

BOOK REVIEW

Malaysia: Economic Expansion and National Unity. By John Gullick. London: Ernest Benn; Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press (Nations of the Modern World Series), 1981. Pp. 290.

John Gullick's new volume, more a rewrite than a mere revision of earlier editions, has proved a disappointment to this reviewer — and not because it fails to live up to some pre-conceived standard, or expectations of excellence engendered by previous work, but because of bewildering variations of quality within the book itself.

One cannot speak too highly of the first six chapters (setting the scene up to Independence) as models of sensitive geographical, historical, sociological and political exposition. This is Gullick, the former Malayan administrator and historian well read in most of the recent literature, giving of his emotional and intellectual best (though East Malaysia receives short shrift). Chapters 9 and 10, on manifold aspects of the modern economy, also constitute a valuable contribution, at the level of succinct but sophisticated introduction. Here the expertise of Gullick as a Guthries Director provides the reader with information and understanding rarely conveyed by texts in this kind of “country series”.

But the account seems to falter at Chapter 7 (an abbreviated analysis of “The Making of Malaysia”) and meets serious difficulties in Chapter 8 (“Politics and Government”), with loss of direction, and lapsing into depreciatory cliché, and some surprising inaccuracy. For instance, the fifteen Singapore Members of Parliament in the 1963 Federal Parliament are said to have been “elected” (p. 118); the descriptions of the constitutional crises in Sarawak, 1966, and Kelantan, 1977, badly exaggerate and understate, respectively, the role of central *realpolitik*, while the rise of a centrally directed coalition in Kelantan from 1973 is effectively denied (p. 121); and the Islamic Party seems to have been known only recently as PAS (p. 123). The most serious error concerns the alleged abolition of Chinese-medium primary education (pp. 227, 249, that is, in Chapter 12, “Education, Language and Culture”, and Chapter 13, “A Changing Society”). Equally mysterious is the claim that Britain has recognized the present government in Cambodia (p. 208, that is, in Chapter 11, “Defence and Foreign Policy”, which deals briefly with the new situation in Indochina and its impact on Malaysia and ASEAN).

The two Guthries colleagues who read the manuscript missed the errors and presumably found it acceptable that new intellectual currents in Malay nationalism are left out entirely (but for one footnote on Islamic revival), and that the New Economic Policy is written up in a frequently uncomplimentary tone. The writer is almost “trendy” in his concern about inequalities in contemporary Malay society (even taking the neo-Marxist Kessler at face value on Kelantan), but if the Malay successor élite is not optimally “accountable” to those for whom it acts “in trust” (p. 153), one is tempted to point out that Guthrie Corporation was not accountable to the local population either. This, at any rate, is a Malay nationalist

perspective on the post-colonial economy, which should have received prominence in a book which has much to say about rubber. The fact that it has not, but that the author responds to the new Malaysia with more than a hint of alienation and incomprehension, not only flaws the presentation, but may throw unintended light on some of the causes of recent Anglo-Malaysian tensions.

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