

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role and influence of the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) in Malayan politics between 1946 and 1957. The approach taken in this study is the chronological, descriptive/analytical historical method. The thesis begins with a general discussion of the Indian community in Malaya to provide the background for the study before it analyses the different phases of the development of the party. This thesis is divided into three main components. The first part of the study, covering the period between 1946 and 1950, traces the formation of the MIC and then examines the party's response to the 1946 Malayan Union proposal and its boycott of the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement. This section also discusses the contest between the MIC, the Malayan Indian Association (MIA) and the Federation of Indian Organisations (FIO) to become the main representative of the Indian community in the immediate post-war period. The second part of the thesis, covering the period 1951 and 1954, examines the MIC's partnership with Dato' Onn Jaafar's non-communal Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) to participate in the local elections. In this section, the MIC's campaign for an Indian representation in the Member System introduced in 1951, its involvement in the IMP-sponsored National Conference in 1953 and its bid to secure reserve seats for Indians in the Federal Legislative Council are also discussed. The third section, covering the period 1955 to 1957, discusses the MIC's role in several important political developments. This includes its partnership with UMNO and MCA to contest the local and federal elections in 1954 and 1955; its role in the independence negotiations and its participation in the constitutional negotiations. The thesis reveals from an examination of primary sources that the origins of the MIC lay in the chaotic post-war conditions in Malaya in 1946 and the desire among the Indian leaders for a national organization to represent the interests of the community. The party documents show that the MIC moved from a purely non-communal approach in its early stage to adopt an inter-communal position as evidenced in its cooperation with the UMNO and MCA in 1954. Further this thesis shows, unlike earlier studies, that the MIC played a significantly important role in shaping Malayan politics of this period. In particular, its cooperation with UMNO and MCA led to the emergence of a strong united nationalist movement, the Alliance Party, which had the support of the three main communities and which was able to obtain independence early from the British. The role of the MIC was also significant during the independence negotiations and in the inter-communal agreements contained in the 1957 Malayan independence constitution.