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Peace comes to a 'bad' town—after five years

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Peace comes to a 'bad' town—after five years

by

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GELDARD

KAJANG is a Malay word, the name of a type of natural roofing material. But in English, Chinese, Tamil and Malay it has also come to mean blood and violence, the bayonet and the aimed gun.

Kajang is the main town of Ulu Langat district in South Selangor. It is on the main trunk road 18 miles south of Kuala Lumpur.

Five years ago my work as a reporter has taken me to Kajang many times.

...was to see violence or the results of violence. For almost 12 months I have had to go there.

On Thursday, the fifth anniversary of the declaration of the Emergency, I went to Kajang again.

I found a Kajang no longer a place of fear and suspicion. The tragic things that have happened to Kajang and its people since 1948 are but a memory, an unpleasant memory, but no longer a guide to terrors to come.

For now the people of Kajang have regained their confidence and their town is as nearly peaceful as any place can be in the Federation as yet. On the long, hot day of the Emergency and its yet time for the last shot to be fired.

IN KAJANG on Thursday I saw two planters' wives in a car. Nothing special about that. Not unless you flick your memory back to even a year ago, never mind four or five years. The car I saw today had no ugly armour plating, no special constables with heavy rifles sat with the two women, and there were no rifles in the shopping baskets.

Yet how different it was a year ago. Since the day in July 1948 when little Bobby Dunlop was murdered as he sat in his parents and 12-year-old brother in the car. They were taken to safety from their estate a few miles from Kajang town.

They did not get very close to that safety. The Kajang Gang of terrorists, then powerful and vicious, waited by the side of the estate road and they killed that little boy and wounded his parents and brother.

The blood of a child on that

The blood of a child on that estate road was the signal of absolute outrage and terror, and a sign to the planters of Kajang district that they were in the front line of a battle of death in which no quarter would be given.

So the planters strengthened their defences and practised their aim. With even greater urgency for four long years the loaded gun was beside the pillow in the estate bedroom, ready at the hip in the club and the cinema, and at night the croak of the bullfrog was disturbed by the angry and terrifying explosion of enemy rifles.

Day and night there was danger at every turn on the lonely estate. Yet today the guns are in desk drawers, under piles of papers and letters, and the planters' wives can come to Kajang unafraid and unarmed.



AND the bloodstains on the floor of a coffee-shop in the main street of Kajang have long been washed away. On Thursday the old men gossiped around the table on that spot. But a year ago it was still a place of fear, as it had been since the day in 1950 when terrorists came through the back door and shot an innocent man dead.

And the taps in Kajang now give water. But the people remember August 1949 when the Kajang Gang smashed two miles of pipeline and cut the town off from its water supply because the people were not helping them. For days 31,000 suffered hardship as a result.



DAY after day for four years, Kajang was reminded of the Emergency. Fighting could be heard.

sometimes near, sometimes in

the distance. The crump of mortars, the rumble of bombs. The sudden dash of police trucks loaded with armed men of a jungle squad, leaving the police station, the bodies of terrorists being dumped unceremoniously in the police station yard, where all who passed by could see them, the funeral processions.

For four years these things happened many times. But in the past year the sounds and signs of terrorism have faded, and Kajang has followed other towns back to the near-normal.

The District Officer, Tan Haji Abdul Aziz, told me: "Oh yes, things are better here now, very much better. I have been here for three years and it is easy for me to see the change that has come in the past year."

He was specially encouraged by the new attitude of the people in the outlying villages. "We used to visit them and get blank looks and the Chinese pretended that they did not understand Malay or English. But now we get smiles and co-operation, and we can talk together. They all have a greater confidence now."

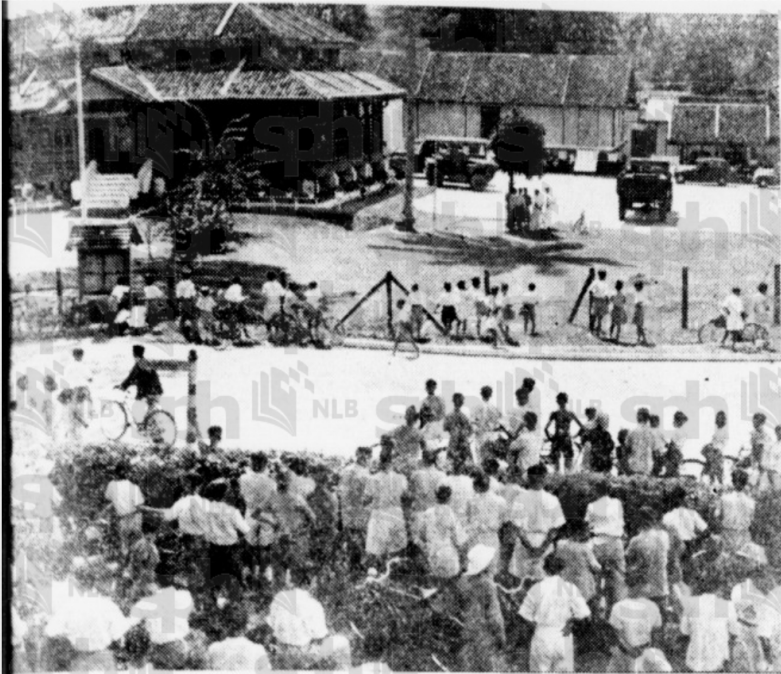
DURING Coronation Week every village, as well as Kajang town, had celebrations, and all races joined in whole-heartedly.

The village committees too are becoming lively bodies now. There is eagerness to take part in civic life. Truly a vast change in the attitude of the people.

But there are still terrorists in the hills close by the town. Communists are still around the villages and kampongs and on the estates.

There are still incidents.

There was a murder last month, and shots were fired at a police truck on the main road on the night of June 6. But to the people of Kajang, life is now delightful. When for months you have had to stay indoors night after night because of a strict curfew, freedom tastes good. The people of Kajang hope that the sixth year of the Emergency will allow them to wipe out the bad record, and the name of their town will once again mean only something that can give shelter.



Kajang—in the old days. Hundreds of people crowd the street beside the police station to watch the arrival of dead bandits after a clash with the First Suffolks

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Last Updated 2023-01-31