WAR CABINET.

CONSTITUTIONAL POLICY IN MALAYA.

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES.

I invite the attention of my colleagues to Paper No. W.P. (44) 762, of the 22nd December, 1944, which was a Memorandum by the Chairman of the Committee on Malaya and Borneo, dealing with future Constitutional Policy in Malaya.

2. The Memorandum contained proposals for a measure of publicity about our political plans for Malaya. The War Cabinet considered these proposals on the 9th January, and it was then felt that the proposals either went too far or not far enough. On the one hand, they did not offer the advantage which would result in publicity for a settled policy on which we were prepared to stand. On the other hand, they provided for a distribution of information wide enough to create a risk of leakage, and to entail embarrassing questions. Largely in view of these doubts, the War Cabinet did not reach a decision on the matter, but preferred to await my return from the United States.

3. Since my return, I have carefully considered these criticisms. I feel that we should not contemplate, for the time being, a greater measure of publicity than that previously proposed, since we should thereby commit ourselves further than I consider necessary to a new and important line of policy which we may possibly wish to modify later on, at any rate as regards some of its details. I am still impressed, however, both by the need to prepare and influence general opinion both here and in the East amongst circles whose good will and understanding are important for us to secure, as well as the need to provide material for a progressive scheme of political warfare.

4. In order to meet these needs, I now propose a somewhat modified course of action which should, I think, for the present achieve the essential objectives of my earlier proposals. I propose that only the broad statement of the chief problems in Malaya (in the terms recommended by the Ministers' Committee) should be issued (see Annex). Its distribution would be confined to the following official Agencies, viz.: all United Kingdom Government Departments and Representatives in Great Britain and abroad who are concerned with policy in Malaya, including S.E.A.C., United Kingdom High Commissioners in the Dominions, Political Warfare Missions and Ministry of Information Representatives, Colonial Governors and Diplomatic posts in the East.

One of the purposes for which these agencies could use the statement would, of course, be to guide unofficial thought on the problems involved and direct public attention and discussion towards a political and social development of Malaya along the fresh and progressive lines of consolidation and unity which our provisional policy envisages.

5. In due course we shall need to be more explicit, but when that time comes our course will have been aided, if my present proposal is approved.

O. S.

Colonial Office, Downing Street, S.W. 1,
7th May, 1945.

* W.M. (45) 3rd Conclusions.
ANNEX.

DRAFT STATEMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS IN MALAYA.

MALAYA, though a geographical unity, is not in fact a single country, in the sense in which Great Britain or France are single countries. Malaya forms neither a racial nor a constitutional entity, and an appreciation of this fact is essential to any understanding of the problems we shall meet on our return.

2. The Malay Peninsula, as organised under British control, consists of a British Colony (the Straits Settlements, the most important of which are Singapore, Penang and Malacca) and of nine Malay States, four of which are joined in a Federation. Until about 1870 the nine States remained entirely separate and entirely independent—they were largely isolated by mountains and jungle—and British control was confined to the Colony. From then on, disturbances caused by pirates and by foreign (mainly Chinese) infiltration caused the several Malay Rulers, separately and at different times, to seek British protection. To this day the whole British position in the Malay States rests upon Agreements concluded with the individual Rulers—agreements which in substance and interpretation provide for British advice (to be acted upon in all matters other than Malay religion and custom), but which leave the Rulers, from the legal point of view, as sovereign princes.

3. The spread of British influence has brought co-ordination in many things, but the separate entity of the States remains none the less a reality. The Malays cherish a definite loyalty towards their Rulers, and this feeling conflicts with the development of any allegiance towards a larger unit than the State. There is no widespread conception amongst the Malays that they are “Malays,” with common duties and problems; and this is the first problem which must be faced in Malaya, if the country is to advance towards nationhood and self-government within the British Commonwealth.

4. The second problem is that of race. The extraordinary economic development which has accompanied the spread of British influence, and the extensive introduction of capital and enterprise from China and India has led to a situation in which the non-Malay population in Malaya now outnumbers the Malays, though the majority of the former still regard their original lands rather than Malaya as their real home. The resultant problem presents special obstacles to the development of a sense of common citizenship in Malaya. On the one hand, the relations of the British Government with the Malay States are based on a recognition of the right of the Malay peoples to a secure position in their lands and in their educational and other facilities for progress. On the other hand the enterprise and capacity of the non-Malay peoples of the country, provided they be accompanied by a sense of civic responsibility, assert a claim that should exercise a due share in the moulding of Malaya’s future.

5. Mention has been made above of economic development. It must not be thought that racial or parochial factors have been allowed to hinder all progress. Far from it. The economic, social and educational record of Malaya under British control is unsurpassed in the Far East. In these fields the work of great research organisations, such as the Rubber Research Institute and the Medical Research Institute, is recognised throughout the East. Along with the task of guiding Malaya towards her political destiny, the duty of restoring these and other valuable institutions and adapting them to future conditions and needs will clearly rest upon the Government and industry. The economy of Malaya has in the past been founded on the two great industries of rubber and tin. The importance of these natural resources must be re-established, and also a healthy broadening of the basis of Malayan economic life will be a pressing need.

6. The condition of the country and the temper of the people which we shall find on the eviction of the enemy after his prolonged period of occupation remain to be ascertained. But it is not too early to think and plan in terms of a forward policy in the country for the promotion of a growing cohesion and sense of political unity. If any of the features mentioned in this note are found to be obstacles to such a development, and if liberation is to be comprehensive and not merely related to the eviction of enemy forces, measures will need to be considered and concerted with all concerned to liberate the new Malaya from old barriers and prejudices, and it will be important that those who have the responsibility for the lines on which the new Malaya is built shall also be vested with the power to overcome any reactionary interests.