Malayan Decolonisation and Imperial Policy: Negotiating the Terrain

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Introduction

The process of decolonisation continues to attract much scholarly interest judging by the substantial research produced in the last two decades. The availability of previously classified sources in particular has stimulated this renewed interest. An engaging debate is taking place among historians who have chosen this historical inquiry. Among the main debating points are: to what extent did Britain choose to decolonise; the influence of nationalist movements on the decolonisation process; the impact of economic conditions in Britain after the Second World War on the disintegration of Empire; and the influence of international relations on imperial policy. As yet, the debate remains inconclusive and new interpretations continue to surface from time to time.

The decolonisation process and the transfer of power in Malaya is also a subject of much debate. The topic, however, is often addressed as part of larger themes and some interesting work have surfaced in recent years. Anthony Stockwell's three-volume series entitled Malaya, a compilation of important political documents related to the decolonisation process in Malaya, is perhaps the exception as it focuses entirely on Malaya. In an earlier work, Porter and Stockwell provided insight into the workings of the Colonial Office and how decisions were made by officials in London and at the High Commissioner's office in Malaya.

Researching the process of decolonisation inevitably requires the examination of fairly wide-ranging primary sources—imperial records, documents of nationalist movements, personal records of colonial