

## Two Radical Malays of Pahang During the Era of Struggle for Independence

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### Abstract

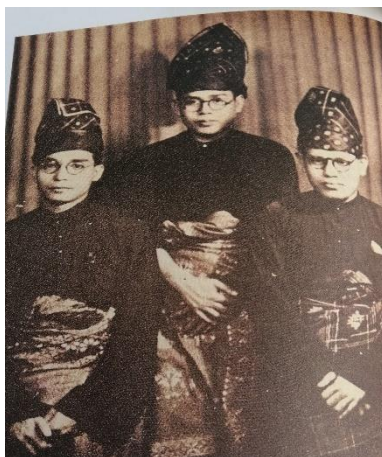
31 August 1957, is a sacred date for Malaysia. Indeed, it is born from the struggles of its earlier generations. This paper seeks to reveal the roles, contributions and sacrifices that have been made by those labeled radicals in seeking independence. This study was completed by referring to historical documents such as British files and reports as well as personal records of those involved to confirm their involvement in the struggle for independence. The findings showed that the role of two great figures from Pahang, namely Ibrahim Haji Yaakub and Ishak haji Muhammad, was significant in the struggle for Malaysian independence. These forerunners of the struggle for independence have given a huge impact and meaning to Malaysia. Their deeds, contributions and sacrifices must be recognized by the nation.

**Keywords:** Ibrahim Hj. Yaakub, Ishak Hj. Muhammad, Radical, Independence & Malaya

### Introduction

When deliberating about independence, these two figures who hailed from Temerloh, Pahang cannot be forgotten. They are Ibrahim Haji Yaakub and Ishak Haji Muhammad. Their presence was ahead of their time. The Western imperialists were already present in Malaya hundreds of years ago. In the early 20th century, these two figures were born to finally shape the Malayan political arena. In fact, the ideas, principles and struggles that they put forward managed to generate a wave of uprising, that was not found before, to the people. Although before this, there has been a series of uprisings against the colonialists from personages such as Dato Dol Said in Naning, Negeri Sembilan, Dato Maharaja Lela Pandak Lam Kg. Gajah, Perak,

Tok Janggut in Pasir Puteh, Kelantan, Dato Haji Abdul Rahman Limbung in Terengganu and Dato Bahaman, Tok Gajah and Mat Kilau in Pahang. But these revivals were more localized and they did not rise simultaneously throughout Malaya. The difference with the wave brought by these two figures who hailed from Temerloh unleashed a wave of consciousness and struggle throughout Malaya.



Ishak Hj Muhammad, Abdul Hamid Hj Muhammad Dan Ibrahim Hj Yaakub

Source: *Memoir Pak Sako Putera Gunung Tahan*, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi. 1997. p. 50

The voice of Independence started to be heard. Previously, the term independence was foreign and almost absent in Malaya. The conducive position enjoyed by the British in Malaya began to be disrupted. The movement against British colonialism began as early as the 1930s, yet it did not begin in their hometown. It began to resonate in a district called Muallim. An educational institution was founded here to produce teachers to cater for educational needs in Malaya. The Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) in Tanjung Malim, Perak in 1922 brought together teachers from all over Malaya. Among those selected was Ibrahim Haji Yaakub. Meanwhile, Ishak Haji Muhammad, who excelled in his studies, was selected to enter the Malayan Civil Service (MCS) and underwent training at the Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK). Both of these institutions, SITC and MCKK recorded many important historical struggles in defending the Malays.

### **Background Ibrahim Haji Yaakub**

On 27 November 1910, a man named Ibrahim Haji Yaakub (IBHY) was born in Tanjung Kertau, Temerloh, Pahang to a family of Bugis descent. His parents migrated from South Sulawesi to Riau, and then to Temerloh, Pahang. His father Haji Yaakub was a religious teacher and respected figure. His mother was Hawa binti Hussein. His parents divorced when he was 2 years old. He was raised by his mother with a modest life. He received his early education at Sekolah Melayu Tanjung Kertau, then continued his studies at Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) in 1928 until 1931. Ibrahim Haji Yaakub was assigned as a teacher at the Kuala Lumpur Police Depot and very interested in journalism. He wrote a series of articles for a Malay newspaper where he criticised the various aspects of the British administration in Malaya.

Ibrahim Yaakub was the founder of the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda*, KMM (Young Malay Union) and the first Malay political leader who opposed the British colonialism. KMM's goal was to achieve independence through the union of Malaya with Indonesia under the concept of

Greater Malay/Greater Indonesia. In Kesatuan Melayu Muda, he was warmly welcomed by the Malay youths. KMM cooperated with the Japanese by actively helping them as he believed that Japan would aid Malaya in gaining independence. Ibrahim was trained by the Japanese for six months and in June 1944 he was appointed Commander of the Giyu Gun, with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. With the help of the Japanese military forces, Giyu Gun was formed in the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. His involvement with the Japanese caused him to face the challenges that came with it. When Japan surrendered in World War II, he was advised to emigrate to Indonesia for fear of being captured and sentenced to death by the British. Thus, on 19 August 1945, he migrated to Indonesia. In Indonesia, his political career in the struggle against the colonialists was so successful that he eventually became one of the most radical political figures in Indonesia during the same era as Soekarno (Stockwell 1979:176). He died on 8 March 1979 in Jakarta, Indonesia and was buried at the Kalibata Heroes Cemetery, South Jakarta. On the tombstone, the name Iskandar Kamel was engraved. (IBHY), retired Lieutenant Colonel TNI-AD, NRP 26217 (Saat 2011).

### **The Struggle**

According to Cikgu Mohamed Nor, a friend of Ibrahim Yaakub while studying at SITC in 1929, Ibrahim Yaakub was an active student and very interested in political issues. He often talked about the politics of Malaya, the backwardness of the Malays, and British unfair policy to the Malays (Asaari, 2011). His interest in politics was not just talking but also proving it with actions. Thus, in 1929, Ibrahim Yaakub established Pertubuhan Ikatan Pemuda Pelajar and Ikatan Semenanjung Borneo (Youth Association of Students and the Association of Peninsular Borneo) to invite those who have the same dream and agree with his views to come together to organize and spread ideas and views of their struggles in defending the fate of the Malays (Sakdan 1997). Here, Ibrahim and his friends began the movement against the British colonialists. Then, after graduating from SITC, he translated his struggle by establishing Kesatuan Melayu Muda in 1938. He and some of his colleagues like Hassan Manan, A. Karim Rashid, Ishak Haji Muhammad, Ahmad Mustapha Hussein, and Yaakub Ahmad established the Kesatuan Melayu Muda, KMM (Young Malay Union). KMM was a political organisation that was first established in Malaya before World War II (WWII), aiming to improve the Malays at that time and fight against the (British, 1985).

The ideas and spirits of the struggle of Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM) were flourished under the leadership of Ibrahim Haji Yaakub, Mustapha Hussein, Ishak Haji Muhammad, and Harun Aminurashid. This also explained that the ideas and spirits of KMM, led by Ibrahim Haji Yaakub (IBHY), were an inspiration born in SITC. KMM was also strengthened by the presence of other radical figures such as Onan Haji Siraj, Abdul Karim Rashid, Haji Othman Abdullah, Hassan Manan and Isa Mohd. bin Mahmud, Mohamed Isa bin Suleiman, and Abdul Hadi bin Haji Hassan. All of them were graduates of SITC (Roff, 1994).

Indeed, SITC's role in raising the community's spirit and awareness to fight against British colonialism should not be forgotten (CO717/149/52701). SITC was dedicated to the Malays only. In SITC, the principal and lecturers were involved and participated in raising the spirit of nationalism among the Malay students. Among those who played that role was O.T. Dussek, Abdul Hadi Haji Hassan, Haji Buyong Adil, and Harun Aminurrashid. Should the role and involvement be clearly described, O.T. Dussek, the principal of SITC in 1922, had participated directly and raised the national spirits of the Malay students in SITC although he was an

Englishman (Majlis, 25 Ogos, 1935, 7). He was directly involved during the administration of SITC in providing awareness of the struggle to uphold the Malay race (Othman, 2002). His involvement in providing awareness of the nation, concerned about the welfare, progress and struggle of the Malays, caused him to be known as *an Englishman with a Malay heart* (Funston, 1980). This opinion was also shared by scholar Mohd. Isa Othman, saying that O.T Dussek was an Englishman with a Malay soul, striving to make SITC a Malay University. He was responsible for producing many Malay scholars with nationalist spirit (Othman, 2002). In fact, this view was also shared by N. J Funston, who noted; "*Perhaps, most important, under a sympathetic headmaster the SITC turned its attention primarily to the study, use and development of Malay language, literature, and history.*" He added; "*Students were exposed to new ideas.*" The involvement of the principal and lecturers has inspired Ibrahim Haji Yaakub to engage in the struggle to defend the Malays. Their names were engraved in the annals of the struggle for independence against the British colonials in Malaya (Funston, 1980).

The rise of Asia under Japanese leadership, with the slogan *Asia for Asia*, opened the eyes of all countries being colonised by the West, especially in the Southeast Asian region. Japan's success in defeating the West on Pearl Harbor Island sent a clear message to the colonised countries that the Western colonials could be defeated. This Asian uprising gave ideas and inspiration to Ibrahim Haji Yaakub to join the struggle for independence. Thus, he negotiated with the Japanese. This means that the presence of the Japanese in Malaya, apart from the available strategies, was invested by the Japanese through its agents. Their arrival was also welcomed by the freedom fighters for independence, led by the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM). Ibrahim received special training from the Japanese for six months, and in June 1944, he was appointed Commander of the Giyu Gun (Japanese Volunteer Army).

Before the outbreak of WWII, the British had taken action by arresting the KMM leaders and banning the movement. But during the Japanese occupation, Kesatuan Melayu Muda was viewed as an underground anti-British organisation, consisting of leaders such as Onan Haji Siraj and Mustapha Hussein who managed to escape from being arrested by the British. They restructured the Kesatuan Melayu Muda to become the Barisan Pemuda (Youth Corps) and played an important role in the military and social unrest during the Japanese invasion (Soh, 1999). Kesatuan Melayu Muda's cooperated with Japan by volunteering as counselors or interpreters to the Japanese troops, to protect the Malays who have problems with the attacking team. In the early arrival of the Japanese in Malaya, the Kesatuan Melayu Muda has received recognition from Japan, where Japan has provided both social and political strengths in the Kesatuan Melayu Muda. Ibrahim Haji Yaakub had become the Commander of the Giyu Gun, a volunteer army with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Part of this volunteer army was made up of leftist radicals. Gun Giyu was also known as a military force because Ibrahim Haji Yaakub wanted to get the military supplies for Kesatuan Melayu Muda. But those involved in the Giyu Gun have to obey the Japanese. Ibrahim Yaakub's involvement in the Giyu Gun can be seen in his role in the anti-guerrilla operation during the Japanese occupation when there was hostility between the Chinese and the Japanese army (Soh, 2005).

The Giyu Gun team was established in Malaya and Sumatra. It was created to oppose the allied forces. Members of Kesatuan Melayu Muda also carried out duties such as promoting Giyu Gun to the Malay youths to join the military forces. But over time, Ibrahim Yaakub gained less power in his rank as the Japanese became suspicious of Giyu Gun for allegedly

collaborating with the Parti Komunis Malaya, PKM (Communist Party of Malaya), which was Japan's enemy. Therefore, before the end of WWII, KMM was banned by the Japanese. But when the Japanese were on the verge of defeat, they released all KMM leaders and advised Ibrahim Haji Yaakub to leave Malaya before the British returned. Thus, Ibrahim Haji Yaakub decided to migrate to Indonesia and join the struggle of Parti Nasionalis Indonesia, PNI (Nationalist Party of Indonesia) under the leadership of Soekarno. Before migrating, one interesting thing that needs to be known is the seriousness of Ibrahim Haji Yaakub's effort in achieving the independence of Malaya. According to Gestu Gunawan and acknowledged by Master Taufik Abdullah, there was a secret meeting between Ibrahim Haji Yaakub with Soekarno and Hatta's entourage upon their return from a working visit in Saigon, a stop-over in Taiping and greeted by Ibrahim Haji Yaakub at the Japanese Commander's house at the Japanese Army Headquarters. Amongst their discussions was the declaration of Malaya's independence together with Indonesia. Muhammad Yamin, one of the Indonesian national heroes of Soekarno's contemporaries, also agreed with the proposed regional circle. Among the provinces proposed for independence under the umbrella of Indonesia were the Former Dutch East Indies, Malaya, North Kalimantan, Papua, and Timor (Portuguese) (Gunawan, 2005:108). But this desire was not fulfilled. This failure caused some members and leaders of PKMM to feel disappointed. Ahmad Boestamam once asked Soekarno the reason Malaya was not included during the Indonesian proclamation in 1945. The answer he received was rather disappointing, namely that Malaya was not well prepared for independence (Boestamam, 1972).

Post-WWII demonstrated that the people's uprising was becoming more extensive. Although KMM has been banned twice, namely in the British era before WWII and during the Japanese occupation, its supporters expressed their struggle by forming new political parties. This inspiration gave birth to the Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya, PKMM (Malay Nationalist Party of Malaya) on 17 October, 1945 in Ipoh, Perak. PKMM moved actively and was assisted by two wings, namely the Angkatan Pemuda Insaf, API (Organisation of Awakened Youth) and Angkatan Wanita Sedar, AWAS (Organisation of Aware Women), which added heat to the political atmosphere in Malaya. The uprising of other people around the world also inspired the people's struggle in Malaya. The nationalists uprising in India had taken place under the leadership of Mahatma Ghandi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and Subha Chandra Bose. The rise of the Filipino people under the leadership of Jose Rizal, the rise of Indonesia under Soekarno's leadership inspired and motivated the Malay youths to participate in the rise against the British in Malaya.

When the PKMM became more vocal and bolder in criticising the British colonialists, the rise of various streams of struggle against the colonialists during the same time, such as the nationalists, socialists, communists and Islam, threatened the conducive British position. The British waited for the right moment and time to act. The murder of Sir Henry Gurney at Jalan Kuala Kubu Baru, Selangor was a blow against British rule in Malaya. Indeed, the communist ambush on Sir Henry Gurney, the Selangor Police Chief, was rather painful to the British. Then, a series of murders of British officials took place, namely the murder of three rubber plantation managers in Sungai Siput, Perak. These incidents had made the British took drastic action by introducing the Emergency Act 1948 and subsequently declared a state of emergency in the whole of Malaya. This situation caused political turmoil that engulfed Malaya. The Act gave the British the power to act. The introduction and enforcement of the



Emergency Act 1948 indeed has various hidden agendas, and the author emphatically states that it has a three-pronged goal which is:

1. *First, to curb the communists influence which are widespread among the Chinese community in Malaya.*
2. *Secondly, to authorise the British government and justify their actions to arrest and imprison radical Malays without trial.*
3. *Thirdly, to curb the rise of Islamic reform movement that is growing in Malaya (Saat, 2013, p. 368).*

The author stresses that the arrest and imprisonment of the radical Malay leaders were unsuccessful in breaking their fighting spirit. The British authorities managed to imprison their bodies but not the ideas and spirits of their struggle for independence. On the contrary, their imprisonment was filled with beneficial activities with plans to continue the struggle after their release. The introduction of the Emergency Act resulted in many leaders being arrested and detained in British prisons and Political Detention Camps. Among those arrested were Ahmad Boestamam, Ishak Haji Muhammad, Abu Bakar Al Baqir, Abdul Majid Salleh, Ibrahim Chik, and many more. However, there was one great figure of the same era as Ibrahim Haji Yaakub who was not arrested. He was Dr Burhanuddin Al Helmy.

Under the leadership of Dr Burhanuddin, PKMM continued to actively champion the Malay issues. Apart from the issue of radical Malays' hatred against the British who have long colonized Malaya, PKMM's involvement in the issue of Natrah made the British uncomfortable. The increase in the hatred against the British has made them act to save their conducive position in Malaya. At the same time, PKMM which has a very close relationship with the Indonesian independence fighters or with the Persatuan Indonesia Merdeka, PIM (Independence Party of Indonesia), added to the British anxiety. This is because many issues and factors can arouse the people's unruly feelings towards the power of the British government. This situation not only made the British anxious about their position but also forced the PKMM leadership to arrange certain measures to save the situation, to avoid PKMM from being banned by the British (Djamily, 1994:110). Following that, the PKMM leadership has made several decisions to face some of the possibilities of PKMM going through some difficult times. This was compounded by the fact that many of its leaders were arrested and imprisoned by the British through the enforcement of the Emergency Act 1948. Therefore, on 1 May 1950, under the leadership of Mohammad Taha Kalu as Acting President and Syed Abdullah Zawawi as Secretary-General, PKMM gave a mandate to Ibrahim Haji Yaakub to continue the struggle if PKMM was banned. This mandate was the delegation of power so that the struggles and policies of the Greater Malay would continue either from inside or outside of the country. This mandate was also agreed upon by the General Advisor of PKMM, Dr. Burhanuddin Al Helmy. This demonstrated the seriousness of PKMM's struggle and strategic foresight of its leaders to realize the Malay struggle in the Greater Malay. Evidence of this allegation is contained in the PKMM Power of Attorney dated 1 May 1950 (*Surat Kuasa Penoh*, 1950). Apparently, the involvement of Dr. Burhanuddin Al Helmy and PKMM leaders worried the British. Hence, in 1950 he was arrested under the Emergency Act 1948. This action was taken because the British were concerned that Dr. Burhanuddin's involvement in the case of Natrah would lift his name as a public figure and become increasingly admired by many and thus, make him more popular. Therefore, Dr. Burhanuddin must be arrested before the situation got worse. Although PKMM was banned by the British,

the idea and inspiration of PKMM's struggle was continued by Ibrahim Haji Yaakub in Indonesia.

### **Background Ishak Haji Muhammad**

Ishak Haji Muhammad, or better known as Pak Sako, was born in 1909 in Kampung Bukit Seguntang, Temerloh, Pahang. He received his early education at Sekolah Laki-Laki Temerloh (Kampung Tengah National School), Temerloh in 1919, and then continued his education at Clifford English School, Kuala Lipis from 1924 to 1928. Pak Sako graduated from Senior Cambridge from Raub English School in 1929. His intellectual ability allowed him to enter the Malayan Civil Service (MCS), and in 1930, he continued his studies in MCKK (Malay College Kuala Kangsar) to undergo training as a Malay Probationary Officer in the Administrative Service of Malaya. He held various positions in MCS, such as Deputy Assistant District Officer, Class III Magistrate, and language teacher, before joining the world of writing. Yet his outstanding achievements in government service did not give him satisfaction. Then he took drastic steps to leave his big post and get involved in the struggle to defend the people.

After serving for a long time, Pak Sako realised that the British underestimated the Malays too much and made no serious effort to improve the Malays. In 1934, Pak Sako resigned from his position as Magistrate Class III because he refused to cooperate with the British and then decided to explore the Peninsula of Malaya. Pak Sako later focused his efforts on nationalist writing and politics. Pak Sako was imprisoned twice from 1948 to 1953 under the Emergency Act 1948 as a political prisoner and detained in the British Political Detention Camp. He was arrested again in 1965 and 1966 on charges of conspiracy to overthrow the Malay Sultanate of Brunei.

### **The Struggle**

According to Abdul Samad Ismail, Ishak Haji Muhammad was a politician who was not interested in using force. He was a law-abiding man, hence all his political movements and during his leadership in political parties, he avoided going against the law. Ishak Haji Muhammad attempted to demonstrate the principles and philosophy of struggle by applying the gentle and polite indigenous Malay culture. His ideas and views were often expressed in his writing such as in newspaper articles, short stories and novels using his pseudonyms, Hantu Raya and Pak Sako. That was why Ahmad Samad Ismail held the view that Ishak Haji Muhammad was more suitable as a journalist and a writer than a politician (Ismail, 1997).

The spirit of Ishak Haji Muhammad in the struggle for independence is no less important. Despite his high position in the administration of the British Malaya, his soul was empty thinking about the fate of his people who were oppressed and lagging in all fields of life. Therefore, he did not want to be left behind in joining the independence movement. Among the movements he joined were KMM, PKMM, API, PETA, PUTERA and the Malayan Labor Party. According to J.D. Dalley, Chief Spy of Malayan Security Service, the movements which were listed as radical group were PETANI, API, PKMM, AWAS, PNI, PETA, *Hizbul Muslimin*, *Barisan Tani SeMalaya*, *Gabungan Melayu Patani Raya* (GEMPAR / GMPR) and MDU and were considered extremely harmful to British in Malaya. This, coupled with the intimate relationship of PKMM leaders, Labor Organisations and the leader of the Communist Party of Malaya through PUTERA, further worried the British. The British also blacklisted the leaders who led radical movements in Malaya such as Dr. Burhanuddin, Ishak Haji Muhammad,

Ahmad Boestamam, Abdul Majid Salleh, Ibrahim Singgeh, Abdullah CD and Rashid Maidin. For the British, these names possessed great influence and can threaten their position in Malaya (*MSS. Ind. Ocn. 251*, p. 364-369). That was why these resistance parties were banned. Meanwhile, the leaders of these organizations were arrested and imprisoned under the Emergency Act 1948 (Adam, 2001).

Failure to achieve independence alongside Indonesia made the nationalists planned further actions and strategies to obtain the independence of Malaya. They established PKMM, led by Mokhtarudin Lasso, Dr. Burhanuddin Al Helmy, Ishak Haji Muhammad and Ahmad Boestamam. This political party was established in Ipoh, Perak on 17 October 1945. The figures who once led PKMM included Dr. Burhanuddin Al Helmy, Ahmad Boestamam, Ishak Haji Muhammad and Baharuddin Latif. They were the forerunners of the radical movement in Malaya and made the state of Perak as their headquarters. Perak became the place to plan and establish their operations. The PKMM first congress, held in Ipoh on 30 November to 3 December 1945, set 8 important resolutions of the Malays, namely

1. *To unite the nation of Malaya and inculcate national spirits amongst the Malay people with the ultimate aim of making Malaya united with the big family, namely the Republic of Greater Indonesia.*
2. *To strive for freedom of speech, movement, assembly and freedom to pursue knowledge.*
3. *To uplift the Malay economic position by promoting industry, commerce and agriculture.*
4. *To strive for freedom of agriculture in the sense that no tax should be imposed on agricultural land and farmers should reserve the freedom the market their products as they like.*
5. *To strive towards the granting of complete freedom for the Malays to establish their national schools using their language as the medium of instruction.*
6. *To strive for freedom for the Malays to publish their own books, to encourage the spread of education democratically in order to enhance the position of the Malays in the political arena thus improving the sense of nationalism amongst the Malays.*
7. *PKMM wishes to cooperate with other nations living in this country, working well and working for Malayan United Front to make Independent Malaya prosperous and blissful as a component member of the Republic of Indonesia.*
8. *To support the Indonesian people in their struggle for independence (UMNO/SG No. 96/1946)*

This was a bold move from PKMM in the political struggle of the Malays, stating their demands and articulating the defense of the nations' fate against the colonialists. Although some elements and efforts tried to manipulate the Malay struggle to assimilate communism at the beginning of PKMM's establishment, the efficiency and quick thinking of Malay political leaders with national and Islamic spirits had successfully purged communism in PKMM.

A few Malay leaders, who supported communism, tried to spread the ideology to the Malays by penetrating it through PKMM. Among them were Mokhtarudin Lasso, Ashaari Arshad, Abdullah CD, Rashid Maidin and Musa Ahmad. However, since the struggle based on communist ideology was difficult to infiltrate, the effort to manifest the struggle based on



communism has found a dead end. The misguided element of faith was heavily opposed by the Malays because it was a sensitive issue that must be defended to uphold the sanctity of Islam. The presence of radical Malay leaders such as Dr. Burhanuddin, Ahmad Boestamam, Ishak Haji Muhammad, Ustaz Abu Bakar Al Baqir and Baharuddin Latif managed to control the situation from being trapped by communist elements. At the beginning of PKMM's establishment, efforts to manifest the communist struggle were made by Mokhtarudin Lasso and his followers, but were unsuccessful. This assertion can be proved by the nomination of the first Malay political party, which was the Parti Sosialis Melayu (Socialist Party of Malaya). These efforts were thwarted by Ahmad Boestamam and his colleagues by suggesting the name of the Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya, PKMM (Malay Nationalist Party of Malaya (Ahmad Boestamam, n.d.)). After this incident, the communist ideology was no longer openly expressed, but sneaked into the struggle of PKMM until the struggle came to a halt, after the introduction of the Emergency Act 1948 and the mass arrest of PKMM leadership figures. Following the enforcement of the Act, they finally manifested their communist struggle through the 10th PKM Regiment, after which legally-based struggle was no longer allowed.

According to radical Malay figure, Ishak Haji Muhammad, in his *Memoir Pak Sako Putera Gunung Tahan*, they established PKMM to accept the challenge and meet the demand to defend the Malays who were behind in all fields of life. In fact, colonial domination and foreign immigrants, especially in the political and economic situations in Malaya, caused the Malays to slack and fall behind. He further stressed that the struggle of PKMM was in line with one of the goals of the United Nations [UN], under the provisions of the Charter of Human Rights. This charter guarantees the right of colonised human beings to demand independence, or at least self-government, freedom for all human beings, regardless of skin color or religion, the right to speak, assemble, form political parties, publish newspapers, freedom from hunger, freedom from arrest and detention without going through the legal process, and physical and spiritual liberty (Muhammad, 1997:187 & 228). Based on this spirit, PKMM was set up by the Malay youths to defend the rights of the Malays and ensure they are at par with other races in Malaya. His assertion on this issue:

*"We, the radical nationalists in Malaya, has set up Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya [PKMM] with the objective of demanding full independence of Malaya and the Malay nation."*

PKMM presence, then, was greeted with enthusiasm by Malay youth radicals and was successful in threatening the position of the British colonial power and the Malay aristocracy.

When the Second World War broke out (1941-1945), the British were easily defeated by the Japanese army. Japanese victory, with *Asia for Asia* slogan, has given new momentum to the Malays to diminish the belief that Asian people including the Malays are weak. The supposedly strong colonialists could be defeated. More upsetting was the so-called colonials 'Sir' acted by saving themselves and let the Japanese concurred Malaya in February 1942. In times of war, the Malays suffered from food shortages and disease outbreaks. The only food that was easily available was tapioca. Thus, the period was known as the '*era of tapioca*' in Malay society. This opinion was also supported by Ishak Haji Muhammad. He insisted; "*That's why the era of Japanese occupation is better known as the tapioca era.*" (Muhammad, 1997). This made the Malays realised the significance of governing one's own country, to guarantee the future of the nation. British actions and the victory of Japan have left a deep impact on

the souls of the Malays. This situation made the Malays more aware of their dire situation and rose to express their desire to be free. The Malays must unite to expel the colonialists and demand independence.

Policies and systems introduced by the British in education and the economy had caused the Malays to be left behind. The situation was made worse when the British political approach 'Divide and Rule' caused the Malay power to weaken (Bakar, 1991: 50). British policies made the Malay race obsolete. This scenario raised dissatisfaction among the Malays. It must be opposed by demanding full independence of Malaya. So, the Malays began to form political parties, join and unite in them, in dealing with the British colonialists. Although the Malays were divided into multiple streams of political and educational backgrounds, the fighting spirit and goals of radical Malays remained the same, to expel the colonialists. Since they have the same goals, their movement, planning, cooperation and actions were always in parallel. Thus, sometimes they set up a joint body to act against the British, for example they worked together to set up or lead PKMM, KRIS, *Hizbul Muslimin*, API, AWAS, PUTERA, PAS, PRM and Socialist Front. These organizations helped each other to achieve a common goal. For example, PKMM provided close cooperation in establishing *Hizbul Muslimin* in Gunung Semanggol in 1948 (Abdullah, 1976).

Before that, PKMM was also involved in the Conference of Malay National Congress in 1946 to set up UMNO. After their period of incarceration, radical Malay figures still maintained their cooperation and understanding with each other. This was reflected through an event where Dr. Burhanuddin was invited by PAS to strengthen the party's leadership in the struggle for the independence of Malaya. This action showed that a form of understanding between Ahmad Boestamam and Dr. Burhanuddin was achieved when Dr. Burhanuddin was invited to lead PAS in 1956 (Boestaman, n.d.). In fact, cooperation between the Malays were also carried out with the immigrants, especially the Chinese. For example, the cooperation of PUTERA-AMCJA in 1947 and the Socialist Front (SF) in 1957, to achieve a mutual goal. PUTERA-AMCJA worked together to oppose the colonialists by proposing the *Perlembagaan Rakyat* (People's Constitution), which was recognised by many as the best constitutional proposal at the time. This constitution was the result of three days of discussions between Dr. Burhanuddin, Ishak Hj. Muhammad, Tan Cheng Lock, J.A. Thivy, Ahmad Boestamam (CO537/2140/136697) Chan Loo and Gerald de Cruz. It was a constitutional proposal that was acceptable by all races. *Perlembagaan Rakyat* was proposed to replace the Malayan Union which provoked great controversy in Malaya in 1946.

An interesting point that can be discussed is related to the political approach between the left and the right wings. The different approaches separated the Malays in their political struggle and independence of Malaya. At the beginning of their establishment, the right wing just wanted to return the *status quo* of feudal class and the elite Malays, especially those in UMNO (CO537/1582/136697). Whilst the Malay radicals in PKMM wanted full independence from the British. This statement was contained in an interview with Ishak Haji Muhammad and was recorded in a British document (CO537/1582/136697). When consensus of opinion could not be reached, PKMM decided to withdraw from the Malay National Congress. The political turmoil in Malaya reached its climax in 1948, and eventually, through the Emergency Act of 1948, more radical political leaders were arrested and imprisoned until 1955. The political situation in Malaya regained its liveliness when all the arrested figures were released in 1955.

Their release did not make them fearful or phobic with prison. On the contrary, their spirits continue to burn. Therefore, following this, they established and joined political parties such as PAS, PRM and PBM as well as UMNO. Ahmad Boestamam established and led PRM from 1955 to 1967, while Prof. Dr. Burhanuddin Al Helmy led PAS from 1956 to 1969. Their friend, Ishak Haji Muhammad led the Labor Party of Malaya from 1956 to 1965. As for other less significant figures, those loyal to Ahmad Boestamam, such as Harun Aminurrashid, Abdul Majid Salleh, Nazar Nong, Yahya Nassim and Ibrahim Singgeh, continued to join him in PRM. While those who were loyal to Dr. Burhanuddin Al Helmy, chose PAS to continue their struggle. These staunch supporters of the great figures of the Malay radicals did not just join the political organisations but also led the movements in the state and district levels. For example, Abdul Majid Salleh, was a member of Parti Rakyat Malaya and led the party in Perak in 1960-1967 (Salleh, 2004). Similarly, Ibrahim Singgeh led PRM at the district level as the Vice Chief of PRM Batu Gajah, Perak in 1955. PRM Batu Gajah at that time was led by Ibrahim Karim (Singgeh, 2002). There were also those who chose to join UMNO such as Cikgu Mohd. Yusof bin Ayob, Abdul Aziz bin Ishaq and Mustapha Hussein. What is interesting is that some of the radical figures who joined UMNO left the party later because they cannot accept UMNO's non-radical policies and claimed it was too tolerant in all matters. Thus, figures such as Abdul Aziz Ishak and Cikgu Mohd. Yusof Ayob left UMNO for PAS (Ayob, 2002). Although they led and belonged to different political parties, they can still be work together and cooperate in political action. The formation of the Socialist Front in 1957 proved that ideology had never been an obstacle when dealing with the British authorities as well as the post-independence government. Ahmad Boestamam and Ishak Haji Muhammad were prominent figures representing the Malay radicals during the pre-independence period. They remained loyal in the political struggle to defend the people.

### **Conclusion**

The spirit of the radical nationalists cannot be erased despite the introduction and enforcement of the Emergency Act, 1948 by the British. Enforcement of these laws legitimised British in arresting and imprisoning Malay and Chinese leftist leaders. An estimated 5,362 radical fighters were arrested and imprisoned in colonial political detention camps (Yunus, 1992, p. 72). This number increased from year to year until 1955. In fact, statistics obtained from the Colonial Office showed that the number of emergency detainees during 1948 to 1960 has reached 29,857 people. Meanwhile, according to Tuan Haji Kasim, former API Perlis Youth Chief, more than 10,000 people have been arrested and imprisoned. So it can be concluded that so many radical leaders and supporters were arrested and imprisoned in the hope of dousing their fighting spirit, but this British strategy failed to achieve its goal. After 1955. The political struggle intensified and finally on 31 August 1957, Malaya achieved its independence.

The struggle of the radicals is very important and significantly meaningful. Although at the beginning they were misunderstood, their efforts were finally appreciated and recognised post-independence by the ruling class as what was said by the late Tun Dr. Ismail bin Abdul Rahman, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia (1970-1973) in his speech upon receiving the Honorary Doctorate Degree of Law at the Convocation of Universiti Sains Malaysia on 23 September 1973 as follows

"Although independence has been achieved by the moderates, history has proven that radical nationalists have also contributed to the achievement of independence".  
(Source: Speech by the late Tun Dr. Ismail bin Dato Abdul Rahman, 23 September 1973).

Therefore, it is time for the Malaysian government to give due and appropriate recognition to those who fought for independence. Recognition as *Pejuang Nasional / Pejuang Kemerdekaan* (National Hero / Independence Fighter) should be awarded to those who fought and sacrificed for the sake of religion, race, and country. With this, I would like to suggest the establishment of the Academy of Malaysian National History to collect, research, publish and certify those who deserve to be recognised as National Hero / Independence Fighter. With the Academy of Malaysian National History, we will be able to increase the number of national historical documents so that they can be viewed and studied by all Malaysians, as well as to curb any movements that try to distort the country's historical facts.

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