.⁸⁰ The committee noted that the aim of the federation should be the ‘attainment of self-government with sovereign status and the creation therein of a nationality’. And in order to achieve this aim, the statement declared, elections to municipalities and state legislatures should be held early. The committee felt that the franchise for elections should be based on federal citizenship. The teaching of Malay and English, it said, should be compulsory in all government and government-aided schools. The CLC statement, apart from stating the principal agreements, went further to explain some of the rationale underlying their views.⁸¹

The CLC agreements were commendable considering the diversity of opinions among the different community leaders, but there was a mixed response from the local media. While the English daily, the *Straits Times*, was supportive of the CLC statements, the *Utusan Melayu*, the Malay daily, was more critical, viewing the CLC statement as a ‘cheap imitation of other people’s ideas’, and nothing new.⁸²

76 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 19 Aug. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (59). MacDonald notes that he raised the matter with Gurney who agreed to examine the memorandum on citizenship prepared by Braddell and to provide MacDonald with their views.

77 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 19 Aug. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (60). The committee felt that Malay would be the appropriate medium of education in Malay schools and English in the urban areas. A small deputation from the committee was appointed to meet the High Commissioner and the Director of Education to discuss the matter further.

78 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 19 Aug. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (60).

79 *Straits Times*, 18 Sept. 1949, p. 8. See also *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Sept. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (44) and *Glasgow Herald*, 20 Sept. 1949, CO 717/183 (55).

80 Statement by CLC, 18 Sept. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (48).

81 *Ibid.*

82 See *Straits Times*, 22 Sept. 1949, p. 10. The *Utusan Melayu* editorial noted: ‘We cannot but feel surprised to see the time taken if not wasted, by the Communities Liaison Committee to bring forward proposals which are nothing new. The novel thing in these matters is that they are now proposed by a body

The paper argued that the left-wing parties such as the Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM) had proposed these ideas three years earlier. Following the discussions in the CLC on the introduction of local elections, High Commissioner Sir Henry Gurney wrote to the Colonial Office suggesting a timetable for the introduction of local elections in the major towns in Malaya.⁸³ As a result of these initiatives, the first local election was held in George Town in Penang in December 1951 and the second, the Kuala Lumpur municipal election, in February 1952. Clearly the CLC recommendations had much influence on government policies at the time. The *Manchester Guardian*, in reporting the 'Agreed Views' of the CLC, recognised that the committee was able to reach agreement on a range of issues that would not have been possible a year or two earlier at the height of the Malayan Union controversy: 'This is heartening. The movement must come from the Malaysians themselves; Britain can only encourage it.'⁸⁴

The question of a Malayan identity was an important focus of the committee's deliberations. The CLC provided a broad definition of the term 'Malayan' and in its statement said it referred to 'the inhabitants of Malaya'.⁸⁵ In this context, the committee was keen to ensure that the young grew up thinking of themselves as Malaysians: 'The immediate problem is to send boys and girls out into the world with a Malayan mind and so strongly Malayan-minded that they will pass it on in due course to their children.'⁸⁶ Federal citizenship was invariably a central issue in the CLC's agreed views. The statement emphasised that the provisions on citizenship in the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement should be reconsidered 'to bring into the fold of Federal Citizenship people of the type that will build up into a Malayan nation'.⁸⁷ MacDonald, in a note to the Secretary of State, remarked that the committee was doing 'remarkable constructive work'.⁸⁸ The Secretary of State for the Colonies, while acknowledging the progress made by the Committee, cautioned of the difficulties that surrounded the issues of citizenship and nationality: '[...] the subject bristles with technical difficulties, and unless these are clearly seen and understood by all concerned from the outset, the Committee may find itself in deep waters'.⁸⁹ While most of the media commented favourably on the agreed views of the committee, some

of persons who are known to be the favourites of the Colonial Office and who will still not admit that conservative ideas must give way to new ones.'

83 See Gurney to J.J. Paskin, 25 August 1949, CO 537/4741 (74).

84 *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Sept. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (44).

85 Statement by CLC, 18 Sept. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (48).

86 *Ibid.*

87 Statement by CLC, 18 Sept. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (51). 'The Eurasian of the settled community appears to have exactly the same claim to a special position that a Malay has, since this is his only home and as a rule he is a true Malayan. The old-established Chinese, Indian and Ceylonese families are so self-evidently Malayan that they could not be ignored. The very genuine desire for the preservation of Malay life and civilisation that is so abundantly clear amongst all races in Malaya should surely remove by now most of the fears that existed when the Federation Agreement was being worked out.'

88 MacDonald to Creech-Jones, 16 Sept. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (35). MacDonald was confident that the committee would be able to overcome their previous difficulties: 'I feel greatly encouraged by the last two meetings of the Committee, and believe that we are coming in sight of complete agreements between the Malay, Chinese and other leaders.'

89 Creech-Jones to MacDonald, 24 Oct. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (35).

Malay organisations pointed out that the committee had no authority to make decisions on, for example, the issue of a single Malayan nationality.⁹⁰

There remained considerable differences of opinion within the CLC despite the publication of its agreed views. Not surprisingly, the next stage of the CLC discussions became more difficult and there were disagreements. At the CLC meeting in Penang on 29–31 December 1949, the Malay representatives raised the need to reconsider the economic issues first before further discussions on the political questions, especially the issue of a Malayan nationality, were held. The Malay leaders clearly wanted more commitments on economic assistance to the Malays. Onn was conspicuously absent from this meeting, citing tiredness from his visit to Indonesia. MacDonald thought this was a tactical move to allow the two Mentris Besar to raise several prickly issues.⁹¹ While the ‘Agreed Views’ of the CLC published in September 1949 were generally well-received, some concerns were raised among sections of the Malay community that the committee was moving too fast on the issue of nationality while there had not been significant movement on the economic issues.⁹² After some discussion it was agreed that a ‘Federal Malay Development Board’ would be set up to plan improvements in the economic and social position of the Malays.⁹³ This is another clear instance where the decision of the CLC was quickly transformed into government policy with the setting up of the Rural and Industrial Development Authority (RIDA) in 1950 headed by Onn.

The CLC met again in Kuala Lumpur on 10–11 February 1950, and continued discussions on economic and political issues. The quid pro quo element in the discussions was evidently strong. The committee agreed that effective machinery should be set up to improve the socio-economic well-being of the Malays. The Malay leaders cautioned that it would be difficult to persuade Malay opinion to make political concessions to the non-Malays unless the economic development plans for the Malays were more clearly an integral part of the overall plan.⁹⁴ A separate committee was set up by the CLC to discuss this issue and formulate more definite plans. The committee was able to reach agreement on amending the federal constitution in relation to federal citizenship. A state nationality was to be introduced to enable Malaysians without citizenship to be admitted as federal citizens. Legislation was to be introduced in the states admitting all Asians and Eurasians born in the state as natural-born subjects of the state Rulers.⁹⁵ This was a significant breakthrough in the intercommunal

90 Extract from Pan-Malayan Monthly Intelligence Report, 9 Nov. 1949, CO 717/183/2 (15). Abdul Hadi Noor, President of Persaudaraan Islam Malaya said that the committee comprised mainly of government servants not elected by the people and had no authority to make decisions regarding a single Malayan nationality. The Kedah Peasants Union warned that a section of ‘high Malay officials’ would rise in protest if the UMNO agreed to a single nationality and possibly establish another party.

91 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 7 Jan. 1950, Macdonald Papers 21/3/20.

92 *Straits Times*, 22 Sept. 1949, p. 10. See also Notes of CLC meeting, 29–31 Dec. 1949, TCL023.009.

93 MacDonald to Secretary of State, 7 Jan. 1950, Macdonald Papers 21/3/20. See also Notes of CLC meeting, 29–31 Dec. 1949, TCL023.009. A Malay officer would head the agency which would enjoy direct access to the High Commissioner and local Malay Development Boards would be set up in each state.

94 MacDonald to the Secretary of State, 16 Feb. 1950, CO 537/6018 (228).

95 *Ibid.* It was agreed that the citizenship clauses of the federation constitution should be amended to admit as citizens: ‘i. British citizens permanently resident in the Federation; ii. Subjects of any Malay Ruler who are permanently resident in the Federation; and iii. Anyone who has become a citizen by application under the present constitution before the date when the registration lists are closed.’

discussions. MacDonald concluded that this agreement was ‘eminently satisfactory’ to the Chinese and other non-Malays.⁹⁶ He noted that the proposal was acceptable to all the Malay members as well as the Mentris Besar present at the meeting. High Commissioner Gurney was also supportive of the proposals made by the committee. With this agreement, MacDonald felt that the CLC had brought them ‘within sight of a far-reaching and constructive political reform’,⁹⁷ and that the agreement was an important step in the long-term goal of creating a Malayan nationality.

Nevertheless, in spite of the progress made, the committee’s discussions faced further obstacles. The agreed views of the CLC met considerable resistance from some UMNO branches⁹⁸ and Malay organisations⁹⁹ and the committee recognised that some changes were necessary to placate Malay opinion.¹⁰⁰ The colonial administration sought to convince the Malays that considerable efforts were being made to improve their economic position and the citizenship proposals in this respect were fair in view of the assistance being given to the community. Gurney’s office played a delicate balancing act between the demands of the Malays and the Chinese in respect of the revision of the citizenship provisions. Onn’s role was also crucial. Onn had told Gurney that while the UMNO General Assembly would accept the principle of State nationality, the categories of persons who would be eligible would be more restrictive than the CLC’s proposals.¹⁰¹ To assist Onn to obtain support for the CLC’s revised citizenship proposals from his Malay colleagues, Gurney wrote to Onn explaining the various development programmes that were implemented by the government to support Malay involvement in the economy.¹⁰² He pointed out to Onn that a large proportion of the \$31.7 million capital expenditure for agricultural and drainage and irrigation programmes in the Draft Development Plan for Malaya would directly benefit Malay agricultural production and explained the setting up of RIDA.¹⁰³ The Malay media, however, largely ignored the economic

96 MacDonald to the Secretary of State, 16 Feb. 1950, CO 537/6018 (229).

97 MacDonald to the Secretary of State, 16 Feb. 1950, CO 537/6018 (228).

98 *Straits Times*, 19 May 1950, p. 8. The Perak UMNO, after a four-hour meeting, said the time was not right to consider any alteration to federal citizenship.

99 *Straits Times*, 19 May 1950, p. 6. Malay graduates from the University of Malaya issued a statement saying that the CLC proposals would be detrimental to Malay interests.

100 Gurney to British Advisers, 3 June 1950, CO 537/6018 (39). In this letter Gurney notes that there was considerable Malay opposition to the extension of the federal citizenship: ‘There are in fact growing signs of Malay reluctance to accept these proposals and it is probable that but for Dato’ Onn’s leadership they would be rejected by Malay opinion.’

101 Onn to Gurney, 16 May 1950, CO 537/6018 (24). Onn told Gurney: ‘I am sure, however, the UMNO Assembly will accept the principle of establishing State Nationality, although the categories of persons to be eligible will undoubtedly be much more restricted than the Committee’s proposals or even the Government’s suggested amendments to them. Malay distrust and suspicion is very strong at the moment. They are mistrustful of Government’s policy — or more correctly of British policy — and they are deeply suspicious of the Chinese, whose sincerity, except for a small minority, they doubt in the extreme.’ See also Gurney to Higham, 19 May 1950, CO 537/6020 (8).

102 Gurney to Onn, 18 May 1950, CO 537/6018 (24). See also Onn to Gurney, 16 May 1950, CO 537/6018 (24).

103 Gurney to Onn, 18 May 1950, CO 537/6018 (24). Other government plans to assist the Malays economically included the building of a rice mill in Tanjong Karang, Selangor, in which the government provided \$320,000 of the capital; the government rice mill in Arau, Perlis, in which a partnership between a government and a Federation of Cooperative Societies would help the society purchase the rice crop from the farmers; provision of new planting material to assist Malay rubber smallholders (to establish

development assistance that had been put in place to assist the Malays and focused on the citizenship proposals, which it depicted as a threat to Malay interests.¹⁰⁴

Impasse over citizenship issue and the loss of Gurney and Onn

Both MacDonald and Gurney had considerable misgivings over the negative Malay response towards the CLC citizenship proposals. Onn, nevertheless, was confident that UMNO would accept the proposals in a modified form.¹⁰⁵ Onn made a strong case for supporting the CLC's citizenship proposals at a special session of UMNO in May 1950 shortly after the CLC published its 'Agreed Views'.¹⁰⁶ The UMNO Executive Committee met in Kuala Lumpur on 6–7 May 1950, and accepted the CLC's proposals on citizenship with minor changes, at the urging of Onn.¹⁰⁷ Onn had emphasised that the British administration was taking certain measures to improve the economic well-being of the Malays and pointed to the establishment of RIDA.¹⁰⁸ There was, however, broader resistance in the party and this was reflected in the special general assembly of the party that debated the CLC proposals further on 20 May and suggested further changes.¹⁰⁹ In June, Onn and his Executive Committee in fact resigned en masse from UMNO to force the issue of citizenship.¹¹⁰ Onn later returned to lead the party when it was more forthcoming on the issue.

Meanwhile, the Colonial Office was none too pleased with the impasse. It disagreed with Gurney's idea to leave it to the CLC and the states to resolve the matter and felt that Gurney should take the lead to address the matter.¹¹¹ A draft bill to introduce amendments in the federal constitution produced by Gurney met considerable

50,000 acres a year); education reforms as recommended by the Central Advisory Committee on Education; and the increase in Malay enrolment in English and Malay schools.

104 *Straits Times*, 28 May 1950, p. 13. The Singapore Malay Union headed by Sardon Jubir, for example, felt that the CLC citizenship proposals were 'too loose'.

105 Minutes of meeting at MacDonald's residence on 7 June 1950 at Bukit Serene, Johore Bahru, CO 537/6018 (131). See also *Straits Budget*, 1 June 1950, abstract in CO 537/6018. When the CLC proposals were criticised by Sardon Jubir at the UMNO General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur in May 1950, Onn told Sardon to 'go back to Singapore and formulate a plan for Singapore Malays as was being done in the Federation'.

106 See *Straits Times*, 10 May 1950, p. 1. See also draft of Onn's speech at a special session of the UMNO General Assembly, 9 May 1950, MacDonald Papers, 18/2/19.

107 See also Extract of Pan-Malayan Political Report, May 1950, CO 537/6020 (13). See *Straits Times*, 10 May 1950, p. 1.

108 See Extract of Pan-Malayan Political Report, May 1950, CO 537/6020 (13). See also *Straits Times*, 15 May 1949, p. 8.

109 *Straits Times*, 20 May 1950, p. 1 and 21 May 1950, p. 13. The changes sought by UMNO included a Malay language test for applicants for citizenship, 10 years of continued residence out of 12 years preceding the application, a declaration of intention to stay in Malaya, and renouncing allegiance to any other state. (The MCA had sought a five-year period of residence to qualify for federal citizenship through naturalisation.)

110 *Straits Times*, 13 June 1950, p. 6.

111 A note by J.D. Higham clearly reflects this mood: '... the Secretary of State's view is that there must be some liberalisation of the citizenship laws; but because of the very delicate situation obtaining at the moment we have not made the letter as strong in its terms as we should otherwise have wished to do. It is all very well saying that the only satisfactory solution of the citizenship matters is a solution arrived at by agreement between the communities but if that agreement cannot be obtained then the matter can clearly not be allowed to drift.' See minute by J.D. Higham, 1 Sept. 1950, CO 537/6018.

opposition from the Rulers at the 12th meeting of the Rulers Conference on 31 August 1950. The Rulers felt that the Federation Agreement should be allowed time to work ‘until normal conditions in this country have been attained so that all matters pertaining to citizenship, education could be properly formulated.’¹¹² Gurney argued that one of the main purposes of this bill was to get the law to define who was a subject of His Highnesses. In the absence of any written law, he noted, anyone who is born in a Malay state will be the subject of His Highness. Gurney continued to push the federal and state bills related to citizenship and tried to deflect criticisms¹¹³ that the work of the CLC was not making much headway.¹¹⁴ He told the Colonial Office: ‘The Communities Liaison Committee discussions have, in fact, borne fruit and vindicated the belief that real constitutional progress can only come “through conference and consent”.’ He was able to get the agreement of the Conference of Rulers to the bills and planned to introduce the Federal Bill after 25 April 1951 when the federal legislative council met and then refer it to a Select Committee.¹¹⁵ He, however, decided to postpone the introduction of the Federal Bill scheduled for April to allow the state legislatures to debate the related state bills and anticipated some difficulty in the states of Kedah, Perlis and Kelantan.¹¹⁶ After the Federal Select Committee had read the Bill for the first time on 8 August 1951, Gurney again cautioned the need to proceed slowly on the Bill to ensure ‘its ultimate acceptance by a majority of the population’.¹¹⁷

On 6 October 1951, shortly after these discussions, Gurney was killed in a communist ambush. Another serious setback was Onn’s announcement earlier in June 1951 that he would be leaving UMNO to form a new non-communal party — the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP).¹¹⁸ This had a depleting effect on the work of

112 Extract of Minutes of 12th Meeting of Conference of Rulers, 31 Aug. 1950, CO 537/6018 (52). The Mentri Besar of Selangor pointed out that the CLC’s proposals were to be explained to the Chief Secretary, the Attorney-General and the Registrar of Federal Citizens and a fresh memorandum resulting from the discussion was to be forwarded to the Rulers for consideration. This, he said, had not been done and with the resignation of Onn from UMNO the memorandum had not reached their Highnesses. See also Extract of minutes of 12th Meeting of Conference of Rulers, 31 Aug. 1950, CO 537/6018 (53).

113 Gurney to Secretary of State, 5 Feb. 1951, CO 537/7296 (7).

114 Gurney to Secretary of State, 5 Feb. 1951, CO 537/7296 (3). Writing to the Secretary of State on 5 Feb. 1951, he noted: ‘Since Colonel [H.S.] Lee’s letter was received, copies of the Federal and State Bills relating to citizenship have been sent to all members of the Communities Liaison Committee, which is due to meet this month. The Bills are also to be discussed by myself with the Conference of Rulers on the 15th February and have been under consideration by the State Executive Council during the past few weeks. It is therefore premature to say that the efforts of the Communities Liaison Committee have proved fruitless.’ Selangor MCA chairman, H.S. Lee, wrote to the Chief Secretary of the Federation government urging the government to set up a royal commission to examine the federation constitution including the citizenship provisions. Lee said that although the UMNO leaders in the CLC had agreed to the changes to the federal citizenship provisions, UMNO had rejected it and hence a royal commission should be introduced. See also H.S. Lee to the Chief Secretary, Federation government, 16 Jan. 1951, CO 537/7296 (30).

115 Gurney to Secretary of State, 5 Feb. 1951, CO 537/7296 (5).

116 Gurney to Secretary of State, 7 May 1951, CO 537/7296 (7). He hoped to have the Federal Bill ready by July 1951.

117 Gurney to Secretary of State, 5 Feb. 1951, CO 537/7296 (9). The state representatives were to meet on 17 and 18 Oct. 1951 to discuss the Bill by which time it was hoped that the new UMNO leadership would be able to give its views as Dato’ Onn was planning to leave UMNO.

118 Gurney to Secretary of State, 22 June 1951, CO 537/7303 (3). Onn left UMNO in August and formed the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) on 16 Sept. 1951.

the CLC, as Onn could no longer claim to be speaking on behalf of the Malays in spite of being a member of the federal legislative council. UMNO under the new leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman was charting a path of its own and distanced itself from Onn's undertakings in the CLC. The bill containing the amendments to the citizenship provisions in the federal constitution was read a second time on 11 July 1951.¹¹⁹ Following Gurney's death in October 1951, the CLC itself seemed to have reached something of an impasse although the Officer Administering Government (OAG) A.T. Newbould continued to maintain the momentum. A Select Committee of the Federal Legislative Council was appointed to examine the bill to amend the Federation of Malaya Agreement 1948 to provide for state nationalities.¹²⁰ This report was completed in February 1952.¹²¹ These amendments were eventually passed by the Federal Legislative Council after further debate.

The introduction of a state nationality in 1952 was among the more significant achievements of the CLC. This allowed for a broader extension of federal citizenship to non-Malays born in the federation and domiciled there through becoming subjects of the Rulers. There were some misgivings among the Chinese and Indian members of the Select Committee of the Federal Legislative Council on the final form of the legislation containing these amendments as it was deemed restrictive (the period of residence to qualify for application by naturalisation was not reduced) but it was a compromise nevertheless. The Bill [*The Federation of Malaya Agreement (Amendment) Ordinance, 1952*] was passed by the Federal Legislative Council on 8 May 1952 and was seen as a 'most notable achievement' among the differing views.¹²² The CLC never met again after May 1950 although a meeting had been planned for January 1951. Onn's departure from UMNO and Gurney's death deprived the committee of two crucial players. Nevertheless, the CLC's achievements

119 Gurney to Secretary of State, 20 Aug. 1951, CO 537/7296 (15). See also Minute by A.S. Melville, 26 Feb. 1952, CO 1022/174.

120 Report of Select Committee to amend Federation of Malaya Agreement 1948 to provide for state nationalities, CO 1022/174 (235). The Committee chaired by the Attorney-General included the following members: Member of Home Affairs Dato' Onn Jaafar; Raja Uda bin Raja Muhammad (President of Council of State of Selangor), Yong Shook Lin (with H.S. Lee as alternate), R. Ramani, Khoo Teik Ee, Tan Siew Sin, Tuan Sheikh Ahmad bin Mohamed Hashim, Lim Khye Seng, Dato Hamzah bin Abdullah, G. Shelley, Abdul Aziz bin Ishak and A.E. Duraisamy.

121 Ibid. Four Chinese members of the Select Committee issued a caveat with the report stating that by signing the report they had not abandoned the principle of *jus soli*. The two Indian members of the Select Committee issued a separate statement expressing their dissatisfaction on several aspects of the draft bill. See statement by R. Ramani and A.E. Duraisamy, 14 Mar. 1952, CO 1022/174 (14). Their statement noted: 'On signing the Select Committee Report on the Bill to amend the Federation Agreement, we would like to draw attention to the fact that while we have readily subscribed to all other matters set out in the report, we regret that on a matter which ultimately affects the very large majority of the Indian and Ceylonese communities, the Bill in the form in which it has emerged from the Select Committee has not taken adequate note of the position of these two communities.' Ramani and Duraisamy argued that Indians born in the Federation should be federal citizens by right of birth because they were citizens of the United Kingdom and the Colonies by descent, that is, British subjects, similar to those born in the Straits Settlements. See *Straits Times*, 24 Mar. 1952, p. 6.

122 Note on citizenship by A.S. Melville, 3 June 1952, CO 1022/174 (25). In a minute to this, Melville commented: 'While the new legislation may not be altogether as liberal as might have been hoped (c.f. the Malayan Union proposal) it does represent a very important step forward, and also a most notable achievement in reaching a substantial compromise between widely divergent views.'

in terms of enhancing intercommunal relations and laying the framework for resolving contentious intercommunal issues were clearly significant.

Conclusion

This article shows that the CLC played a significantly bigger role in Malayan political development between 1949 and 1950 than previously recognised. This experiment in elite intercommunal negotiations at a formative stage of nation-building achieved considerable success in reaching compromises on complex intercommunal issues that had been a source of much disagreement in the post-war years. Despite being an informal body of community leaders without decision-making powers, the CLC in reality played a significant role on three levels. First, the CLC helped to enhance relations between the Malay and non-Malay communities through open and frank discussion of long-standing intercommunal issues such as Malay economic backwardness, citizenship and nationality, language and education. The CLC discussions helped to provide the basis for intercommunal agreements on these contentious issues and in particular enhance Malay participation in the economy. Second, the CLC paved the way for political and constitutional reforms and helped to speed up the decolonisation process by urging the British administration to introduce local elections to the states and settlements to enable the local elites to play a more significant role in the political decision-making process. Third, the CLC approach to intercommunal bargaining through confidential discussions among the elites proved fairly effective in addressing complex issues and became an essential part of the emerging pattern of Malayan politics.

Many of the resolutions and agreements reached at the CLC were adopted and implemented by the government. The federal citizenship, for example, was widened with the enactment of the State Nationality Act in 1952 to enable a large section of the domiciled non-Malay community to acquire citizenship. At the same time, as a quid pro quo, several measures were taken by the British administration following the CLC discussions to improve Malay participation in the national economy. RIDA was set up in 1950 to assist Malay participation in the agricultural and industrial sectors. Special assistance was given to Malay farmers in terms of subsidies, irrigation works and rice milling. Equally significant, the CLC discussions led to the formulation of a basic national framework for the education system in Malaya with a Malayan outlook, essentially providing for the compulsory teaching of English and Malay in the national schools and considerable protection for the vernacular schools through grants-in-aid. Most importantly, the CLC provided an early model of consociationalism which enabled leaders from the various communities in Malaya to resolve intercommunal disputes amicably and which consequently became entrenched in the political system.