Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in SINGAPORE

Beng-Huat Chua

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For Evelyn, Emily and Timothy

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Preface

The ruling People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore has prided itself on its purely pragmatic approach to the recurrent problems confronted by the island-state. That pragmatism has been extolled, in particular, over the way in which the trauma and tribulations of separation from Malaysia were overcome to national advantage. Dr Chua Beng Haut has put that proprietary pragmatism under his intellectual microscope to expose its ideological dimension and purpose as well as to demonstrate its mutability. In this set of separate but closely interconnected essays, he argues that in fact ideology has been consciously formulated and then reformulated beyond pragmatism by the PAP to serve its version of an appropriate political order. Such reformulation has been necessary in Singapore because the successful utilisation of an initial ideology based on individualistic premises has given rise to problems of political control. For that reason, as he explains, the political and ideological work of government is never done. A founding social contract between government and electorate in which legitimacy had been accorded on the basis of an economic nexus has had to be revised with changing economic and social circumstances as well as changing generations.

In his challenging and robust analysis, Dr Chua tracks and interprets the process of ideological reformulation within Singapore from the onset of PAP rule. At issue in this volume are the underlying causes in the refashioning of state ideogy driven by the relationship between phenomenal economic achievement and striking social change. Singapore's experience of so-called developmental authoritarianism has not been unique in East Asia. Dr Chua is at pains to point out, however, that the object of ideological reformulation in Singapore's case has been to obstruct and to deny any logical linear

move to liberal democracy exemplified by the experiences of Taiwan and South Korea. The PAP's conception of good goverment has caused it to impose its own version of communitarian democracy appropriate to an island-state whose economic achievement cannot overcome an intrinsic vulnerability. Although specific to Singapore, these essays make a stimulating contribution to the important intellectual debate about the relationship between economic development, social change and political order in newly industrialising East Asia.

Michael Leifer

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Some of the chapters have appeared in several places, permissions to reprint them here in modified form are gratefully acknowledged: Chapters 2 and 3 appeared in *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science,* Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore; Chapter 4 in Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (eds) *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore,* Institute of Southeast Asian Studies; Chapter 6 in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* and Chapter 7 appeared in German in *Social Welt.*

Introduction

Singapore's successful capitalist economic development over more than three decades is by now legend. Lesser known are the cultural underpinnings of that growth. A set of prerequisite cultural values and appropriate attitudes had to be inculcated in the population of Singapore in order for the economy to take off and for subsequent sustained growth. A massive cultural transformation was necessary to bring the population in line with the cultural requirements of capitalist industrialisation, given the prevailing pre-industrial entrepôt trade economy of Singapore since its colonisation in 1819 until the late 1950s. The People's Action Party (PAP) that has governed Singapore from 1959 has achieved this transformation through the judicious use of both state and non-state ideological institutions since it assumed state power.

In spite of its own insistence that it is unencumbered by ideology, the PAP's ideological success may be interpreted, albeit in retrospect, within a neo-Marxist conception of the processes of ideological formation in the development of a new social order. One may be tempted to suggest that this should not be surprising; after all, during its political ascendancy, the PAP was in coalition with communists and party leaders have admitted to having learned some lessons about mass organising from their partners. To give in to this temptation, however, may actually attribute to the PAP too much forward ideological planning. Indeed, the Party takes pride in its self-proclaimed 'pragmatism' in responding to situations at hand rather than in ideological commitment, let alone ideological planning over a sustained period of time. From some of the contradictions that its policies have put in place in the social body, an absence of ideological commitment seems apparent. Nevertheless, this

introduction will show how closely the processes of ideological formation of Singapore fit conceptually into a neo-Marxist framework.

PROCESSES OF IDEOLOGICAL FORMATION

Marx has suggested that the very first item on the political agenda, after a revolutionary group has captured state power, is to 'universalise' the historically determined ideas and interests which led the group to power. This universalisation is essential to his suggestion that the dominant ideas of an epoch are the dominant ideas of the ruling class (Marx 1970). Successful universalisation is itself dependent on the ability of the revolutionary group to 'not sacrifice the actual interests of the subordinate classes but rather to some extent realise those of the subordinated classes by sacrificing some of its own material interests' (Hyug, 1991:128). Members of the revolutionary group would have to distance themselves from the corporate interests of their own class and join forces with other subordinated groups if they were to articulate the ideas and interests of the emerging coalition, and in so doing provide moral leadership during the transition to a new normative moral order.

If subsequent societal material transformation were successful, the universalised ideas and interests would have been transformed into the normative value system, that is the ideological system, of the new social order. The new ideological/normative order is sustained through the voluntaristic production and reproduction of 'acceptable' and 'appropriate' routine social practices of the population. The ideological concepts are revitalised anew each time they are used to rationalise the practices. Through such a closed logical sequence the ideological/normative system is transformed into the cognitive framework which delineates the boundaries and defines the substance of what phenomenologists call the 'taken-for-granted-common-sense-reality' of everyday life world, one which has lost its 'consciousness of historicity' (Hall, Lumley and McLennan, 1978:50).

This new normative order would then also provide the conceptual and moral boundary, for state interventions into the social body to be rationalised, criticised and defended. Social control imposed by the ruling group is likely to be voluntarily accepted by the governed as necessary and 'enabling' interventions to achieve certain desirable ends. That such social control and state intervention may

be voluntarily accepted by those subjected to them suggests that the 'legitimacy' of a regime is not to be evaluated in terms of some pre-selected political philosophy, such as liberal democracy. Rather, the issue of legitimacy should be raised *in situ* within the ideological/normative system which the regime is relentlessly attempting to institutionalise. The possible meeting of the government and the governed at the ideological level should result in a high degree of legitimacy for the former and a high degree of social stability, where specific but effective coercion is used only against those who do not share the same normative values.

However, as suggested, such a new normative order will come about only if societal material transformation is successful. This points to Gramsci's insistence that hegemony/consensus cannot be maintained at the level of ideas alone but 'must also be economic' (quoted in Hyug, 1991:127). It must necessarily be supported by the ruling group's ability to improve the material life of the governed if the extant ideas and values are to retain ideological currency. Moral leadership of the governing is therefore to a significant extent underwritten by the leaders' ability to improve the economic well-being of the people. Indeed, the desire for economic growth may itself be inserted into the ideological system, thereby justifying the need to rearrange existing social structures and organisations to ensure the growth. Subsequent economic success 'validates' and thus legitimatises the ideological concepts themselves. A materially transformed society governed by a new set of normative values may then be denoted as one in which the political leaders govern through moral leadership backed by necessary coercion, by 'ideological hegemony' in the best of Gramscian terms.

The term 'hegemony' carries with it a sense of external imposition by the state on its citizens. However, for all who abide by the new moral order, the resultant social stability signifies a condition of high 'value consensus' between the leaders and the led. The proper denotation of such a condition should therefore be ideological hegemony/value consensus or to simplify, hegemony/consensus.

Unfortunately for the ruling group, hegemony/consensus invariably tends to weaken once the historical conditions that enabled its emergence and consolidation begin to change as a result of both the government's own policies and external social forces. Taking a long view, establishment of an ideological hegemony/consensus is but an essential stage for the development of a new

social order. Progressive decline of its penetration and embeddedness in the social consciousness of the population is to be anticipated. As this decline sets in, the ideological condition becomes increasingly characterised by a loosely held mass loyalty to the nation. The political strategy of the ruling group must adjust accordingly by absorbing, through co-optation, into its fold potential emergent antagonists that may threaten its continuing political dominance. The political and ideological work of the governing is, therefore, never done.

IDEOLOGICAL FORMATION OF THE PAP GOVERNMENT

The above conceptualisation of ideological formation of new states can be fruitfully used to reinterpret, theoretically, the ideological trajectory of Singapore under the PAP regime. For Singapore to develop economically, a massive cultural transformation of its population was necessary. The historically determined condition at the time of political independence was distilled and conceptualised by the PAP into an issue of the 'survival of the nation' that could be resolved by successful capitalist industrial development. From then on, this 'ideology of survival' has served as the basic concept for the rationalisation of state policies that extend beyond economics to other spheres of social life. If a measure of social control can be shown to contribute to economic growth, it is considered as necessary to survival *per se* and hence, 'pragmatic'.

The depth of ideological hegemony/consensus of the PAP government was clearly evident in the common sense of the population; thus, its electoral popularity. This had enabled it to introduce certain 'unpleasant' social policies without apparent damage to its political dominance and legitimacy to rule. However, the weakening of the hegemony/consensus became noticeable from the early 1980s. In 1981, it lost a single seat in a by-election, the first since 1968. Subsequently its electoral support declined in each successive election in 1984, 1988 and 1991, from a commanding 75 per cent of all popular votes to around 60 per cent, which remains, of course, a sizeable majority by any standards. Nevertheless, the erosion is watched with concern by the Party.

The erosion coincided with the retirement of the first generation of political leaders that had governed since independence in 1965, and with demographic changes in the electorate; an increasing proportion of the population has had no experience of the

historical conditions that surrounded the founding of the new nation. The changed circumstance led the second generation PAP leaders to try and seek a 'new' consensus with the electorate by reformulating and/or replacing some of the ideological concepts for the nation. By the end of 1980s, the process of ideological hegemony/consensus had run its anticipated trajectory; beginning with the inscription, followed by the entrenchment of a new set of historically determined ideas in the body social and body politic, there now emerges an increasingly differentiated set of opinions and views among the economically and ethnically stratified population, held together by loosely observed mass loyalty to the nation.

The chapters in this collection, written over the decade from the early 1980s to the early 1990s, track the ideological development process in Singapore. Each chapter analyses a specific set of ideological terms and their effects in particular policies and/or cultural contexts in this trajectory. To provide a sense of overall coherence of the ideological concepts discussed, the first chapter charts the historical evolution of the ideological sphere in Singapore. This history began with Lee Kuan Yew's very first attempt to develop a sense of the 'nation' and of 'national interests', so as to enable the multi-ethnic population to 'imagine' that they share a 'common faith' and destiny. This common faith was constantly invoked as the reason for the ensuing ideological and institutional entrenchment of the concepts of 'survival' and 'pragmatism' in public policies and popular consciousness. Finally, the weakening hold of pragmatism gave rise to the current search for a set of new concepts, such as 'Shared Values' and communitarianism, to lend a new consensus and a new definition of politics for the coming decade.

Chapters 2 and 3 discuss sequentially the presence an ideological hegemony/consensus within the body politic of Singapore in terms of an 'ideology of pragmatism'. Against the prevalent conventional understanding of lay individuals and political scientists in Singapore that the concept of 'pragmatism' is non-ideological, its thoroughly ideological character is disclosed analytically. The penetration of the concept in the social consciousness is initially demonstrated through an analysis of the mundane and pervasive activity of political rumour-mongering in Singapore. This is followed by the working out of the operational logic of

'pragmatism' as an ideological system, exposing simultaneously its internal operational weaknesses.

The efficacy of societal management strategies that are rationalised within the ideology of pragmatism, with its economic instrumental rationality, is then analysed through the substantive cultural transformation of the Singaporean population into a disciplined industrial labour force. Chapter 4 is a phenomenologically descriptive essay which places side by side two snapshots of everyday life in Singapore before and after the rapid economic growth. The dramatic contrast of life under two different modes of economic production lends substance to abstract discussions of 'economic performance' in the literature on Singapore and, perhaps, by extension other Asian newly industrialising nations. This transformation of everyday life is subsequently subjected to conceptual analysis in Chapter 5. This chapter documents the ideological process in (1) the development of an autonomous state that authoritatively defines the 'national' interests, (2) the institutionalisation of a new economic order, and (3) the restructuring of the family, the education system and system of community organisation; in short, the institutionalisation of a new social order geared to act unilaterally in the direction of economic growth.

Concurrent with its effect in terms of the cultural transformation of the Singapore population, the hegemony/consensus of the ideology of pragmatism exercises its effect in the political sphere by pushing politics below the surface, that is, by its 'depoliticisation effect', first hinted in Chapter 2. The full impact of this, which acts to further reinforce the hegemony/consensus itself, is analysed through the very successful national public housing programme which accommodates more than 80 per cent of the population, more than adequately.

After more than two decades, the values requisite for capitalist growth, such as individualism and consumerism, begin to have their effects on the social stability built on concepts of 'survival' and 'pragmatism'. The latter has not disappeared entirely but has been sidelined, while the ruling PAP government has added another layer in its ideological work to retain its link with the population. Individualism is reframed from a necessary value for capitalism to one which is 'detrimental' to social order. The battle line is drawn between the Confucian and 'collectivist' tradition that apparently underpins the rapid post-Second World War economic growth in

East Asia and the individualistic tendency of Western capitalism. Chapter 7 analyses the failed attempt by the PAP government to 'Confucianise' at least the Chinese majority, if not all Singaporeans.

With ideological hegemony/consensus weakening, Singapore entered by the mid-1980s, a stage of political development, in which the structural contradictions of capitalism have been felt increasingly. These include the emergence of class differences, which are rationalised but not entirely successfully in terms of 'meritocracy', and of welfarism as an economic and political state management tool to cope with these differences. Concurrently, the constantly improving education of the population and the emergence of a middle class have brought with them an increasingly sophisticated electorate that knows how to use its vote to pressure the government for greater participation in national decision-making. Chapter 8 analyses the strategies that the PAP government has instituted to meet the demands generated by these developments. The second generation PAP government began to shed some of the authoritarian strictures of their predecessors and intensify the rhetoric of participation. The overall effect of the institutional changes is to cultivate a political 'middle ground' which potentially augurs well for further political democratisation.

This potential democratisation is, however, prevented from taking the course of liberal democracy. Instead, the formal democratic processes are to be framed within a 'communitarian' ideology; itself an evolution from earlier concepts of Confucianism and the so-called 'collectivism' of Asian traditions. Chapter 9 analyses the ideological ground on which the presumed differences between Asian and Western political values are drawn. Taking the claims of a communitarian democracy seriously, it seeks to locate the necessary conditions for such a system. In the end, it found the constraints placed by the PAP government on the mass media and on voluntary associations of the civil society to be serious obstacles to the forging of a communitarian democracy. The concluding chapter sums up the development and accounts for the apparent steady state of politics towards greater democratisation at the mid-1990s, awaiting fresh initiatives.

With the exception of the first and the last chapters, all the others were written as independent pieces to document different points in the ideological trajectory and for different occasions. Although much of the repetition of substantive material has been edited, some recurring substantive material has been retained in order to maintain

the logical and substantive coherence of each chapter and thereby to place the conceptual arguments in context. An advantage to this, at times slightly irritating, repetition is that each chapter continues to stand on its own in argument and therefore can be read independently of the others, if desired. Finally, the order of their appearance is aimed at ensuring the coherence of the collection as a single text, hence, the chapters are organised in terms of conceptual continuity rather than historical chronology.

Chapter 1

Ideological trajectory

From authoritarianism to communitarianism

Singapore as an independent polity was inconceivable before the event. Granted self-government in domestic affairs by the British colonial office in 1959, it was, however, difficult for its leaders to push on to the obvious next political step because an independent Singapore was thought to be 'a foolish and absurd proposition' (Lee Kuan Yew quoted in Drysdale, 1984:249) for largely economic reasons. Then, when import substitution was the development strategy favoured by decolonised states, island Singapore needed for its new industrialisation programme the larger market of peninsular Malaya.

The political leadership in Malaya was, however, not warm to the prospect of a merger. In the words of the then Prime Minister of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman, 'Naturally we didn't want Singapore' (Drysdale, 1984:258). Nevertheless, in May 1961 he announced, in Singapore, that 'the possibility of a merger with the Federation of the Borneo territories and Singapore could not be excluded' (Drysdale, 1984:260). This was because, according to Tunku, the British, fearing that an independent Singapore would fall into communist hands, had made the inclusion of Singapore as a condition for the merging of peninsular Malaya and the three British territories in Borneo (Drysdale, 1984:259). Lee Kuan Yew moved quickly to seize this opening and, in 1963, the Malaysia Federation was constituted, with North Borneo renamed Sabah. Membership proved politically difficult for Singapore, leading to its separation from Malaysia after two brief years. In August 1965 political independence was thrust upon its population (Yong, 1992:32–35). The unimaginable had become reality.

Throughout Singapore's journey to a reluctant independence, the PAP kept gaining political strength. Founded in 1954, it captured

state power in 1959. It then moved immediately to consolidate its power by suppressing opposition forces through repressive legislation. However, as the development strategies began to succeed and the material life of the population improved incrementally, an economic instrumental rationality, encapsulated ideologically in the PAP's concept of 'pragmatism', became increasingly accepted by the electorate. The latter, by and large, voluntarily lent its support to the PAP and the need for overt repression subsided. The PAP has since governed without a break for more than three decades, establishing a strong ideological hegemony throughout the 1960s and 1970s. It is likely to govern for a considerable period yet in the future.

It is easy empirically to stress the continuities of the long-established PAP regime. Both its early politically repressive strategies and the longevity of its first generation leadership have been read often as an 'unchanging' authoritarianism. It is then but a short step to attribute Singapore's economic success to this authoritarianism; contributing to the problematic general theoretical proposition that authoritarianism is a necessary pre-condition to economic development for Third World nations (Wong, 1991). As the majority of post-colonial authoritarian governments have failed to achieve rapid economic growth, it is obvious that the authoritarianism of the PAP leadership and its allied governmental strategies cannot singularly account for Singapore's economic success, even less the PAP's political popularity and its apparently invincible hold on power.

On the contrary, PAP's popularity lies significantly in its ability to develop an ideological system which was able to crystallise and reflect, relatively accurately, the underdeveloped material condition of the island population at the time of independence. This enabled it to provide the leadership which united the population behind its developmental policies, which in turn delivered material returns to the governed. The success of PAP's authoritarianism is thus itself to be explained by its acceptability to or at least toleration by the population through the presence of an ideological hegemony or consensus.

As the realities of underdevelopment were replaced by those of economic growth, the initial ideological frame began to lose its hold on the population. With hindsight, the ideological currency of economic instrumentalism may be said to have been waning since the beginning of the 1980s, when one of its constituent values,

individualism, became a target of PAP's ideological concerns. Nevertheless, this development became apparent by the unexpected sharp decline of electoral support in the 1984 election. After that the need to establish a new ideological consensus with the electorate became an explicit item on the political agenda.

Changes in the ideological sphere in Singapore may be characterised thus: a long period of continuity, ruptured by discontinuity at a certain juncture, and followed subsequently by evolutionary changes once the discontinuity is absorbed and political adjustment made by the regime itself. So conceived, the critical break may be located at the beginning of the 1980s, a period in which individualism was inverted from being a much promoted value to one that had to be surgically removed from the body politic. The surgery was to be performed with the enthronement of new ideological concepts to replace individualism as a motivating force among the population. The search for appropriate and efficacious concepts began with moral education through religious knowledge and Confucianism, in the early 1980s, which subsequently evolved into the currently exhorted Shared Values and communitarianism.

This ideological trajectory, from the rise of the PAP to its hegemonic position to the current state of ideological uncertainty is tied to the specific concepts that were developed as responses to various historical turning-points. Therefore, an understanding of the internal logic and evolution of this trajectory is central to the understanding of the continuity of the single party dominance of the PAP in the Singapore polity.

ASCENDANCY OF THE PAP: IDEOLOGICAL LEADERSHIP IN DECOLONISATION

At its founding in 1954, the PAP was constituted by a coalition of left-wing unionists and a group of British-educated professionals under the common banner of anti-colonialism. If the unionists' anti-colonialist motivation was transparent, that of the professionals was analytically enigmatic.

In classic Gramscian fashion, like all groups that successfully transformed their respective polities, this professional group was a breakaway fragment from its own class and corporate interests. Instead of continuing to enjoy the advantages granted to them by the colonial regime, the fragment saw its long-term interest in

identification with other subaltern classes. It was able to articulate and represent the anti-colonial sentiments of all the subaltern classes as the general or universal interest of the society and in so doing set itself up to lead the decolonisation process. This English-speaking class-fragment was already in a position of ideological leadership even before it captured state power.[1]

However, without access to popular support, the fragment had to form a coalition with unionists and other left-wing organisations, whose constituencies were the disenfranchised and discriminated-against mass of workers and Chinese-educated youth. On the other hand, faced with the colonial regime's readiness to outlaw pro-communist activities, the left welcomed the veneer of 'respectability' that the English-speaking class-fragment provided. The result was a political party with two distinct factions, each with its own agenda but united by a sense of mutual need and anti-colonialism.

Realising that it would be difficult to govern through a partially elected Parliament in which power remained in the hands of *ex-officio* colonial administrators, the PAP nominally contested the first general election six months after its founding just 'to secure a forum in the Legislative Assembly to propagate the Party's objectives' (Fong, 1979:26). The Labour Front, a pro-labour socialist party, which had failed to forge a coalition with the PAP (Chan, 1984:75), won the most seats and formed the first elected government. The PAP won three out of four constituencies contested. The Progressive Party, a bastion of English-educated, Straits-born Chinese, was decimated. The results showed that anti-colonial parties with social democratic tendencies were in the ideological ascendancy.

After the Labour Front government assumed state power in 1955, Chinese-educated students who had been mobilised politically by their resistance to the colonial regime's intention to impose military conscription on them joined cause with the workers. Picket lines of striking workers, unionised under the leadership and legal counsel of prominent PAP leaders, were supported by well-organised student contingents. Events came to a head when skirmishes between workers/students and police turned violent during strikes at a private bus company on May 12, leaving four people dead. The strike was settled two days later in favour of the workers.

Then, the first Chief Minister, David Marshall resigned after a brief fourteen months in office. This was in keeping with his promise that he would do so if he failed to obtain independence for Singapore. He was replaced by Lim Yew Hock who moved to crush the popular

mobilisation by deregistering radical student associations and unions and detaining their leaders. Riots broke out in late October 1956 but subsided within a week because the police were well prepared (Clutterbuck, 1984:121–133). With their repression went any credibility on the part of the Labour Front as an anti-colonial socialist party and Lim was himself reduced, in popular parlance, to representation as a 'running dog' of colonialism, leaving the PAP as the sole leader of the anti-colonial movement. Nevertheless, crushing the popular mobilisation did induce the British to soften their stand on 'independence' for Singapore. Full self-government except for defence and foreign policies was agreed to in 1957, to be granted after general elections in 1959. Buoyant because of its obvious political popularity, the PAP vigorously contested these elections and won forty-three out of the fifty-one seats. Lee Kuan Yew accepted the office of Prime Minister, after securing the release of PAP left-wing unionists from political detention. All right-wing political parties were reduced to insignificance.

The election victory moved the PAP from the periphery to the centre of power. To its ideological leadership was thus added the monopoly of state power. The PAP was in possession of 'the means to push forward [its] hegemony to the fullest possible extension' (Sassoon, 1980:129). But first, the internal division in the Party had to be reckoned with.

The first instance of overt intra-party struggle came with a by-election in Anson constituency, in 1961, for the seat vacated by the untimely death of the PAP incumbent (Drysdale, 1984:242 and 264). The left threatened to switch electoral support to ex-Chief Minister Marshall, if the Lee faction refused to redress its grievances against a whole battery of repressive measures. These included absence of civil liberties and the continuing detention of political detainees under the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance and the Internal Security Council; deprivation of citizenship to left-wing individuals; attempts to control the radical trade union movement instead of helping it to consolidate its political base; and finally, absence of intra-party democracy within the PAP (Rodan, 1989:67) because the cadre system of electing executives, introduced during the detention of the left-wing leaders, had deprived the latter access to power in the Party (Bloodworth, 1986:185).

When the Lee faction stood firm, the left delivered its threat and caused the PAP to lose the seat. This gave Lee the chance to force the intra-party division into the open by calling a confidence vote on

his own government. In the ensuing vote, eight of the left-wing faction crossed the floor and five abstained; the government survived with the majority of one. The thirteen members of the PAP were immediately expelled and they, along with the left unionists, formed the Barisan Sosialis. Massive ground defection from the PAP followed (Bloodworth, 1986:243), leaving the Lee faction with little organised support base but in control of the state.

HEGEMONY BEGINS: ELABORATION OF A 'NATIONAL INTEREST'

Against the left, the Cabinet 'reconstituted' itself as the 'moderate' faction and moved to regain its political leadership by appealing directly to the electorate. Devoid of a party base but with constitutional power in hand, the Cabinet identified itself as the 'government' which must define and act in terms of the 'national' interests, instead of the 'sectarian' interests of the left. At that time, Singapore as a 'nation' was yet unformed. The construction of this 'nation', as a necessary 'myth' for the population (Yong, 1992), was addressed ideologically in a series of one-sided radio broadcasts, which Lee called the 'battle for merger', delivered during the long run-up to the referendum on merger, that is, Malaysia, on September 1, 1962.

In these broadcasts, he began by characterising/exposing the communists as, ironically, pro-colonialism. He argued that they would rather Singapore remained a colony so that their struggles could be seen as anti-colonial and thus occupy the political moral high ground; whereas struggles against a popularly elected government and popular nationalist leaders would expose their anti-nationalist sentiments (Lee, 1962:45). The distinction between the 'popularly elected PAP government' and the 'communists' enabled Lee to claim political legitimacy for himself and the PAP government, in spite of the fact that both had come to power through the massive electoral mobilisation by the left faction, which he was now casting as an anti-nationalist fringe. It was as nationalists that the PAP spoke to the 'nation' and the 'people'.

This 'nation' and 'people' needed to be textually constructed in the broadcast too.[2] However, constitutive components were at hand: 'The Malay-speaking, Tamil-speaking and the English-speaking groups are quite certain that Lim Chin Siong and his Communist friends are up to no good, and consider that they should be put away and not allowed to do mischief' (Lee, 1962:56). The obstacle to

such construction was the care needed to shape a crucial Chinese component to fill out the abstract ideological concept of 'nation': distinctions had to be made between the alleged communists and those who were not, otherwise the government would fall 'into the Communist trap of allowing themselves to be presented as anti-Chinese culture and Chinese education' (Lee, 1962:58). The sense of a 'national constituency' that emerged was therefore defined by its supposedly essentially multiracial, non-communist and/or anti-communist orientation.

The 'nation' of racially diverse 'non-communist' population had concrete material interests which again could be aggregated in the same textual strategy into the 'national' interests:

> The English-educated want to be assured that merger does not mean that four to one ratio between Malays and non-Malays will apply in the Singapore section of the civil service.
> Businessmen, contractors and bus companies want to be assured that priority of tenders and licences will be as before, with no priorities or special rights for anybody.
> Chinese parents who want their children to go to Chinese schools want to be assured that the present policy of equal treatment of all streams of education will go on.
> Workers want to be assured that our pro-labour policy will continue.
> Merchants want to be assured that our free port status and our free trade with all countries will continue, and that our trading links with the whole world will remain as they have been, free and easy.
> Every legitimate interest will be protected.
>
> (Lee, 1962:78–79)

The aggregate effect of this particular juxtaposition of the self-evident anti-communist multiracial constituent groups, and their equally self-evident economic interests in their daily life was to produce an authoritative image of the 'nation' and 'national interests', respectively, and in turn of Singapore as a political entity. The presence of these groups and interests was never actually substantiated. It is in this precise sense of being authoritative without factual evidence that the political consequences achieved by such textual strategies may be said to be unavoidably ideological.

Two ideological/political effects were achieved. First, the conceptually/ideologically reconstituted 'non-communist' national

constituency provided a focus for a large segment of population who were carried along by the anti-colonial mobilisation but were not necessarily communist-inclined. It enabled this constituency to get a sense of cohesiveness and act accordingly as an 'imagined community'.[3] Second, it redirected the attention of this mobilised constituency from political struggles to economic development. In this redirection, Lee sought to conflate politics and economics: 'Political problems ultimately mean the problem of how we make our living, how we can give everyone a fair and equal chance to study and work and have a full life' (Lee, 1962:83); this ideological reduction is still central to the PAP government today.

Alongside the ideological construction of a 'non-communist nation', the PAP government began to speed up its industrialisation programme and increase its social expenditure, especially in housing and education. By the time of the referendum on merger in September 1962, these programmes had begun to show impressive results. These improvements were 'real reforms of benefit to the working class' which, as such, were essential to the direct appeal and political penetration of the PAP into the social base, in spite of an absence of political organisation (Rodan, 1989:66). These improvements lent evidence to the PAP's ideological construction of a nation with common material interests.[4] The result was that 71 per cent of enfranchised individuals voted for the PAP proposal in the referendum. It should be noted that all the three alternative proposals presented to the electorate in the referendum assumed merger to be a given. They differed only in details regarding the relationship between Singapore and the federal government of Malaysia (Drysdale, 1984:304).

ELIMINATING THE OTHER

After the referendum, the PAP government intensified its use of monopoly state power to repress oppositional forces. In February 1963, a raid codenamed Operation Cold Store detained more than a 100 radicals (Clutterbuck, 1984:158). This raid was authorised by the Internal Security Council in which Malaya held the determining vote in a council of seven members, three from the elected Singapore government and three British officials (Clutterbuck, 1984:144–145). Thus, althought present at the meeting in which the detention decision was taken, Lee Kuan Yew was able to minimise his role in it (Clutterbuck, 1984:159). Having so deprived the Barisan Socialis of its

leaders, the PAP announced a snap general election. As a testimony of its strength, Barisan captured 33.3 per cent of the popular votes, winning thirteen seats, relative to the PAP's 46.9 per cent and thirty-seven seats. Unfortunately, it failed to consolidate its base as the only viable opposition party to the PAP. When the new legislative assembly was sworn in, three of the thirteen had been arrested and two had fled the country (Bloodworth, 1986:287). Barisan Socialist secretary-general imposed a boycott on its MPs sitting in Parliament. Subsequent resignations in 1965 of the remaining eight MPs gave the PAP the opportunity to pick up more seats through by-elections. The gross tactical mistake of boycotting Parliament spelt the end of a viable opposition voice in Singapore for decades to come.[5]

On the other hand, the PAP's victory was also impressive. Its direct appeal to the electorate, including almost a year of arduous personal campaigning by Lee Kuan Yew himself in all the constituencies, particularly those which had voted against the PAP during the referendum on merger (Bloodworth 1986:279–280), had obviously paid off and in the process galvanised the population into a sense of 'nation' and 'a people'.

As Singapore was obliged to leave Malaysia in 1965, the victory for merger was short-lived. The resulting ideological gains of having configured the 'nation' and its 'people' were, however, far more lasting to both the PAP government and to newly independent Singapore. The political process had enabled the government to articulate a new vision for Singapore and Singaporeans which emphasised economic development and to represent this orientation as the only rational choice for the population. This constituted the basis of its intellectual leadership for Singaporeans. The subsequent successful transformation of the economy stands as both the realisation of the concrete interests of the subordinated masses and the 'moral' component of political leadership (cf. Gramsci, 1971:161 and 182), which in turn contributed to the PAP's sustained hold on state power and the monopolisation of coercion.

ON SURVIVAL AND PRAGMATISM

Expulsion from Malaysia meant the loss of the potential common market, calling into question the very survival of Singapore as a city-state. Economic difficulties were intensified by disruptions of the commodity trade with Indonesia, which began with the Indonesian policy of confrontation against the formation of Malaysia

(Clutterbuck, 1984:158–160). Furthermore, severe loss in employment and national revenue was in prospect as a result of Britain bringing forward its military withdrawal from Singapore to the early 1970s. Although suppressed politically, the radical left continued to have serious influence. Also, although the period of membership in Malaysia was brief, it had nevertheless given Singapore's minority Malay population a sense of its own interests and political significance as a community in the larger regional picture. This gave rise to potentially disruptive demands on communal grounds with racial riots of 1964 (Chan, 1971).[6] It was within this historical context that the ideological leadership of the PAP found its full expression, beyond anti-colonialism.

The PAP government was quick in translating the historical conditions conceptually. It thematised them into an 'ideology of survival', around which several important generalised policy orientations were to be rationalised. Most significantly, if Singapore were to survive, the population must be transformed into a tightly organised and highly disciplined citizenry all pulling in the same direction with a sense of public spiritedness and self-sacrifice in the national interest (Chan, 1971); first and foremost that of economic development on the national level and 'making a living' at the individual level. As part of the disciplining process, possible bases for organised sectional interests had to be controlled, the most significant of which was the subordination of the trade unions to the PAP government in an unequal 'symbiotic relationship' (Lee Kuan Yew, *Straits Times* 27 Dec., 1980).

In August 1966, exactly a year after a reluctant independence, the Trade Union (Amendment) Bill made it illegal for strikes and other industrial actions to be taken by any union without the consent of the majority of its members, to be obtained through secret ballot. Two years later, new legislation altered the extant working conditions for the worse; the working week was lengthened while the number of public holidays, annual leave and sick leave was reduced, and management prerogatives expanded (Rodan, 1989:91–92). The sectional interest of labour was to be subjugated to the larger interest of national survival. The primary task of unions was redefined by the then Minister of Labour, to one of 'finding practical solutions' to problems posed by 'the new and harsh economic realities' which confronted the government, the worker and the boss alike; solutions which required 'discipline and sacrifice' from all (Rajaratnam, 1987:269–271).

The Minister's comments brought forth another ideological term which organised the daily operations of the PAP government. Since the necessity of economic growth had been ideologically raised to the 'only reality', any process that contributed to economic growth was therefore 'practical', indeed 'necessary' for the survival of the nation. 'Pragmatism' became the term used to gloss over economic instrumental rationality.

As Chapters 2 and 3 will show, a certain conceptual coherence has evolved around the two inextricably tied terms of 'survival' and 'pragmatism' during the years between 1968 and 1984. 'Survival' is repeatedly thematised discursively by the political leaders and often by the led too. Its connotative, ideological effect[7] provides the rationale for, and consequently generates, a 'crisis mentality' in government. This mentality in turn produces an overanxious tendency in the administrative machinery to take pre-emptory 'pragmatic' measures to avoid certain presumed problems, which may themselves be the unintended consequences of earlier policies. Indeed, precisely because of its utility in rationalising intervention, the idea of a 'crisis of survival' is periodically constructed in order to revive the legitimacy for repressive interventions (Devan and Heng, 1992).

The state has over the years thoroughly penetrated and controlled society in the name of ensuring economic growth. Schools, once financed and run by ethnic and local communities, have been nationalised and transformed into a system of stratified occupational training. The public housing programme benefited the populace but also simultaneously transformed them into dependants of the state. Community organising efforts in the high-rise, high-density housing estates are carried out in turn by government-sponsored agencies, controlled through the Prime Minister's Office. Historically, the negligence and inactivity of the colonial regime had produced a rich network of voluntary organisations, constitutive of a strong civil society, which carried out many such social welfare activities. In contrast, the penetration of PAP government/state progressively reduced not only the power but also the initiatives of these voluntary associations in community affairs (Chua, 1993).

Ironically, the independent state is also an interventionist state that reduces the power of the civil society, reducing the government/ people relationship to a bargain: extensive political and social administration for improved material life. The result, detailed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, is the cultural and material transformation of

Singapore's population into a disciplined labour force whose everyday life is subjected to the logic of industrial economy; all other means and markers of social organisation, such as ethnicity, are politically reduced to structural inefficacy. Yet, once the economic condition became stable and the livelihood of an increasingly educated population was perceivably secure there appeared, at the phenomenological horizon of this everything-is-unfolding-as-it-should society, the return of desires that were repressed in the exchange of political freedoms for improved material life. The unbottled desires, such as demands for greater individual autonomy and more room for debating public issues and decisions, have given rise to challenges to, or at least raised scepticism regarding the prevailing rationality of the hegemony of economics over all other spheres of life.

WEAKENING HEGEMONY OF PRAGMATISM

In the management of societies, successful formulae of an earlier historical period may prove unsuitable to a present which has been transformed precisely by past successes. The PAP government was to discover this in 1984. Meanwhile, the citizenry's appreciation of the rapid economic growth which had greatly improved their material life, gave the PAP four successive clean sweeps in the general elections between 1968 and 1980. During this period of unmitigated exercise of unilateral power in determining the shape of the daily life of the nation, the PAP as a political party became increasingly conflated with the Singapore government and Singapore state in an apparently seamless web. The PAP began to take the electorate's support for granted, with apparent disregard of the latter's sentiments or sensitivities. Assured of its own 'correctness' and of the 'necessity' and 'rationality' for continuing economic growth, the government's execution of its public policies was relentless. 'We made tough but unpopular policies' became a refrain of the Party/government.

The seemingly unquestioning support of these policies was more the result of rational agreements of the electorate, rather than any presumed 'disagreement' that required much toughness on the part of the government. Many of the so-called tough policies had calculable, tangible material outcomes that were obvious and agreeable to the population. However, as state interventions moved into less tangible features of social and personal life, where a

multiplicity of sentiments rule and agreements between people and government are characteristically weak, it became difficult for the latter to take action without political costs. This became clear, in 1984, when the PAP government imposed the very unpopular 'graduate mother policy'.

The 1980 census had showed that university graduate women were putting off marriage in favour of careers, and if married had fewer children than less well-educated, lower income women. Believing that a person's ability is essentially inherited, Lee Kuan Yew saw these trends, common in developed nations, as a 'thinning' of the 'talent' gene pool while the 'non-talented' genes continue their relative expansion unabated, spelling disaster in the long run for the island nation whose only resource is human intelligence. In typical crisis-orientated, pre-emptive fashion, policies were hastily formulated in 1983 to encourage marriage and increase childbirth among graduate women, with generous tax incentives. Conversely, the less educated women were encouraged to 'stop at two', preferrably one, with a cash grant of S$10,000 to their social security savings fund. Such blatantly unequal policies were off-handedly rationalised by the argument that 'nature is undemocratic' (*Straits Times,* 18 Aug., 1984).[8]

Convinced that the policy was 'rational', the PAP decided to tough it out in the face of public protest. This lost it an additional 12 per cent of its usual popular support with opposition securing 37 per cent in the 1984 general election. A post-election survey showed that the result was a venting of deep dissatisfaction not only with specific policies but more significantly with the style of the PAP (*Straits Times,* 10 April, 1985), such as 'arrogance of power, an inflexible bureaucracy, growing elitism, and the denial of consultation and citizen participation in decision-making' (Chan, 1989:82).

The size of the protest vote broke the spiral of silence which was sustained by an exaggerated sense, among the population, of fear of persecution that supposedly would visit anyone noted as a critic. Even its uncritical academic supporters were to interpret the election result as a decisive 'no' from the electorate 'to the PAP government's trespassing beyond the invisible but real line between the citizen's own prerogatives and his definition of national interests' (Quah and Quah, 1989:117) and began raising questions about the limits of government.

The result threw the PAP off track temporarily; self-criticism among its MPs and Ministers followed. Obviously, the authoritarian

approach based on 'pragmatism' to ensure 'survival', had lost much of its ideological currency. The ideological purchase of economic success had also lost some of its intensity. As a Minister said, 'We just can't always be telling them to compare their situation to that of the 50s and ask them to be grateful' (*Straits Times,* 19 Sept., 1984). When the new Parliament had its first seating, it modified the 'graduate mother policy'. The retreat showed that the PAP, like any government which depends on electoral legitimacy, is subject to public sanctions in spite of its absolute parliamentary dominance and professed 'toughness' against public sentiments.

During this brief period of confusion, a very significant characteristic of the PAP was disclosed or rather confirmed; namely, its deep scepticism towards common peoples' ability to make rational choices. This was made explicit in the emergence of the concept of 'freak elections'. Lee Kuan Yew read the election result as indicative of the electorate using the vote to push the PAP government without the risk of toppling it (Lew, 1989). He then raised the 'fear' that such a strategy could produce a 'freak election' resulting in less than able individuals being inadvertently elected to govern, thereby threatening national welfare. The term frames and interprets votes for opposition as irrational: as the opposition is not worthy, relative to the PAP candidates, voting for it in earnest is irrational and consequently all votes for it are to be read as 'protest' votes based on emotions rather than reason. Within this frame, an election in which opposition parties come to form the government is presumed to be unintended by the electorate, it is therefore a 'freak', rather than a considered and rational choice. Since then, the term has become part of the vocabulary of Singapore politics and fear of its possible realisation has become embedded in the consciousness of segments of the population.

To prevent freak elections, Lee Kuan Yew suggested that perhaps the 'one man one vote' system should be examined, implying either that not every ordinary citizen should be trusted with the vote or, alternatively, befitting PAP elitism, citizens with above average qualifications could be given greater voting weight, as in the case of the former British practice of extra votes for university graduates (Lee, *Straits Times,* 21 Nov., 1992).[9] The scepticism towards electoral rationality has been shared by the new Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, who asks 'why when it comes to national leadership, selection is left to the 'spectators' when you never do it this way for a football team or other important job?', and when such

a process often led to the election of incompetent administrators of state affairs or worse, 'crooks and thieves' (*Sunday Times,* 13 Dec., 1992). However, since undemocratic procedures are no longer acceptable, other means of preventing the realisation of 'freak' elections must be found; one of these means is the nominated MP scheme, discussed later in this chapter.

OPENING UP THROUGH CONSULTATION

The 1984 electorial setback coincided with the transfer of leadership from the founding generation of the PAP to the next generation (except for Lee Kuan Yew, who remained the Prime Minister until Goh Chok Tong assumed the post in November, 1990). Correspondingly, the electorate is annually being replenished by younger and better-educated voters with no experience of past economic and political struggles but a 'keener awareness of the negative effect of an over-regulated society' (Quah, 1983:287). Furthermore, instead of the relative homogeneity of shared poverty of the 1960s, cultural and economic differences between individuals and groups have become more pronounced, not least of which are ethnic and class divisions. The new leadership felt that a new consensus was necessary in order to draw the electorate together, in spite of their differences, under the same set of ideological concepts.

For a start, the authoritarian 'tacit assumption that experts at the centre of government alone are in a position fully to comprehend the problems facing the polity and are the most competent to resolve them' (Sandhu and Wheatley, 1989:1083) had to be modified. The PAP feedback network of Party members and government-sponsored community organisations (Seah, 1985:173– 194) had obviously failed to communicate ground sentiments; this had to be rectified. Consequently, the new leaders professed the need and desire for greater public consultation in their decision-making. This was formalised by the establishment of a Feedback Unit in the Ministry of Community Development, which was to hold regular closed-door discussions with invited members of the public.

Consultation was to have significant effect on some important public policies, lending substance and credibility to the government's new strategy. An immediate effect was to be found in the reformulation of economic policy following the mini-recession in 1985, the first in nearly two decades of continued double-digit economic growth (Lim, 1989; Rigg, 1988). A high-profile

Economic Committee was convened under the chairmanship of the Minister of Trade and Industry, Lee Hsien Loong, to examine the cause and propose solutions to the recession. The Committee was supported by eight sub-committees, each conducting its own consultations with relevant individuals. In all, more than 1,000 individuals participated in the deliberations. Many of the Committee's recommendations, which advocated serious changes in the direction of future economic development, were adopted in principle by the government, including the promotion of the private sector as the engine of growth, divestment of government enterprises and support and promotion of the much-neglected indigenous small- and medium-sized enterprises (Report of the Economic Committee, 1986). The attention given to the local enterprises has also helped the small-and medium-sized entrepreneurs to establish a voice in the economic and political arena (Chalmers, 1992).

Another illustrative instance was the deliberations of the Parliamentary Committee, constituted in 1989, to rethink the land transportation system in view of the unabating expansion of car ownership in spite of prohibitively high taxes. Submissions to the Committee came from transportation associations, academic planners and economists, and lay individuals. These were supplemented by letters to the press and press interviews with Committee members. Its recommendations were debated in Parliament and in public forums, including a marathon session in which the Minister of Transportation promised not to terminate the meeting until all present had their questions discussed. The final set of regulations adopted in 1990 reflected modifications suggested by these processes. To complete the consultative cycle, then Prime Minister designate, Goh Chok Tong, held a dialogue session with 800 grassroots leaders to explain the measures adopted. The openness of the entire process was undoubtedly meant to exemplify the new consultative style of government (Chua, 1991a:255–256).

These instances notwithstanding, having been subjected to three decades of little or no say in public policies, Singaporeans have remained understandably sceptical of 'whether the government is engaging genuine consultation or merely mounting a public education exercise in the interest of consensus building' (Sandhu and Wheatley, 1989:1085). However, it should be noted that such a consultation process is unavoidably double-edged. While it gives the government an opportunity to control the range and propagation

of different views and to explain and convince the public of its policies, it also gives the public a voice which the government can only neglect by risking further public alienation and disaffection. Furthermore, once institutionalised, any attempt by the government to withdraw from the consultation process without sound reasons will undoubtedly incur political costs.

TRYING OUT NEW IDEOLOGICAL STRATEGIES AND CONCEPTS

The intensity of the car ownership debate indexed the presence of an increasingly affluent population afraid of being excluded from one of the trappings of middle-class life. In contrast, two weighty constitutional changes made in the same year drew little interest.[10] The first was the introduction of 'nominated MPs', that is, individuals nominated instead of elected into Parliament, subject to the acceptance of a parliamentary select committee. The number of nominated MPs to be admitted is to be decided by each Parliament, depending on the number of opposition members elected. The Nominated MP Bill came under much criticism from the PAP back-benchers because it implied that they were found wanting in representing their constituencies' interests in Parliament (Rodan, 1992:8–9). However, it was a strategic concession by the PAP in recognition of an increasing popular desire and demand for different views to be aired, hoping that by admitting acceptable nominated individuals, the clamour for opposition in Parliament would be diminished.

The second was the change from the existing appointed ceremonial President to an 'elected Presidency' with limited executive powers, including a veto over an extant government on drawing down the national reserve for purposes of national deficit budgeting.[11] The motivation for the change was ostensibly to safeguard the national reserve from elected governments, which could be tempted to purchase electoral support through careless welfare and other spending (Low and Toh, 1989). The lack of trust of subsequent generations of politicians to act rationally and responsibly with regard to national wealth is too obvious to require further explication. Suffice it to note that this is but an extension of the distrust of the rationality of ordinary members of the electorate discussed earlier.

However, there may be some other cumulated intended consequences in all the changes to the Constitution. If the elected

Presidency prevents fiscal irresponsibility in future Parliaments, nominated MPs provide moderation in public debate, the Group Representative Constituencies (GRC) arrangement ensures parliamentary representation of ethnic minorities, and the 1990 Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill controls religious extremism, then the aggregate effect of these changes may bring about a consolidation of the politics of the middle ground. Potentially extreme positions of the left and the right will be excluded, and negotiations among disputing parties will be confined to the moderate options contained within the political middle. This has been the expressed desired intention of the present PAP, which is ‘to enlarge the middle ground through a more accommodative and participatory style of government that seeks to include rather than exclude the greatest number of Singaporeans in the political process’ (Goh Chok Tong, *Straits Times,* 24 Jan., 1990). As argued in Chapter 8, where the list of legislation is discussed in greater detail, this stable middle ground is a necessary condition for political stability in preparation for more democratisation in the future.

In any event, both the Elected Presidency Bill and the Nominated MP Bill were passed without much public attention. This inattention to constitutional changes against the intensity of public response to the car ownership issue is the type of evidence that the PAP government draws on as symptomatic of disconcerting emergent Singaporean attitudes.

ON INDIVIDUALISM AND WESTERNISATION

By the 1980s, economic growth had intensified the consumerist orientation in the society, which is symptomatic of greater emphasis on individual selves. To the PAP government, individualism, with its emphasis on difference, tends to produce a sense of hypersubjectivity at the expense of commonality with others, implying an unwillingness to make self-sacrifice for the social good. Politically, it may lead to the demand for enshrinement of individual rights, which in turn will provide the political and ideological space for individuals to translate their own social disadvantages into welfare claims on the state. Finally, welfarism itself is seen as leading to a decline in work ethics and economic competitiveness at both individual and societal levels.

Ironically, there is a certain intentional amnesia on the part of the PAP government in its criticism of individualism. First, Lee Kuan Yew had lauded Singaporeans as essentially individualistic

achievers (*Straits Times,* 1 May, 1981) because as immigrants, they might have developed a keen self-centredness which motivated them to work hard in their struggle to survive. The same spirit was central to the dynamism of the economy as a whole (Pang and Lim, 1981). Second, 'rugged individualism' as an ethos for Singaporeans had been encouraged. The first Minister of Finance, Dr Goh Keng Swee (1972: 63), had argued that the extended family system could be an obstacle to economic growth because it discouraged one who has to share the fruit of his or her labour with others in the family to strive harder. Third, individualism is one of the logical outcomes of the government's emphasis on 'meritocracy' as a 'pragmatic' means to extract the best from each citizen in pursuit of economic growth. Meritocracy concurrently encourages individuals in the pursuit of excellence and serves, at both the societal and individual levels, to legitimise social inequalities as the natural outcome of individual differences in effort and/or intelligence, thereby, justifying and reinforcing individualism.

Thus individualism, promoted in the early years of industrialisation, only became a negative value in the ideological configuration of the PAP government after 1980. If its potential untoward consequences were to be contained without jeopardising continuing economic growth, individualism, an essential attitude of capitalism, had to be wrenched from the latter and dealt with at the level of culture as ideology (cf. Geertz, 1964).

MORAL EDUCATION THROUGH RELIGION

The ideological response to individualism had its first tentative formulation in the 1977 revamp of the education system into the current practice of streaming, at different stages, students of different levels of academic performance into different programmes. This streaming, rationalised as one which recognises 'natural' differences among students, yolks the education system to meeting the different skills required in the labour force (Goh, 1979).

A minor recommendation in the revamp was that 'moral education' be made a school subject 'to provide the cultural ballast to withstand the stresses of living in a fast changing society exposed to influences, good and bad' (*Straits Times,* 15 Mar., 1979). This was proposed because of a perceived 'deculturisation brought about by the large-scale movement to education in English' which led to the loss of 'the traditional values of one's people and the acquisition

of the more spurious fashions of the West'. Lee Kuan Yew's response was that in educating Singaporeans, 'Confucianist ethics, Malay traditions, and the Hindu ethos must be combined with sceptical Western methods of scientific inquiry, the open discursive methods in the search for truth'; specifically, students 'must be made to place group interests above individual interests'. (*Straits Times,* 15 Mar., 1979).

By 1982, moral education was to be taught in secondary schools through courses in 'Religious Knowledge' in Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. For Chinese who professed none of the 'book' religions, Confucian ethics was offered as a residual option although Lee Kuan Yew had presumed that most Chinese parents would prefer their children to study it (Kuo, 1992:23). As it turned out, Confucianism became ideologically the most significant intervention.

CONFUCIANISM

As the majority of Singaporeans are Chinese, 'culturalist' arguments which regard the political behaviour of Singaporeans as essentially Confucian can be made readily. For example, instead of analysing the effects of various legal-repressive mechanisms, absence of democracy is interpreted as a consequence of the Confucian conception of politics: the government's 'mandate from heaven' can only be legitimately overthrown when it transgresses utterly beyond the limits of tolerance and forfeits the mandate to govern (Clammer, 1985:161). Similarly, the elitist-statist and paternalistic-authoritarian Confucian conception of hierarchical social order in which the 'benevolence' of the sovereign in promoting the general social welfare is exchanged for compliance and obedience of the governed is invoked to explain the popular support and high level of political legitimacy (Chan, 1976:230–233), instead of successful economic performance, the criteria by which authoritarian regimes justify themselves (Liddle, 1990). The culturalist readings are problematic in several ways.

First, as an immigrant population hewn from displaced peasantry of southern China, most Singaporean Chinese's understanding of Confucianism was at best a distilled folk version of familialism. Second, the educated amongst them at the time were likely to be influenced by the 'modernist' movements in post-1900 China, in which Confucianism was ridiculed and rejected rather than

followed. Third, the most radical and active political elements in pre-independent Singapore were the Chinese population, across all classes, educated and uneducated alike. Finally, in the interests of generating a national culture, the PAP government had standardised all school texts to local contents, eliminating references to any traditions. Given this counter-factual evidence, the issue is not whether Singapore's Chinese continue to practise some weak versions of Confucian ethics but rather that of the PAP government's intentional thematisation of Confucianism as a device to establish a ideological/morality system to shore up the existing state.

As Chapter 7 on Confucianisation shows, the PAP government's critique of individualism for undermining any meaningful sense of community and unity of collective purposes coincided with those levelled at individualism by neo-conservative American intellectuals (Steinfels, 1979). In the search for lessons that might help America to recover from its apparent economic and cultural malaise, some American intellectuals 'discovered' Confucianism as the essential cultural underpinning that supposedly explained East Asian capitalist successes, akin to the supposed role of the Protestant ethic in the rise of capitalism in the West. Not surprisingly, the PAP government was attracted to this line of argument.

What unfolded was an exemplification of the general process of mutual benefit between institutionalised production of knowledge and the exercise of power, exposed by Michel Foucault. Academic 'knowledge' helped the government to inscribe 'Confucianism' as an essential 'nature/truth' of the Singaporean Chinese population. As this truth was to be revitalised through formal education processes, resources were provided by the government to further the investigation and accumulation of knowledge of Confucianism. Indicative of the absence of Confucian tradition in Singapore, overseas scholars were engaged to develop the teaching materials and to give public lectures so as to extend Confucian teaching to the entire Singaporean Chinese population. Finally, a very well-endowed Institute of East Asian Philosophy was established to bring the best in the tradition to conferences and research.

By 1982, along with other religious knowledge, Confucian Ethics was introduced as a course in moral education. It was poorly subscribed. By 1989, its 17.8 per cent enrolment of all eligible Chinese students compared unfavourably with 44.4 per cent in Buddhist Studies and 21.4 per cent in Bible Knowledge. Non-

Chinese students were completely absent. The attempt to entrench Confucianism in the Singaporean ideological landscape has failed. This was either because the so-called 'moral crisis', which supposedly resulted from economic success and Westernisation (Kuo, 1992:3–5; Mutalib, 1992:82–84)), was more perceived than real or, assuming that the population concurred with the prognosis of the presence of a 'moral crisis', established religions appeared to have greater ideological appeal than Confucianism, indicating again the absence of Confucian ideas as foundations for the organisation of the daily life of Chinese Singaporeans. Ironically, the demise of Confucianism in its own name was to be found in the success of the Religious Knowledge curriculum as a whole in the secondary schools.

In 1988/1989, the findings of a government-commissioned, social scientific study on religion in Singapore implicated Religious Knowledge courses in intensifying religious fervour and religious differences among students, and possibly in the long term, contributing to inter-religious conflicts (Kuo, Quah and Tong, 1988). Apparently heeding the 'warning', compulsory Religious Knowledge courses were phased out by 1990 and with it Confucian Ethics. To the extent that the study reiterated a constant theme in Singaporean political discourse, that is, religious differences constitute a sensitive issue held in delicate balance by mutual tolerance among Singaporeans, it facilitated the government's translation of the authors' observations into grounds for abolition of the Religious Knowledge programme. Yet, for a political leadership that often has only disparaging terms for describing intellectuals and accords them no legitimate place in politics (Chan, 1977), it would be simplistic, without detracting from the authors' intellectual labour, to deduce that it so readily heeded the academics' warnings. Additional reasons for the readiness of the PAP government to act may be identified.

Historically, the study on religion was commissioned soon after the detention without trial of seventeen young individuals in 1987 on charges of a Marxist conspiracy. The detainees were either paid or voluntary workers of various Catholic welfare programmes. Consequently, the arrest caused serious open disagreements between the Catholic community and the government. The report was therefore released into a politically charged environment in which the government was predisposed to be wary about religion (Rodan, 1992:13–15).

Religion is, of course, capable of producing alternative meanings of social reality and social justice to that of prevailing government ideology, as the arrest of the Catholics exemplified. In this contest between government and deity, the latter often holds sway ideologically; the truths of gods are conceptually more permanent than those of mortal politicians. To promote religion is potentially to legitimise it as a source of counter-ideology, a position contrary to PAP ideological and administrative practices. The study of religion was thus a timely device to correct an ideological mistake. That the termination of Religious Knowledge was partly aimed at eliminating potential counter-ideologies was indirectly affirmed by the institutionalisation of the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill in 1990, which threatened sanctions against religious leaders who commented on social and political issues in their capacity as preachers.

The attempt to stitch religion into Singapore's ideological terrain was, therefore, short-lived not only because of potential competition between religions but, more importantly, of possible contest between religious beliefs and the PAP's ideological hold on the population. Confucian Ethics had to go to because keeping it would appear to privilege the Chinese majority over other religious and ethnic groups (Kuo, 1992:19). However, its essence was to be recovered and differently embedded in the concept of communitarianism which organises, from within, the explicit national ideology being subsequently promoted by the government.

COMMUNITARIANISM/SHARED VALUES

The textbooks for Religious Knowledge and Confucian Ethics have been discarded but the government's perception of the presence of a 'moral crisis' persists, leading Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong to call for an explicit national ideology which will forestall an insidious individualism. Reaffirming that the failed Confucianisation process had its origin in the 'Confucian thesis' on East Asian capitalism, he kicked off the debate on the national ideology, by summarising the thesis of the book *Ideology and National Competitiveness: A Study of Nine Countries* (Lodge and Vogel, 1987). The book argues that a nation's economic competitiveness is affected by whether its people are relatively more 'communitarian' or 'individualistic'. In East Asian capitalist nations communitarianism dominates and this has enabled them to catch up economically with the industrial West in the last two decades (Goh, 1988:14). Prime Minister Goh noted, 'Like

Japan and Korea, Singapore is a high-performance country because we share the same cultural base as the other successful East Asians, that is, Confucian ethics' (1988:15), reduced to a single dimension of communitarianism.

His cultural prognosis was that among Singaporeans 'there has been a clear shift' from communitarianism to individualism and by extension to Western values, which would imply a risk of declining economic competitiveness. Room is thus made for the concepts of 'vulnerability' and 'survival' prevalent in Singapore's initial political idiom to be transferred to the cultural discourse. The representation is that of Singapore as a predominantly English-speaking open society which is vulnerable to Westernisation, a process that undermines its Asian heritage and affects the survival of its cultures and identities. The dichotomous characterisation of 'Western' versus 'Asian' values becomes increasingly marked, in spite of occasional credit given to some Western values (Lee Hsien Loong, 1989:32; Yeo, 1992). In 1988, a government committee was appointed to develop a 'national ideology'; notwithstanding that the PAP had hitherto taken pride in being 'pragmatic' rather than ideologically encumbered.

A White Paper on Shared Values was tabled in Parliament in January, 1991. It states that to institutionalise a national ideology is 'to evolve and anchor a Singaporean identity, incorporating the relevant parts of our varied cultural heritages, and the attitudes and values which have helped us to survive and succeed as a nation' (White Paper, 1991:1). Certain cultural elements, suppressed by the ideology of pragmatism—which has itself become an Asian quality—are belatedly given recognition as essential to success and survival. These are to be elevated as 'core values' to constitute a 'national ethic', replacing and eliminating the Marxist/communist conceptual baggage of the term ideology.

The values initially identified were 'placing society above the self, upholding the family as the basic building block of society, resolving major issues through consensus instead of contentions, and stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony' (White Paper, 1991:1). The first was later reworded as 'nation before community and society above self' to reflect the multiracial composition of Singapore; 'community' specifically refers to the different ethnic communities. Then, as a concession to public concern that Confucianism has historically bred authoritarianism, an additional value, 'regard and community support for the

individual' was added. To avoid any semblance of privileging individualism, the maxim is meant to refer only to the 'social welfarist' concerns for individuals who have fallen behind in the meritocratic economy (White Paper, 1991:6–7). Ironically, the last is a typical moral justification for welfarism in Western developed nations, which is much chastised by the PAP (Friedman, 1981:3).

Of course, many questions can be raised regarding the Shared Values, from definitions of each term to empirical evidence of the extent to which they are shared (Clammer, 1993). One of the interesting analytic issues concerns the difficulty of inscribing this ideology in the body politic of Singapore. The White Paper appears to sit uncomfortably as a discursive artefact in search of an institutional site in the body politic.

First, in spite of claimed affiliation to Asian traditions, its origin is too diffuse to enjoy a mythical origin that may be said to be connected organically to the people, as in the case of Indonesia's national ideology, the *Pancasila*. Second, in explicitly denouncing individualism, which undergirds the very nature of meritocracy and open competition for achievement, it is severed from existing materialist grounding and 'floats' as a moralising statement rather than as descriptive and/or prescriptive statement of the extant conditions. As a moralising statement, its ability to convince is much reduced. Third, in the desire not to elevate it into a legal institution, unlike the Bill of Rights or again the *Pancasila,* which serves as the preamble to the respective Constitutions of the United States and Indonesia, the Shared Values ideology does not possess any Constitutional or legal power. Thus, after a year of drafting, the White Paper on Shared Values was tabled on 2 January, 1992, as if to mark symbolically a new beginning, debated and accepted by Parliament. Yet just what has been accepted is not clear for the White Paper still lacks a legal status to bind anyone.

Lacking legal status does not automatically preclude Shared Values from having institutional and ideological significance. As a publicly promoted and politically sanctioned document, it is now available to the government and its supporters as rational grounds for action, while constraining those who oppose it to debate issues within the parameters specified by the Shared Values themselves. A concrete instance of how this political dynamic may unfold may be seen from the following incident.

In 1981, in recognition of the disadvantaged position of Malays in the economic structure (Zoohri, 1990), the government sponsored

the establishment of Mendaki, an acronym of a Malay organisation, under the leadership of Malay MPs, aimed at enhancing the academic performance of Malay students, so as to improve the long-term prospects of the community as a whole. In 1989, a similar organisation, Sinda (Singapore Indian Development Agency), was set up by the Indian community to help its own 'lower achievers'. Given the logic of multiracialism, the establishment of a Chinese agency for the Chinese, the CDAC (Chinese Development Assistance Council), became inevitable.

The social basis of these agencies may be rationalised in terms of the particular Shared Value, 'regard and community support for the individual' with each gainfully employed worker contributing respectively to his or her ethnic group, to improve the educational performance of children of needy families, hence the term 'community self-help organisations'. Administratively, a sliding scale of contributions, except for the majority Chinese population, is deducted monthly from an employee's compulsory savings in the government-managed social security scheme, the Central Provident Fund. In principle contribution is voluntary. However, in contrast to the conventional practice of charitable contribution, donation is presumed unless one intentionally opts out. Given the obviously good cause and the paltry monthly contribution, few opt out. Those who do tend to do so out of either or both of two principles. Some are against the 'opt-out' practice, preferring to have the right to decide whether and how much to contribute. Others argue that taking care of the less able should be done along non-racial lines in order to avoid racial divisiveness that is detrimental to generating a Singaporean identity and national unity.

During the initiation of the CDAC, a casual remark by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong that those who made enquiries regarding opting-out procedures tended to do so in English was headlined by the local press as English-educated Chinese being more inclined to opt out (*Straits Times* 21 Sept., 1992). Given the ideological context, this intentional interpretation was meant to signify that English-educated Chinese are indeed more individualistic than communitarian and more 'Westernised', preferring to argue about principle of rights to the pragmatic solution of presumed charity and the administrative ease of deduction at source. Ironically, as suggested earlier, some who opted out did so for precisely the reason of desiring more 'national' rather than ethnic communitarianism. The way the Prime Minister was misquoted

caused him some embarrassment. He subsequently proclaimed that he had no intention to offend and that he respected each individual's decision. Nevertheless, the intentional reading of the press did force those who opted out on to the defensive, demonstrating the ideological effect of Shared Values.

REINSCRIPTION OF CONFUCIANISM IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE

Significantly, throughout the Confucianisation experiment the expert consultants put great stress on distinguishing Confucianism as a set of moral precepts from Confucianism as a political ideology. Emphatic statements that as a political ideology it was unacceptable to a modern society like Singapore were made by no less than the then Minister of Education (Kuo, 1992:15–16). Ironically, after its conceptual reduction and transformation into communitarianism, Confucianism reappears to be reinscribed in the very centre of political discourse through the self-definition of the PAP government.

Reflecting the politics of multiracialism, the White Paper went to some length to dispel charges that Shared Values were but a subterfuge for Confucian values. However, the latter are nonetheless explicitly identified as desired values in politics. 'There must be a rigorous insistence on high standards of personal and public conduct among political leaders and public servants', who as trustees of the people, 'must do the correct thing because they know it is their duty to do so, not because they fear to be found out doing wrong' (White Paper, 1991:9). These desired qualities are, it is argued, encapsulated in the Confucian conception of good government by 'honourable men' *(junzi)*. The White Paper (1991:8) asserts that for Singapore, *such junzi* 'who have a duty to do right for the people, and who have the trust and respect of the population, fits us better than the Western idea that a government should be given as limited powers as possible, and should always be treated with suspicion unless proven otherwise'.

The contrasting representations of government in Western ideas and Confucianism reflect not only the PAP's conception of itself as a political party but also of its political practice. The liberal idea of a minimal state held in check by a strong civil society which is protected by an extensive set of individual and group rights is seen as unsuitable for Singapore. Therefore, liberalism is explicitly

rejected. In contrast, the government/people relation is to be defined in terms of reciprocity of duties: a leader has the duty to ensure the general welfare of the governed, who in turn have the duty to respect and trust in the leader. Communitarianism is valued in this reciprocal relationship in that the leadership's moral uprightness and desire to uplift societal welfare is met by the governed's placing of societal welfare above self interests, thus constituting a moral/political order that is harmonious and beneficial for all. However, it should be noted that it is a reciprocity that is embedded in a hierarchical structure of unequals, and is thus unavoidably elitist.[12]

For ideological analysis, this succinct distinction is of great importance. Among the many functions of an ideology is its utility in maintaining cohesiveness within the dominant group that itself initiates the ideology. That is, the group is itself convinced by its own ideology and embodies it as a component of self-definition. This self-appropriation may even exceed an ideology's ability to convince the subaltern groups in a social formation (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 1980). It appears that while the PAP government has failed to Confucianise the population, it has indeed Confucianised itself. The epitome of this is in Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's proclaiming that 'Lee Kuan Yew is a modern Confucius' (*Straits Times,* 24 Apr., 1990).

The PAP leadership's self-perception as a group of honourable men governing with the best interests of Singaporeans in mind is, significantly, an image accepted by the majority of Singaporeans themselves. Indeed, the incorruptibility of the government, the very observable financial self-sacrifice made by some of its members, and the national economic success that is attributed to these qualities are constitutive elements of the Singaporean identity and pride as a nation. This leadership quality is itself an important element in maintaining the legitimacy, ideological hegemony and longevity in power of the PAP party/government.

The succinct distinction is also a manifesto and a road map for the future political development of Singapore under the PAP. In brief, it will be a polity that is ideologically anti-liberal and emphasises communitarianism; it will continue to be developmentalist in orientation for this is the most concrete way of demonstrating the leadership's commitment to the general well-being of the people; it will continue to maintain the formal features of democracy, particularly the electoral mechanism, because it is the best way through which the trust and respect of the population and

the right to govern, conceptualised as ‘endorsement by the people’, can be publicly obtained; it will open more channels of communication between the government and the population because of the need to maintain overtly the process of consensus building, as a manifestation of communitarianism in practice.

The PAP’s dismissal of Western liberalism also resonates among a population whose political cultural inheritance is not necessarily one of liberal democracy in the first place. Apart from the vocal segment of the tertiary-educated minority who explicitly professes a desire for liberal democracy, sympathies for the government’s communitarian ideology cannot be dismissed out of hand and its promotion cannot be simply rejected as merely a veil for the perpetuation of authoritarianism. Any attempt to understand the unfolding of the Singapore polity in the medium term through liberal democratic concepts will only be frustrated. Conversely, teasing out the conceptual and practical tensions which will inevitably emerge from the juxtaposition of a communitarian ideology with the formalised practices of democracy will be likely more fruitful in understanding and prefiguring the unfolding of the Singapore polity under the continuing rule of the PAP. The very possibility and potential pitfalls of a non-liberal democracy which emphasises collective interests is thus examined in the last substantive chapter.

CONCLUSION

It should be obvious that the refrain of authoritarianism as the explanation of Singapore’s political development in the past three decades is inadequate. Undoubtedly, some of the repressive mechanisms wielded by the PAP to suppress opposition in the early days of power consolidation remain. However, the PAP’s continuing political legitimacy among the population is achieved largely through its ideological efficacy. The major concepts underpinning its ideological hegemony for the first twenty years since independence were ‘survivalism’ and ‘pragmatism’. The first creates a state of uncertainty, providing operational room for the second concept, which given the context, meant ‘doing whatever is necessary to survive’, including the acceptance of overt state intervention, even authoritarianism.

With three decades of economic growth, improved material conditions and increased literacy, the ideological hold of ‘pragmatism’ has weakened, along with the apparent acceptance of

authoritarian strictures of the state. The support level for the PAP has been declining in each successive general election since 1984, symptomatic of Singaporean's desire to have a greater say in government and a desire for different voices in Parliament to check the unyielding hands of a government which has apparently become too sure of the 'correctness' of its policies. There is therefore pressure for opening up the political sphere.

Since 1980s, the PAP's legitimacy to govern is taken less for granted and has been in need of shoring up and defending. The Party's prime concern has been to prevent further erosion rather than regain lost electoral ground. New political institutions and new channels of consultation have been established to enable greater political representation. Yet, greater constraints have been imposed in some parts of the political terrain, notably on religious institutions, the foreign press and the role of voluntary associations and professional societies. The seemingly contradictory strategies have one apparent consistent intent, to channel discussion into the political 'middle ground' from which, hopefully, consensus can be achieved. These strategies, if successful, would undoubtedly favour the continuing rule of the PAP. Again if successful, these strategies would have also contributed significantly to the greater political democratisation in Singapore.

NOTES

1 This entire process fits Gramsci's theoretical explication of the processes of development of moral leadership through ideological hegemony (Gramsci, 1971:181–182 and 57–59; Sassoon, 1980:117– 119).
2 The argument here is that the ideas of the 'nation' and 'people' were social constructions that needed to be concretised through a set of textual practices, see Chua (1979) and Kwok (1983).
3 The idea of the 'imagined community' draws on Anderson (1983).
4 For a quick summary of these achievements see Rodan (1989:73).
5 For a review of the strategic and tactical mistakes made by the Barisan Socialis, see Bloodworth (1986:256).
6 According to Clutterbuck (1984:319–321) the riot arose in part because of Malay resentment against not being granted similar 'special' rights and status as their counterparts in Malaysia. There was also evidence that the riot was the act of Indonesian *agents provocateur.*
7 On the connotative as ideological see Barthes (1972:109–159).
8 A detailed and critical analysis of the entire episode can be found in Devan and Heng (1992).
9 His latest suggestion is that individuals between the ages of forty and sixty be given two votes because this group is more likely to vote for political and

social stability so as to safeguard their children's future (*Straits Times,* 11 Mar., 1994).

10 According to the senior editor of the *Straits Times,* only five letters to the editor were received by the press on the issue (Fong, 1991:4).

11 For a review of these constitutional changes see Chua (1991a).

12 For an excellent discussion on the Confucian concepts of duty, rights and power see Wang (1980).

Chapter 2

Reopening ideological discussion

Writings on ideological developments in Singapore remain few and largely descriptive. Where analyses are theoretically informed, issues tend to be posed within the theoretical grid of liberal pluralism. Accordingly, ideology is conceived as explicit, conscious and systematic articulations of values held by collectives, such as political parties and other interest groups, in the political market-place. Politics is, by definition, the process through which 'groups of people unite behind some leadership to compete, bargain and negotiate in shaping and sharing of political power to influence or control policy direction' (Chan, 1975:51); politics is constituted and realised when such processes of bargaining and negotiation are observable and result in a sharing of power in the shaping of public policies. An account of the weaknesses of this rendition is in order before elaborating the alternative approach adopted in this book.

By the above definition, substantively only the decade of 1955 to 1965—the period of transition from colonial rule, through a brief and difficult period of membership in the Malaysian Federation, and finally to independence—can properly be labelled political. This was a decade of intense political struggles among organised groups based on their economic and/or ethnic identifications and interests, either singularly or in coalition, supporting both covertly and overtly legitimate political parties. By the end of 1966, with the resignation of all Barisan Sosialis MPs from Parliament, one year after being duly elected the PAP was already well placed to establish the one-party dominant government that has ruled Singapore since the 1968 general election.

Since then, there has been readily discernible lack of public

debate on the goals of the nation, with all government policies and programmes orientated towards economic development. Economic goals are defined in universalistic terms by the political leadership rather than crystallised through public debates. Furthermore, civil servants are appointed to chairmanship of public enterprises, and senior officers of public enterprises resign to run for political office, thus blurring the division between politics and administration. The result is that the competition for power has shifted from the conventionally defined public arena into the administrative bureaucracies. What public discussions there are centre on how the economic goals may be best achieved rather than on the desirability of the goals or their alternatives. Within a definition of politics which specifies that politics is present only when there is open competition and negotiation, the administrative developments since 1968 have been characterised as a state of depoliticised citizenry (Chan, 1975); the absence of organised competition being synonymous with absence of politics. This 'depoliticisation thesis' has been widely accepted by political scientists in and outside Singapore (Bedlington, 1978:241–243).

There is at least one conceptual weakness to the thesis. Even within its own definition of politics, there has been, strictly speaking, no lack of formal politics in Singapore. There are competing political parties with different platforms which, at election time at least, criticise government policies; and elections are conducted without underhanded tampering. That opposition parties win few seats in Parliament is not the fault of the ruling party/government. No political party, however liberal, is in the business of ensuring that the opposition party is elected! Thus the absence of opposition members in a duly elected Parliament does not automatically imply the absence of politics as defined.

One possible anchor point for the depoliticisation thesis is in the history of repression wrought by the PAP government itself. Such repression might have effectively produced a citizenry more intent on avoiding its wrath than on publicly airing their political views and challenging the ruling government; resulting in a depoliticised state. So conceived, the success of the PAP's hold on the seats of power may be evaluated only in negative terms, as in military juntas. This, however, fails to account for the undeniable popularity of the PAP government among the populace. This failure in turn shows that the liberal pluralist problematic is conceptually deficient at two points.

First, it is unable to conceptualise political domination through

legalised social control mechanisms; yet there is no state, no matter how democratic, that does not have in its governing arsenal the use of legislation. Strictly speaking, the utility of liberal pluralism as a framework for analysing Singapore's political development ceased to be valid in 1963. After key radical opposition politicians, student leaders and trade unionists were arrested in 'Operation Cold Store', opposition was reduced to the point of no effective resurrection. This condition was brought about using legal mechanisms for social repression which every government has at its disposal. Such a state of affairs is not 'thinkable' within liberal pluralism. In one stroke, all the bargaining and negotiation so central to this theory were reduced to naught.

Second, the liberal pluralist framework is unable to theorise political consensus that is not generated through processes of apparently open negotiation. It is this failure that led to the formulation of the depoliticisation thesis. One of the consequences of accepting the thesis is the acceptance of the PAP's governing strategies as non-ideologically informed 'pragmatism'. For example, in a discussion on the government's attempt to develop a national identity based on multiculturalism and multilingualism, Chan and Evers were quite ambivalent about how to label these strategies; such strategies may be attempts 'to create a non-ideological identity, or if this seems to be a contradiction in terms, an identity through an "ideology of pragmatism"'. In the final analysis, this ambivalence fell on the side of the 'non-ideological' rendition as they suggested that 'In selecting the values that would express the Singapore identity, the choice has fallen on what would appear to be non-ideological, pragmatic values' (Chan and Evers, 1978:122). This is precisely the reading the PAP government is proposing for all its societal management strategies. The government's claim is that the strategies are 'but the logic of the needs of a developing Singapore' (Thompson, 1978:71) and are thus eminently practical rather than based on any ideological canons.

Undoubtedly, the PAP government has been successful in reducing 'discussions of basic questions of political philosophy and ideology, even political discussion in general…until it flowed at a low ebb out of public purview' (Chan and Evers, 1978:119). Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that it simultaneously actively propagates a set of values which includes a particular conception of the concept 'practical'. That it has been successful in convincing even academics and intellectuals to accept this particular conception is indicative of its ideological success and not of the end of ideology

nor the end of politics. The political question to be posed is how does it achieve this ideological agreement, or consensus. The steps taken to inculcate a historically specific set of values are thoroughly political ways of establishing an ideological hegemony.

POLITICAL DOMINANCE AND IDEOLOGICAL HEGEMONY

For newly independent countries, politics in the immediate post-colonial years is an uncharted terrain. This is generally a period in which political parties sprout, each with its respective following; the political party becomes the vehicle for expressing the collective will of groups of people. Seldom is a party in a position to exert its dominance in such emergent states. Under such conditions, the parties have no choice but to enter into negotiation, bargaining and coalition to form a government. If dominance did not emerge subsequently, these conditions and the attendant political processes might persist. However, contrary to the liberal pluralist view, this condition of coalitions, splits, negotiations and compromises need not remain the only political reality.[1]

From the early 1950s until the mid-1960s, Singapore was a newly created state which lacked established common ideological boundaries for binding the newly enfranchised citizens. Negotiations and coalitions were necessary manoeuvres on the part of political parties which were unable to rise to dominance on their own accord; the most successful coalition was that which constituted the PAP. However, it did not mean that the parties were committed to preserving these forms of exchanges as the logical and the only 'democratic' form of politics. Rather, these necessary manoeuvres indicated a constant struggle for dominance, a constant struggle to gain control of state power. The attainment of state power was the necessary first step towards the possible establishment of a common ideology, with its terms defined and determined for the citizens by the political party that emerged dominant. If a common ideology became entrenched, the citizens would in turn work to reproduce and perpetuate that party in dominance in the political arena. Indeed, the history of the PAP is one such struggle for political dominance and subsequent establishment of a common ideology; one which is synonymous with the political and ideological development of Singapore.

An alternative model to liberal pluralism is therefore necessary in order to understand the processes through which the PAP

successfully created an ideological consensus among Singaporeans. As suggested in the introduction, reproduction of society requires that members be taught not only occupational skills that are necessary for material production but also the cultural competence to engage in socially acceptable behaviour. The necessary cultural competence is itself specified and elaborated within the confines of the ideas of the dominant political party. However, this direct connection between the party and its ideas is masked by an ideological transformation which involves transforming the ideas into so-called 'natural' laws or 'natural' ways of social practice. This 'naturalisation' (see Barthes, 1972) gives the ideas their sense of public authority and objectivity. They constitute 'the only rational, universal valid' ideas for members of the society; hence, as a large part of the latter's 'natural reality of everyday life', as 'common sense'. If the dominant party is able to achieve the 'naturalisation' of its ideas, it may be said to have achieved ideological hegemony/consensus, which will contribute greatly to the party's legitimacy to govern.

For example, the exercise of power necessarily entails policing those who do not agree or abide by the ruling ideas.

Under the condition of ideological hegemony, in the eyes of the governed, the policing function is rendered as a reasonable and necessary step for one's own welfare and that of the society as a whole. Indeed, policing is itself greatly reduced because under a hegemonic condition, the governed and the governing constitute a political unity in pursuit of a social order according to social organisational concepts provided by the latter. Members of the ruling party thus appear not as rulers but leaders of the people. Conversely, without ideological hegemony, coercion or violence will be necessary to suppress dissenting groups, thus exposing political power as domination, leading potentially to a legitimation crisis. The preferred strategy of any ruling group is, therefore, to govern by leadership rather than naked force; consequently, it will commit substantial resources to establishing an ideologically hegemonic/consensual condition.

IDEOLOGY AS COMMON-SENSE REALITY

Under hegemonic/consensual conditions, the ideological system not only specifies the ways whereby society is structured, but also how it is taken up and adopted by individual members as the rational

conceptual system with which to organise the mundane world into a coherent and meaningful entity. This conceptual system continuously mediates social life in such a way that the 'categories, and conceptual procedures which name, analyse and assemble what actually happens become (as it were) inserted in the actuality as our interpretive schema which organizes that for us as it is or was'; furthermore, 'using that interpretive schema to organize the actuality does not appear as imposing an organization upon it but rather as a discovery of how it is' (Smith 1974:258). It also follows that 'our knowledge of society and of the conceptual procedures apt for accomplishing the sense of what comes to us in the form of knowledge appears to be grounded in a "ruling class" relation to the object of that knowledge' (Smith, 1974:258). The world that is so organised is what the phenomenologists call the taken-for-granted world of the natural attitude.

As the line between explicitly articulated historically specific interests and common sense becomes blurred, as the ideological system enters the realm of the mundane life-world, several changes take place. First, at the conceptual level, the most fundamental and necessary change is the obliteration of the specific group reference of the ideological system. Politically, this obliteration is effected through the concept of 'nation'. Through it, the ruling group attempts to enlist the co-operation and allegiance of the other shapeless classes and groups (Barthes, 1972:138). In Singapore, this ideological change was initiated during the 'Battle for Merger' and consolidated after the 1968 general election, when the PAP for the first time won all the seats in Parliament. Although rooted in the working class, according to Mr S.Rajaratnam, the PAP had come to realise that the workers are a class with a vested interest, and that as a political party, the PAP must work for the interest of the whole country and not for one class. In his own words, it is a 'politics of convergence' because it seeks to represent all the interests with the state (Pang, 1971:21).

A second level of change takes place in the way the ideological concepts which have become common sense are used. To understand this, one needs to appeal to the phenomenological explications of the production of socially constructed realities in the everyday life world, especially the work of Alfred Schutz. Under hegemonic/consensual conditions, ideology as common sense is not a cognitive distortion that emanates from one's location in the social political terrain, as conventional sociology of knowledge *à la*

Mannheim would have it, but a condition of social knowledge. Members make use of the shared stock of concepts to recognise, interpret, present and otherwise account for the rationality of their focused activities, for both oneself and each other. Members reflexively make decisions on what, when, and how certain elements of this shared corpus of concepts are applicable and appropriate to the situation at hand, and in so doing reproduce and revitalise the currency of the ideological concepts as rational and valid for every competent member.

The use of this shared corpus of common-sense knowledge always operates in an *ad hoc* fashion, that is, it is always used only to cover the situation at hand. Consequently, the organisation of this knowledge is alway

1 incoherent;
2 only partially clear;
3 not at all free from contradictions.

It is always incoherent because the situations at hand and their relevances are not themselves integrated into a coherent system. It is only partially clear because as long as it serves the purpose for the situation at hand, one does not raise further questions regarding its 'truth' or 'certainty'. For example, in social interaction, one 'takes it for granted that this fellow-man will answer accordingly, without wondering how this miraculous performance may be explained' (Schutz, 1970:76). Finally, it is not consistent because being concerned only with the situation at hand, one is 'not aware of the modifications [one] would have to make in passing' from one situation to another. For example, 'As a father, a citizen, an employee, and a member of his church [a man] may have the most different and the least congruent opinions on moral, political, or economic matters' (Schutz, 1970:76).

Generally speaking, then, within the natural attitude's concern for the situation at hand, common-sense knowledge 'consists of recipes of all kinds of conduct and activity', and 'it serves its purposes adequately as long as its recipes yield satisfactory results in acting, and its tenets satisfactory explanations' (Schutz, 1970:319). Furthermore, these recipes are used repeatedly to cover different occasions as long as they yield satisfactory results. (Ideological concepts operate through repetition; so must their analysis.) The rationality of applying or using any concepts and

rules from the common-sense corpus is therefore always a rationality achieved *in situ;* that is, it is always a practical accomplishment of the situated members, rather than one which appeals to a set of criteria of objectivity.

IDEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS AS COMMON-SENSE KNOWLEDGE

That an ideological concept as common-sense knowledge operates in an *ad hoc* fashion contains both its strength and its weakness. The strength lies in its utility for making sense of the situation at hand, a sense which delivers support for and reinforcement of the ideology. Its weakness, however, lies in the way the same concept, or a different but related concept, from the same ideological system may be invoked to provide an equally reasonable meaning which undermines the rationality of the first reading of the same situation.

Take the concept of 'general will' for example. Within democracy, the concept can be invoked to exclude any individual or group by constituting their respective interest as particularistic and against the general community interests. However, the excluded can in principle challenge the very formulation of the 'general will' for that particular occasion, and call for its re-constitution on grounds that it is not 'general' enough to include the excluded. Alternatively, the excluded may invoke the ideological concept of rights of individuals and choose to contest the 'general will' on the ground that it denies one's fundamental 'natural' rights. Furthermore, it could be argued and contextually construed that individual rights imply a right to be outside the 'general will' with some liberty. Indeed, it is when confronted with the possibility of every citizen taking one's rights to the letter, that neo-conservative intellectuals solemnly declare, 'A true democracy is not governable!'

From the above example, it is clear that an ideological concept necessarily includes and excludes simultaneously. While it can withhold legitimacy from the excluded, it cannot deny the excluded's existence. By borrowing concepts from the ideology itself, the excluded can therefore offer resistance and introduce cracks into the ideological hegemony. Although such borrowing will not ultimately undermine the system itself (Barthes, 1972:139), such resistance must be either displaced or repressed when it gains seriousness. But in repression, the ruling group will be forced to disclose its domination and coercive function. Consequently, no

matter how successful is the ideological penetration of a population by a ruling group, the need to exercise domination follows right behind its leadership role.

To take leave of the discussion of ideological hegemony at this point would risk the impression that the role of domination is predominant in the operations of ideology. This, however, is not so. We would do well, therefore, to recall the leadership function of ideology. No one has put this leadership role in perspective more succinctly than Gramsci. As Gramsci argues, the political party which embodies the ideology 'must and cannot but be the preacher and organiser of intellectual and moral reform, which means creating the basis for a later development of the national popular collective will towards the realisation of a higher and total form of modern civilisation' (Gramsci, 1970:139). Take for example, the embodiment of the ideological leadership function in law. Gramsci argues, the law 'is progressive when it aim to keep the reactionary forces inside the orbit of legality and to raise the backward masses to the level of the new legality' (1970:152–153). We can now turn to the ideological hegemony/consensus fashioned by the PAP in Singapore.

PAP IDEOLOGY: PRACTICAL SURVIVAL

The ideological system of the PAP government unfolds from one central concern, namely, 'national survival'. Survival has been the structuring centre of reasoning and rationalisation of the policies by which Singapore has been governed since independence.[2] The problems of survival can be broadly organised into external and internal threats.

External threats are posed by the political developments in the region and beyond. The prospect of possibly hostile neighbours was illustrated by the Indonesian Confrontation campaign launched against the Malaysian Federation from the early 1960s while Singapore was a member. The uniquely Chinese majority state in a predominantly Malay region is itself a feature that may give rise to a situation in which Singapore is seen suspiciously by its neighbours as 'The Third China'. The development of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a forum for regional dialogue has diffused the intensity of external threats.

On the domestic front, religious and ethnic tensions and communism were considered major threats. The PAP would, and continues to, spare no measures to suppress alleged or real

communist activities. The most recent detention without trial of alleged Marxists was carried out in 1987. This had resulted in the withdrawal of the PAP from the Socialist International in 1975, when faced with potential negative sanctions from the latter concerning its hard-line anti-communist policy.[3]

By the mid-1970s, an alleged new development which combined both the internal and external threat to survival came to be known officially as 'non-communist subversion'. According to the then Foreign Minister, Rajaratnam (1975:118), this form of subversion came from the hitherto unco-ordinated group of dissatisfied individuals who were unduly influenced by New Left developments in the West. This group was seen to share three convictions:

1. Singapore's one-party government is propelling Singapore to wards dictatorship; freedom is suppressed, political opponents are arbitrarily arrested, and fear stalks the land;
2. an independent Singapore is not viable economically, politically or militarily and remerger with Malaysia is the only way out; and
3. the minorities, in particular the Malays, are being oppressed and that the minority problem can best be solved not by persisting in a multiracial party such as the PAP but through the creation of an alliance of communal parties.

He was quick to point out that not all those who hold any or all of the above opinions are subversive, but that it is necessary to hold the opinions to be subversive. The greatest problem with the 'rag bag of individuals and groups' that are so inclined is that they may be used by external forces, including Communism, and create havoc for the efficiency of the government.

Against both external and internal threats, the government has one solution: economic development. According to Lee Kuan Yew, 'Higher wages as productivity increases, and workers educated by their own leaders in the realities of our economic position will, by the 1980's, produce a solid and secure situation which the communists cannot easily exploit' (quoted in Josey, 1971:430). While economic development is necessary for political stability, political stability is in turn necessary for economic development. These paired necessities form the second feature of the PAP ideology. Exerted simultaneously, they have been the justification for a tightly organised and tightly administered society. For example, the heavy negative sanction of Western cultural influences

is justified on the ground that ultimately these influences will lead to moral degeneration among the young and to a decline of the necessary 'protestant ethic' for economic development (Chiang, 1976); this was before the discovery of Confucianism as the cultural underpinning of capitalist success in East Asia.

The desirability of economic development and political stability to ensure the survival of the nation is rarefied into the pervasive ideological concept, 'pragmatism', or in everyday language, 'being practical'. The ideological character of this concept and its administrative efficacy will be analysed fully in the next chapter; the purpose at hand is merely to demonstrate the pervasive presence of the PAP's ideological system in the everyday life of Singaporeans as an index of its ideological hegemony/consensus. As the guiding ideological concept, pragmatism tends to reduce all human problems to the level of technical difficulties and solutions. This tendency has led to some costly problems; nevertheless, the result of this pragmatism has been spectacular not only in the economy but also in regulating aspects of social life, and it is around it that the ideological hegemony/consensus of the PAP government is developed.

POLITICAL RUMOURS AND IDEOLOGICAL REPRODUCTION

The ideological success of the PAP may be ascertained by observing how some of the major ideological features figure centrally in the everyday reasoning activities of the population, as in political rumours.

Rumour is a social product generated under conditions in which information is absent, inadequate or untrustworthy. It is the result of socially conditioned interpretative processes that attempt to make puzzling social situations meaningful and comprehensible. As an aside in her discussion of Singapore's depoliticisation, Chan notes that the ubiquity of political rumours is symptomatic of a politically suppressed society, and political rumourmongering is possibly indicative of a population, under such conditions, searching for 'a safe avenue of political participation' (Chan, 1975:58). So, it is in some of these rumours that an analyst may seek an indication of the government's ideological success.

If these rumours embody controversial political opinions, then one may argue that Singaporeans are politically orientated, even if only in an 'underground' fashion, rather than depoliticised. It is common for political rumours to produce alternative constructions

to that of the official account of a situation or event and in this way they question the government. On the other hand, rumours may contain no such challenges; they may rationalise puzzling events in a completely acceptable fashion, such that no government suppression of their propagation is necessary. If the latter were the case, then 'depoliticisation' would be the surface effect, whereas the processes themselves are political through and through.

Case 1: 'The resignation of the Prime Minister'

One instance which the government took seriously as an intentionally subversive rumour occurred in 1974. It was rumoured that Prime Minister Lee would resign on National Day in favour of Dr Goh Keng Swee, then Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister. It was suggested that Singapore, '[b]uffeted by multiple economic woes, a section of the Cabinet, led by Goh, was said to believe that Singapore's economic and political survival depended on accommodation with Malaysia. And the price of a re-merger with the northern neighbour was the removal of Lee'; for it was argued that Lee was the main obstacle to political reunification with Malaysia. The Prime Minister openly denied any such differences of opinion in the Cabinet and charged that the rumour was propagated by 'external agencies whose sole intent was the disruption of Singapore's stability'.[4]

It should be apparent that this rumour and its propagators could be placed centrally within the conceptual confines of the ideology of survival, indicating that the propagators had defined the situation in terms similar to those of the political leaders. Its location within the PAP ideological framework also blunted its ability to subvert. For the government could, and did, readily turn it around and point out that such rumours and their mongers, not the alleged differences in the Cabinet, were precisely the type of propagandists material that undermined the stability and viability of Singapore. The rumourmongers were therefore subversive and might even be agents of external groups whose desire was the destruction of Singapore. Conversely, it may be reasoned that nationally concerned and proud citizens would not desire the collapse of the nation that they were actively trying to build against great odds. The odds and the intensity of pride of Singapore's achievements belong together ideologically: the greater the odds the more difficult it is to achieve, the more intense the pride of success.

Finally, the allegedly potentially subversive consequence of this

type of rumour provides the ground for government intervention on behalf of the welfare of the people. Its intervention in this instance disclosed how the ideological system can be a double-edged tool, with the government using both sides to its own advantage. The need for survival provides the government with the ground for calling for sacrifices from the citizens, on the one hand; on the other, it was used to discredit those who might actually be thinking differently about the survival of Singapore such as through remerger with Malaysia.

Apart from the official reading, this particular rumour may also be read as some Singaporeans' response to the difficult economic conditions of the early 1970s when, like the rest of the capitalist world, it was suffering a period of recession. From the theoretical standpoint of this essay, the significant issue is how, as a possible response to the recession, the rumour drew readily upon the ideological resource provided by the government, that is, the ideology of survival, as its centre to organise the alleged events of ministerial disagreements, splits and resignations. In either case, being located within the dominant ideology, its political subversive potential, if one was ever intended, was itself subverted leaving it without any way of generating further political issues.

Case 2: 'Changes in Members of Parliament'

If the first case was one of the types of potentially politically loaded rumours that failed, this second case is one of the types of politically pacifying rumours that diffuses political issues and requires no government intervention. Theoretically, this type of rumour brings the analyst closer to observing how the ideological success of the government binds the population within its dominant ideology.

Since 1970, one major concern of the PAP government has been the search for a second generation of political leaders who will continue to build on the groundwork laid by the first generation (Shee, 1979). The PAP has recruited individuals, primarily professionals, to increase the management skills of an already efficient government. The recruited have been introduced laterally through elections and by-elections. Each time one or several sitting PAP MPs would resign to make room for the selected recruits. Often no reason is given for a resignation. Consequently, ever since the adoption of this 'renewal' process, one recurring phenomenon is rumours regarding the ups and downs of individual politicians.

In a liberal democratic society, a common reason for political resignation would be differences of political opinion among party ranks. If so, the differences would give rise to public discussions in the media. If this had happened in Singapore, then it would no longer be a depoliticised state even in appearance. However, it is not so. The January 1979 by-election and the Cabinet reshuffle, for example, provided an occasion to analyse and exemplify what did take place in public opinions. I will narrow the focus on the resignation of Dr Tan Eng Liang.

Tan was Singapore's first Rhodes Scholar. He took his doctorate in Chemistry at Oxford University, lectured for a brief period at the University of Singapore and later joined a multinational company as chief chemist. He was a new recruit in the 1972 election and rose quickly in political position. In the Cabinet reshuffle of 1975 he was appointed Senior Minister of State to the Ministry of National Development, and in June 1978 he was transferred as Senior Minister of State to the Finance Ministry. In early February 1979, he resigned and almost immediately joined a major private corporation. The statement from the Prime Minister's Office announced that Tan had asked to be relieved of his appointment. The Prime Minister acceded to his request and thanked him for the work he had done in his previous political appointments (*Straits Times,* 13 Feb., 1979). Tan's resignation came as a surprise to the electorate as the headlines in the newspaper signified.

As suggested, it would have been perfectly reasonable to expect speculation about Tan's resignation to include the possibility that he had non-resolvable differences with upper-echelon party leaders. If such rumours existed, I heard none, and none were reported in the media.[5] The general belief that the PAP elite only recruits individuals who share their own political views might have forestalled such speculation. However, rumours were not absent; those that I was able to gather readily were variations on the theme of 'personality' problems. One version had it that the 'personality differences' between Tan and a prominent Cabinet minister were the cause of his resignation. Another version had it that Tan was personally dissatisfied with continuing as Senior Minister of State.

The truth or falsity of all these rumours, including others, is not the issue here. What is at issue is that these rumours as interpretations of Tan's resignation were not accidental; the concern here is to show that the rationale of these 'personality' rumours was conditioned by and provided for by government ideology. To explain this, Tan's

resignation must be analysed in comparison with two other possible examples of resignation and decline in political position.

Given the dominant ideological framework of pragmatism and its concomitant administrative efficiency, all necessary for the national survival, the system cannot harbour incompetence. This line of reasoning was with amazing consistency and consensus used to interpret the demise of some who resigned after having served very short stints as MPs with no official reason given. It is casually assumed by Singaporeans that such individuals were incompetent.

That Tan was a Rhodes Scholar and that he possessed a Ph.D. made it difficult for 'incompetence' to seal the speculations about his resignation. But the Ph.D. gave rise to a second line of argument for possible administrative incompetence: it is commonly 'known' that most academics are impractical, that a wide distance exists between the rarefied atmosphere of academic theorising and the active, practical world of work and politics. This line of reasoning has been used to account for the fall of academics recruited into party ranks. In the case of Tan, this line of reasoning was also blocked for he had first demonstrated his ability in the practical world of a multinational company and immediately following his resignation he joined the practical world of business again as a senior manager. Eliminating political differences and administrative incompetencies as the potential template to account for Tan's resignation, personality issues remain serviceable to satisfy an account of his resignation.

When cases of political demise, decline and resignation are taken together, the order of interpretation as encoded in the rumours is, respectively, incompetence; its variant, impracticality; and personality difficulties.[6] These rumours are clearly organised against the background of the dominant ideology of pragmatism. They use the central category, 'practicality', to organise a situational and temporally adequate account; these rumour-ordering processes reproduce the ideology, leaving it intact and with the population well contained in its conceptual horizon. This is exactly as the government prescribes: 'move away from politics to economics', be practical.

TOWARDS AN ANALYSIS OF IDEOLOGICAL PROCESSES IN SINGAPORE

An analysis of the PAP's ideological success in Singapore can now be located within the theoretical framework proposed in this chapter.

Such an analysis should begin with the political history of the PAP as its point of departure, followed by an examination of (1) the central tenets of the ideological system and its changes over time to meet both internal and external historical contingencies; and (2) the mechanisms, or ideological apparatus, through which these concepts are propagated and inscribed.

Analysis of the ideological apparatus should, of course, include those which the government operates directly, such as schools and electronic media, and those that are privately run but subjected to the legislative controls, such as the print media. Next, the measurement of successful ideological hegemony/consensus must be sought in the ways in which the central tenets of the ideological system are used by Singaporeans as rational concepts to organise creative ways to reproduce the ideology itself. Finally, since the leadership role and the domination role of ideology are constant companions, analysis must try to locate where the cracks in the common ideology may be appearing in specific historical conjunctures, rather than projecting their appearance in some unspecified future (Chua, 1982).

CONCLUSION

Dominated by a vision of Singapore as a 'depoliticised state', the ideological processes put successfully into motion by the PAP government to generate an ideological hegemony/consensus among ernment to generate an ideological hegemony/consensus among the citizens remain a rich but uninvestigated terrain for social scientists. The ideological apparatus and processes may be analysed from different substantive interests and methodological perspectives. However, to the extent that the ideological success of a political leadership means carrying along its constituencies towards a common symbolic and practical universe of everyday life, all such investigations should share a common aim. The aim is to trace the path from the officially constituted ideological concepts to the utilisation and currency of these concepts in the daily life of the citizens, thereby disclosing the embedding of these concepts in the social construction of Singapore. It is in those everyday activities that use the ideological concepts as reasonable grounds for their justification and execution that ideological success obtains its sustenance, and is in each instance of usage revitalised.

To the extent that ideological systems are not systematically articulated, but only achieve relative coherence in each instance of

use *in situ,* analysts must pay attention to instances of actual or potential conflicts or contradictions that result from either competing interpretations of the same ideological concepts or different but equally acceptable concepts, derived from the same system, which are brought to bear on a given situation. Not to be concerned about these implied sub-themes would risk presenting a vision of the ideological success as a solid wall without cracks, a condition perhaps politically most desirable from the leadership position but, given the very nature of ideological concepts themselves, never achievable.

NOTES

1 Sri Lanka may be an example of this cycle of coalition through failed attempts at dominance and back to coalition government after the 1994 general elections (Bastin, 1994).
2 For details on the ideology of survival, see Chan (1971).
3 For the PAP's concerted response to this negative sanction, see Nair (1976).
4 The events were reported in the *Far Eastern Economic Review,* 23 August, 1974.
5 This does not necessarily mean that such rumours did not exist. However, it points up one of the important methodological difficulties of research in rumours, that is, one can never claim exhaustiveness, claim to have gathered all the rumours that surround a particular issue; for by its very nature, rumour may be forever forthcoming. This problem is compounded in this instance by the fact that retrenchment of MPs is a recurring phenomenon in Singapore.
6 For a list of individuals who had resigned from PAP MP positions at different times see Shee (1983).

Chapter 3

Pragmatism of the PAP government

A critical assessment

> Set all nearly down into Economy.
> There is little choice—
> We must make a people.
>
> Edwin Thumboo

Individuals who enter politics not for self-serving pecuniary benefits but out of benevolent intent to serve honestly their fellow citizens are essentially motivated by the desire to realise their own political visions in the realm they govern. PAP members certainly hold themselves up as gleaming examples of moral political rectitude. In the long years in government, they have indeed realised much of their political vision.

The total set of conceptual terms of a governing ideology may be broadly sub-divided into the 'operational' and the overarching 'utopian' elements. The distinction turns on the difference between the conceptual elements which politicians actively use to rationalise the day-to-day operations of the state and those they use to define the 'utopian' features of their rule.[1] In the PAP government, the umbrella, utopian element is a vision of a democratic society in the 'final' analysis; a democratic society with all that are conventionally taken as its desirable attributes, beyond the formality of 'one person, one vote' to the embodiment of a political culture in which individuals are respected as such and granted certain freedoms, and in which the collective good is balanced with individual preferences. All these are admissible within the utopian promise as matters of principle, even if the 'final' analysis is never arrived at.[2] On the other hand, as elucidated in the previous chapter, the operant element is 'pragmatism' which enables the government to rationalise, from conception to implementation, state activities on a routine basis.

The PAP argues that there are internal logical connections

between the two sets of elements, with the operant set acting as necessary steps and bridges to the realisation of the utopian vision. In practice, policies that are rationalised on pragmatic grounds often turn out to be undemocratic in serious ways. The only ideological justification is a promise that in the 'final analysis' all these policies will contribute to the establishment of a stable, democratic society.

There is plenty of room for scepticism regarding how the 'pragmatic' policies are to be integrated into a democratic whole. It is almost impossible conceptually to construct a systematic articulation because the contradictions that inhabit the meeting points of the utopian elements and the operant elements are results of two different and often competing modes of rationality that govern the two sets of concepts respectively. Briefly stated, pragmatism is governed by *ad hoc* contextual rationality that seeks to achieve specific gains at particular points in time and pays scant attention to systematicity and coherence as necessary rational criteria for action; whereas utopian rationality emphasises the whole and at times sacrifices the contextual gains to preserve it, if necessary.

This chapter traces the 'operant' set of concepts of the PAP ideology. It will delineate the conceptual boundaries and the logic of 'pragmatism', and the constraints it has imposed on political discourse in Singapore. In so doing, it will inevitably bring into relief points of contradiction that appear to stand in the way of democracy as a utopian vision, and thus serves as an immanent critique of the PAP ideology itself.

ROOTS OF PRAGMATISM

The origins of PAP pragmatism are at once historical, material and conceptual, in part imposed on the Party when it formed the first independent government of Singapore in 1965, and in part a conscious formulation of its leaders as an explicit ideology. The historical and material constraints were determined by the domestic economic situation at independence. Singapore was until then a non-industrial entrepôt and commercial centre of the British Empire with very high rates of unemployment and underemployment coupled with a rapidly growing population. Under such conditions, the material question of 'making a living'[3] was at the fore of the list of problems that had to be solved. Immediate economic development through rapid industrialisation was absolutely necessary; the only question was which model to adopt. The socialist or communist

models were foreclosed. As an island nation with an overwhelming Chinese majority surrounded by Malaysia and Indonesia, it was important that Singapore not be perceived as 'the third China' by her immediate neighbours. An explicit socialist or communist orientation in a Singaporean national identity would surely have given rise to such a perception (Chan and Evers, 1978:199). The capitalist road was the only one open, despite the PAP's early socialist rhetoric.

The result was, and continues to be, an ideology that embodies a vigorous economic development orientation that emphasises science and technology and centralised rational public administration as the fundamental basis for industrialisation within a capitalist system, financed largely by multinational capital. Culturally, in recognition of the geopolitical situation, multiculturalism, representing so-called Chinese, Malay and Indian 'cultures', was emphasised. The PAP government may be said to have had little choice but to do what is necessary, that is, to adopt these elements. Thus from the very beginning, these elements that form a conceptual framework for the day-to-day operations of the PAP government had always been identified as the 'natural', the 'necessary' and the 'realistic' solution to the problems of nation-building. It is in their 'naturalness', 'necessity' and 'realism' that the PAP strategy for nation-building is pragmatic.

The economic is privileged over the cultural because economic growth is seen as the best guarantee of social and political stability necessary for the survival of the nation; some of the effects of this conviction will be analysed in the next three chapters. It continues to be argued that continuous economic growth is the wellspring of all else in a Singaporean's life, including a democratic society in the end. Thus all aspects of social life are to be instrumentally harnessed to this relentless pursuit. This 'instrumental rationality', to the exclusion of all other reasonable arguments, is the conceptual kernel of the PAP's political pragmatism and its logical unfolding is the analytic focus of this chapter.

SUBSTANCE OF PRAGMATISM

From 1959, when the PAP formed the first self-government, it has always seen its task as solving the material needs of the citizens by providing jobs, adequate housing and related amenities. It believed that if these problems were solved equitably among the different races, many causes of political and social instability will either take

care of themselves or be solved subsequently, for 'instability and unemployment feed off each other' (Goh, 1976:81). The immediate aim then was clear cut: (1) 'to achieve a society where all citizens could have a decent living'; (2) 'to provide jobs for everybody who was willing and able to work'; and (3) beyond just providing jobs, 'to give workers rising incomes and improved standard of living over the years', through continuous and rapid economic growth (Goh, 1976:81).

The aims were clear and the answer was to 'industrialise' but conditions were not exactly encouraging. As Dr Goh Keng Swee, the man given the responsibility of industrialising the nation viewed it:

> Apart from the political climate, which hardly inspires investors' confidence, there were other constraints on industrial growth. Besides sand and granite, Singapore had no natural resources. The domestic market was too small to support import substitution manufactures. Further, if the industrial effort failed, there was no fallback position. The land area, then 225 square miles at low tide, was too small to provide an agricultural refuge for the unemployed. Moreover, the main source of Singapore's economic activity, which centred round her port, was made more difficult by action taken in neighbouring countries, whose newly independent governments saw no reason to continue their countries' dependence on Singapore as a transit for their exports.
>
> (Goh, 1976:78)

A two-pronged strategy was developed and has been consistently applied since. First, the domestic economic conditions must be made favourable for investment by foreign and domestic capital, that is, expanding and upgrading the necessary infrastructure services and facilities; developing banking and other financial institutions; offering tax concessions to attract investors and public relations work to bring Singapore to the attention of investors. Multinational corporations have been particularly important because along with jobs they will also engage the world market; both are essential ingredients for the continuous expansion of the economy (Tan, 1976). Second, social conditions must also be disciplined, starting with curbing of militant labour.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

By 1964, the unions were brought into the fold of the PAP-backed National Trade Union Congress. From then on, they were progressively directed away from a 'confrontational' relationship with employers to one of 'mutual trust and co-operation'.[4] (Wong, 1983:267) The 1968 Industrial Relations (Amendments) Act prohibited unions from bargaining beyond the minimum standards set by the Act during the first five years of operation of pioneer industries, thus stabilising the labour costs in these new ventures. It also prohibited strikes and lock-outs, while compulsory conciliation and arbitration were instituted. The collective wage bargaining role of unions was further reduced with the establishment of the tripartite, namely, government, employer and labour, National Wage Council in 1972. The Council recommends annual wage increase guidelines which are largely respected by employers and unions.

The 1982 Trade Unions (Amendments) Bill further emphasised co-operative industrial relations by specifically defining union activities as promoting 'good' industrial relations, improving work conditions and helping to increase productivity. The NTUC also initiated the breaking down of large industrial unions into 'house unions', thereby reducing the collective strength of labour as a whole. Most recently, the 1984 Employment Act gives the employer greater discretion in scheduling of work in order to maximise the productivity of the employees. The leading national newspaper has summed up the situation succinctly, 'the amendments are a systematic attempt to remove any legal obstacles in the way of the nation's objectives' (*Straits Times,* 30 Sept., 1981).

Lee Kuan Yew, then Prime Minister, suggested that the economic progress of Singapore was possible because of the intimate co-operation between the PAP and the NTUC. Lest this co-operation weaken when unions become financially and organisationally stronger in a developed Singapore, he warned: 'Political leaders must triumph (over unions), if necessary, by changing the ground rules to thwart the challenge (by unions), using legislative and administrative powers, and, when necessary, backed by the mandate of the electorate' (quoted in Wong, 1983:265).

When the government was criticised in Parliament for eroding workers' rights and benefits through legislation, the then NTUC Secretary General's response was to concede that workers may indeed be working under less than desirable legislation and

controlled unions but 'had they not however benefited from economic growth?' He in turn rebuked critics as being overly concerned with 'form' instead of 'substance' (Wong, 1983:266). In otherwords, the critic was merely raising a question of principle rather than acknowledging the actual material goods that are delivered as a result of the legislation.

EDUCATION AS HUMAN CAPITAL

With both eyes fixed on economic growth, the PAP government has always seen education as an investment in human capital. The only exploitable resource, 'human resource', must be continuously developed and upgraded. From 1960, the educational system has undergone numerous modifications and radical changes but it has never faltered in its aim: 'to evolve an education system which will support and develop the Republic as a modern industrial nation with a cohesive multiracial society' (Wilson, 1978:235).

The system has by now been finely tuned to identify the different levels of 'abilities' of each cohort of students, and to stream them into different levels of basic and technical/vocational education, in line with estimated demands for the different levels of technical needs of an industrial economy. This is done by a series of rigorously competitive examinations beginning at primary three when the students are between nine and ten years of age. A little more than 10 per cent in each cohort survive these examinations and enter university; quotas are often imposed on levels of intake in professional faculties. At the university, there is a pecking order of preference, in part voluntary and in part imposed by the university administration, of degree programmes, with medicine and engineering at the top and liberal arts at the bottom.

The changes in the education system are executed not without protest from students and their guardians. However, the late Senior Minister of State for Education, Tay Eng Soon, saw these as 'merely' protests, again, in principle rather than reasoned responses to government policies; critics 'oppose streaming on philosophical grounds saying it goes against ideas of equality' (Dr Tay Eng Soon, *Straits Times,* 19 Aug., 1984). Philosophising on grounds of principle was antithetical to instrumental pragmatism. He, in turn, justified it simply: 'It works'. 'Working' is measured by the fact that a portion of these streamed-out students are progressing well in their vocational skills training. The streaming process is further

reinforced by the argument that the selection process itself is based on meritocracy.

MERITOCRACY

While merit in the work-place may be based exclusively on standardised levels of commodity production rate, merit in the education system is emphatically more than just working hard. It is, at least, as much a social-class-stratified phenomenon as to do with one's natural intelligence endowment. However, to recognise the social-economic dimensions of academic achievement would involve the government in a more complex conceptualisation of merit than standardised examinations would permit. Consideration would have to be given to historical and social structural inequalities that have disadvantaged certain sectors of the society. Subsequently, suitable compensatory mechanisms would have to be devised and institutionalised to raise the disadvantaged to an equal plane with those who are relatively privileged. In short, a whole network of social agencies would have to be built around the education system to ensure equal competition by all children. This is not to be.

With pragmatism, equality of opportunity is simply an equal chance of gaining entrance to a free place in a primary school. After that the examination results will segregate the students according to their 'natural' intelligence, into different categories, which in turn fixes their positions in the complex division of labour of the industrial work-place.

Since natural intelligence is supposedly genetically determined, early streaming poses no moral problems in principle. Nature is, by definition, beyond human intervention, so the earlier one is able to detect its course the more one can save the resources that may be committed to trying to change it.[5] Thus, instead of channelling resources to help those who are historically or structurally disadvantaged, resources are used to enrich those who are already in relatively privileged positions. Instead of attempting to achieve some distributive social justice, 'meritocratic' inequality is unapologetically accepted as a consequence of nature. Early streaming is seen as a process of ferreting out the 'no more than 5 per cent' that will lead the nation:

> It is on this group that we must expend our limited and slender resources in order that they will provide that yeast, the ferment,

> that catalyst in our society which alone will ensure that Singapore shall maintain its pre-eminent place in the societies that exist in South East Asia—and the social organization which enables us, with almost no natural resources, to provide the second highest standard of living in Asia.
>
> (Lee Kuan Yew, quoted in Chee and Chan, 1984:8)

The belief that talent is genetically determined reached its logical conclusion, in PAP pragmatism, in the 1984 'graduate mother' population policies, which were to have serious consequences for the PAP's electoral fortunes.

POPULATION POLICY

To summarise the policy briefly: based on the observation that university graduates were putting off marriage in favour of careers, and if married tended to have fewer children than the less well-educated, lower income women, and the belief that 80 per cent of a person's ability is genetically inherited, Lee Kuan Yew was alarmed that this 'thinning' of the 'talented' gene pool may spell 'disaster' to the island nation whose only resource is human intelligence (Lee Kuan Yew, *Straits Times,* 15 Aug., 1983). Government policies were hastily formulated in 1983 to encourage unmarried graduate women to marry, and those who married to have more than two children with generous tax breaks and priorities in enrolling their children in choice schools. On the other hand, the lowest educated women were encouraged to stop at one or two children with a cash grant of S$10,000 in their social security fund, which could be drawn upon to purchase public housing.

In formulating these policies, the PAP government intentionally ignored the scientific literature which argued against genetic determinism.[6] It also ignored the established demographic observation that it is rational and practical for poorer families to have larger families simply because the income generated by an additional pair of hands is greater than the expenditure consumed by an additional mouth. Finally, politically most significantly, it refused to entertain charges of being undemocratic.[7] Apart from dismissing such criticisms as 'nature is undemocratic' (S.Rajaratnam, *Straits Times,* 18 Aug., 1984), it argued that giving special privileges to a particular group does not constitute an 'undemocratic' act because no one is deprived of any basic rights; some are simply given more. As will be

discussed later, significantly, even an electorate which is very appreciative of a government which has done much to improve material life was unable to accept such a blatant violation of social justice. They registered their reaction by significantly withdrawing their electoral support from the PAP in the 1984 general election, held shortly after the policy was imposed, leading to a serious modification of that policy.

LANGUAGE AND MULTIRACIALISM

As suggested earlier, cultural elements have been made to serve as handmaidens to the economic development effort. This has been most apparent in the language policies which, among other regulations, require students to be bilingual in order to qualify for local tertiary education. Bilingualism was never intended to mean any two of the four official languages, rather it was from the very beginning English, plus one of the mother tongues. The primacy of English was rationalised entirely on the basis of its utility for science, technology and commerce, i.e., it is essential to economic development. Lee Kuan Yew has put this succinctly,

> The deliberate stifling of language (English) which gives access to superior technology can be damaging beyond repair. Sometimes this is done not to elevate the status of the indigenous language as much as to take away the supposed advantage a minority in society is deemed to have because that minority has already formed a greater competence in the foreign language. This is most damaging. It is tantamount to blinding the next generation to the knowledge of the advanced countries.

Further,

> Without the English Language, we might not have succeeded in teaching so quickly a whole generation the knowledge and skills which made them able to work the machines brought in from the industrialized countries of the West.
>
> (Quoted in Pendley, 1983:49–50)

Nevertheless, cultural elements are constantly invoked as the socalled Asian values that are needed to combat the penetration of 'undesirable' Western values that may come as the ideological

baggage of the borrowed technologies and administrative strategies. Thus, such values as thrift, industry and filial piety are constantly raised as the necessary cultural ballast against the complacency, individualism and the decline of family in the West.

Whether the selected recommended values are exclusively Asian is highly dubious. S.Rajaratnam, the Second Deputy Prime Minister has had occasions to doubt publicly whether such things as Asian Values do exist (1977). As recently as 1984, Dr Goh Keng Swee, the brain behind the management of the national economy referred to 'thrift and industry' not as Asian values but rather as 'great Victorian virtues' (*Straits Times,* 25 Aug., 1984). What is beyond doubt, however, is that the selected values are also deemed essential to continuing economic growth. Even filial piety is no exception, for, apart from its cultural aspect, it also serves as an ideological justification for the government not to be directly involved in social policies regarding the care of the aged, thus conserving resources for economic growth.

GENERALISED SOCIAL DISCIPLINE

So far the substantive thrust of PAP pragmatism has been delineated in terms of some of its main interlocking features. It must be noted, however, that the underlying instrumental rationality extends beyond these areas of social life, into a significant part of what is conventionally assumed to be private spheres of life in a democratic society. For example, the need for a disciplined labour force logically extends beyond the specific arena of industrial relations into a need for a disciplined citizenry. With such conceptual extension, the door is opened for the instrumental rationality of pragmatism to operate extensively and intrusively into spheres of social and political life.

An obvious and immediate region of intervention is in the control of crime. In 1984, looking through crime statistics, the government deduced that the rise of certain common crimes was a result of the lenient punishment meted out to their perpetrators under the extant penal code; that numerous possible social causes that might explain the frequency of these crimes were not considered. Having so defined the situation, a bill which imposes stiff mandatory minimum punishments, including caning by rattan, on a number of frequently occurring common criminal activities was passed, with the usual ease in a single-party Parliament. Evidence and arguments that questioned the effectiveness of this strategy as a deterrent to the commission of crimes were completely ignored.[8] Also ignored were

principles of jurisprudence regarding the equation between the level of punishment and the seriousness of crime and the authority of judges to make independent judgments regarding the level of punishment the convicted deserved in each case.[9] The bill was, of course, aimed at intensifying societal discipline.

But all the disciplinary measures may not be enough to ensure economic prosperity, since voluntary compliance cannot be assured. Further legislative safeguards and constraints must therefore be installed. In this light, changes in the Constitution of Singapore are being made. Details of these changes and their impact on the democratisation of Singapore will be discussed in Chapter 8. To briefly illustrate the point here, take the Elected Presidency Bill which was mooted in 1984 (Lee Kuan Yew, *Straits Times,* 2 Sept., 1984) and enacted in 1990. Under the Bill, the appointed ceremonial President is to be replaced by an elected one from 1994. The elected President would be authorised, among other specific powers, to veto any proposal by an elected government to draw on the national reserves for deficit financing of the national budget. This provision is supposed to prevent any subsequent generation of Singaporeans from 'squandering' the national wealth accumulated during the years under the leadership of the founders of the PAP. As we shall see in Chapter 8, with the several legislated measures, the way the society is governed has undergone significant changes. The PAP government's perception of its own role in these legislative changes is that of the custodian of the nation's future, which is, of course, entirely congruous with its disciplinary function: the custodian is always the one who maintains discipline and metes out punishment when necessary.

Significantly, both the disciplinarian and the custodian roles are features subsumed under the concept of 'paternalism' which Singaporeans and outside observers often characterise as the style of the PAP government. Paternalism has its own logic: it is benevolent when the children abide by the father's wishes; where there is disobedience, the father's authority discloses itself nakedly in imposing punishments. Furthermore, a lack of faith that the children would continue to abide by the 'wise' counsel of the father, when the latter passes from the scene, is an intrinsic feature of paternalistic reasoning. Obedience, however, can be assured to some extent by the institution of a will. The Elected Presidency Bill is an example of making of a will by the first generation leaders to prevent their 'children' from squandering the fruits of their labours.

From the diverse examples of interventions derived from the perceived need to maintain discipline, including its manifestation at the symbolic level, one is tempted by both logic and empirical evidence to argue that the instrumental rationality which is essential to pragmatism will find increasing areas of social life to govern. Such instrumental reasoning appears to be unable to stop its rationalisation process, and would seem unable to know where or when it should leave everyday life to the desires and preferences of the individuals in the society.

LOGIC OF PRAGMATISM

In the first two decades of the PAP regime, this pragmatism has been systematically elaborated and articulated to become a fleshed-out conceptual system that governs the regime's administrative policies and strategies. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, it has also penetrated the consciousness of the population and has come to serve as the conceptual boundaries within which Singaporeans think through significant portions of their daily life. Even social scientists in Singapore have come to see this pragmatism as the only rational choice and therefore non-ideological. The set of concepts that can be collected under the auspices of pragmatism can, therefore, be said to have a popular legitimacy and to be constitutive of the ideological consensus between the PAP and the population. Since this pragmatism has achieved some level of systematic coherence, it is possible to extract its logical structure and identify the limits of its rationality.

The overriding goal of PAP pragmatism is to ensure continuous economic growth. This singular goal is simultaneously the singular criterion for initiating and assessing all government activities, in terms of how an act will aid or retard this growth. In principle no sector of social life, no matter how 'private', cannot be so administered as to harness it to serve the goal itself. For example, the population policies by extension also regulates sexuality. Marriage is thus subjected to state regulation. If a male Singaporean chooses to marry a non-Singapore citizen and if the potential spouse is educated and professionally trained, thus presumed able to add to the economic growth effort, no state permission is required for the marriage and any children of the couple are entitled to the privileges of citizenship.[10] The same is

not so for lower-income potential spouses; long waiting periods are imposed on the couples before permission to marry is granted.

Since all regions of social life are open to state administrative intervention, selective interventions in a particular region are determined entirely in terms of the economic growth picture at a specific point in time. The justification for intervention is always contextual and never based on principles of political philosophy. The different phases of changes in the population policies, from limiting each family to two children, through the modified ‘graduate mother’ policy, to the current pro-natal policy which encourages increasing the birth rate for all except the poor, reflect this contextual rationality. The context being determined entirely by ‘projected’ manpower needs to keep the economy growing.

Contextual interventions have other entailing features. First, each intervention in a specific region of social life aims to be effective in that region exclusively. For example, under the general concern for economic growth, manpower policies and population policies are treated as separate interventions aimed at two separate regions and quite independent of each other and interventions elsewhere.

Second, as contextual and instrumental instead of ‘in principle’ interventions, they are discrete and discontinuous acts, in the sense that a particular intervention in a particular region of social life may radically alter the trajectory that an early intervention may have put in place. Contextual and discontinuous interventions are characteristics of what a PAP back-bencher calls the ‘crisis’ mentality of his own government (Ow, 1984:377). This mentality has as one of its consequences the desire to make pre-emptory interventions that often contain unforeseen consequences whose subsequent unfolding in turn force the government to change course, sometimes radically. Wage policies of the past are good examples. Immediately after the first petroleum price hike in 1972, fearing that industrial investors might move out of Singapore if wages were to rise, the government through the National Wage Council imposed artificially low wage increases for the next four or five years. This led to the hoarding of labour by the industries. Meanwhile, industries in Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea responded to the same oil price hike by increasing productivity through mechanisation. Wage increases were then radically adjusted upwards in 1978, doubling over a period of three years, to force the industries to mechanise and to release labour into a tight labour market. This rapid wage increase

contributed to the mini-recession in 1985, causing the government to cut wages by 15 per cent and freeze wage increases for the next two years.

Finally, in its single-minded economic aim, pragmatism admits only ‘concrete’ evidence of a statistical type and no qualitative or ‘soft’ evidence or ‘in principle’ arguments. All policy justifications are made in quantitative terms, similarly assessments of its success or failure. For example, in defence against the World Bank’s critique of the geneticist population policy that differentiated university graduates from non-graduate mothers for differential treatment, the then Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education responded by reiterating a long list of figures which showed that children of graduate mothers consistently do better in academic examinations than those of non-graduate mothers; as if these figures settled the nature/nurture debate categorically (Goh Kim Leong, *Straits Times,* 4 Sept., 1984). There is thus a readiness to simply translate quantitative measures into qualitative judgements, without any sense of philosophical and methodological discomfort.

In summary, PAP pragmatism operates with a single goal which simultaneously serves as the singular ground for justifying and assessing government policies, however interventionist in personal terms. Policies are always justified and executed contextually and discontinuously, depending on current or projected configuration of the state of continuous economic development; consequently, they tend to be *ad hoc* and lack long-term coherence within specific regions of social life. As a conceptual framework it not only includes the above features but also excludes others. It admits no ‘in principle’ arguments and tends to trivialise principled arguments in various ways, for example, as mere forms.

PRAGMATISM: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Having extracted its essential logical features, it is now possible to assess PAP pragmatism. The assessment will be limited to two related issues. First, to address its social and political impact in terms other than economic growth and second, to question whether it will deliver a ‘democratic’ society which the government purportedly seeks to realise eventually.

A 'systematic' government

As pragmatic administrative interventions are region-specific, issues arise when interventions are placed side-by-side because regions of daily life are loosely connected rather than rigidly compartmentalised. An illustration can be gleaned by placing the policy on the female labour force beside the unequal population policy.

The initial unequal population policy encouraged university graduate mothers to have more than two children, with generous tax incentives and priority to register her third child in the school of her choice. This 'priority registration scheme' was subsequently withdrawn in 1985, under politically unfavourable conditions which will be discussed later. For now, the priviledged situation of graduate mothers during the two years in which the policy was in place will be used for analytic and illustrative purposes.

Generally, in developed capitalist nations, the number of working women reaches a peak before marriage, drops when they take time off to raise a family, then picks up significantly after the children enter school. In Singapore, the rate of participation simply dips after childbirth and never picks up again. Given the small population base, the expanding economy can ill afford this loss of labour power. Labour policy is, therefore, unequivocally one of encouraging women, especially graduate mothers, to remain in the labour force, again with tax incentives.

The dilemma facing a graduate mother before the 'priority registration scheme' was withdrawn was: if she wished to ensure the admission of each of her three children in the school of her choice, it was necessary that by the time her first child reached the school age of five, either all three children would already have been born, or she should be expecting the third. A promise to have more than two would not secure the priority for the first child. This meant having three children within five years. If one presumes that a graduate mother is a middle-class individual, who, after giving birth, is likely to stay at home with her children for a number of years before returning to work, this will extend the childbearing period to about eight to ten years. Given the competing incentives for nurturing children and remaining in the labour force, the graduate mother logically and existentially would find herself caught in contradictory demands. Contradiction also appears at the national level. If all female graduate mothers in fact abided by the population policy and did their best in producing 'talented'

offspring, what would become of the national labour policy? Conversely, if they remained in the labour force, given the government's geneticist view, what would become of the future 'talent' pool deemed necessary for sustained and expanding economic growth?

As it is impossible to satisfy the antithetical pull of the contradictory demands, individuals can only act by subjective preferences. This has two consequences. First, at the individual level, the government's policies may become irrelevant in one's decision-making process. This will render the policies superfluous. Second, at the government level, it is impossible to assess the effectiveness of any piece of the contradictory interventions because every decision of a citizen that appears to abide by the prescriptions of one policy simultaneously defies another.

Thus, what appears to be a rational intervention in a specific region of social life turns out to be quite irrational when the totality of social life is taken into consideration. Finally, the apparent systematicity of these interventions, provided for by the presumed unifying auspices of an economic policy, turns out to be otherwise, precisely at the national level. Thus, bringing into question the very hallmark claim of the PAP government to be thoroughly planned, efficient and well-administered government.

Towards democracy

In every one of the administrative terrains discussed in the section on the substance of pragmatism, the government's disdain for any 'in principle' criticisms of its policies has been deliberately noted. This is to highlight the antagonistic relation that inheres in the confrontation between pragmatism and claims to democratic norms of equality and rights of individuals. In its single-mindedness to sustain economic growth, the PAP government has deemed it fit to violate various taken-for-granted stock democratic values, in spite of appearances to the contrary.

Take the 'graduate mother' policy: the number of children desired remains the personal preference and 'right' of parents. As in all direct regulations on personal life, no legal coercion can be applied without political costs; instead, only incentives and disincentives, formulated as administrative regulations of public agencies, are used to solicit compliance. These administrative regulations are not subjected to any constitutional challenges because they are deemed terms of contract

between the public agencies and the citizens who avail themselves to the services provided, such as housing, health and education. Should a citizen choose not to abide by the stipulated regulations, one is free to find similar services elsewhere, which all but the very wealthy can ill afford.

Formally, a citizen's rights and preferences are therefore preserved but in substance one's private sphere is a shrinking realm thoroughly encroached by administrative interventions. This maintenance of the 'form' of rights enables the PAP government to counter suggestions of being anti-democratic in principle while simultaneously exercising inegalitarian administrative options. Under such conditions, the only definition of democracy that is admissible is, not surprisingly, a very technical one: 'one person, one vote'; indeed, even this basic rule of equality is not sacrosanct in the hands of the PAP government.

The vote, in turn, is narrowly interpreted as the mandate given by the electorate to the elected to govern in accordance to the latter's definition of 'national' interests, as long as it improves the material life of the citizenry. This interpretation is reflected in the PAP's wont and proud proclamation that the government must make 'tough but unpopular' decisions, implying that the populace cannot be trusted with the rational formulation of policies. Conversely, opinions contrary to these decisions need not be paid much heed and may be trivialised, in such phrases as 'principles do not satisfy an empty stomach!' Consequently, the PAP government appears quite unmoved by any criticism that it is merely a ghost of what has come to be normatively accepted as democracy. If criticisms were made by non-Singaporeans, they can be negated either in terms of the ethnocentricism of the foreigner or their failure to understand the exigencies of Singapore. If criticisms came from Singaporeans, the critics can be discounted as being afflicted by Western liberalism and thus dismissed.

Pragmatism under duress

As shown above, pragmatism as a systematic conceptual framework developed out of the historical and material conditions at the time the PAP assumed the governance of the country. Precisely because of this historical materialist basis, pragmatism as an ideological system has enabled the PAP to lead the population. Policies rationalised under pragmatism come to be seen as necessary, realistic and natural;

exemplifying Marx's conceptualisation of the process of ideological transformation as the naturalisation of the historical.[11] The legitimacy of both pragmatism and PAP leadership have been further strengthened by the success of government's policies in 'delivering the goods', improving the material life of the people. This success has contributed to Singaporeans' hitherto acceptance, or at least tolerance, of undemocratic administrative interventions.[12]

Ironically, the 'imposition' of pragmatism as an ideology becomes exposed when it is pressed into justifying ongoing activities under historical conditions transformed precisely by its success. Up till the early 1980s, every government administrative intervention, from trade unionism to population policy, had been rationalised in terms of necessity for national survival. The political image was of a country without resources struggling against hunger, privation and internal and external threats, in the face of which, Singaporeans were exhorted to be disciplined, vigilant and self-sufficient. The sacrifices and hard work have paid off and Singaporeans have reached a stage of respectable affluence.

This affluence poses problems for pragmatism as an ideology because the compelling element in its rationality is that of necessity. Contrary to necessity, which may serve as the ground for collective action, affluence opens up the avenues of individual preferences. For example, instead of fear of unemployment, the tight labour conditions make it possible for workers to exercise greater degrees of choice not only in jobs but also in subjectively defined suitable working conditions. With increasing affluence and full employment, talk about the necessity to ensure the basics, and not to make personal demands, seem to find few sympathetic ears. As Dhanabalan, then Minister for Foreign Affairs has noted, 'We just can't always be telling them to compare their situation to that of the 50s and ask them to be grateful. We can't always be telling them that' (*Straits Times,* 19 Sept., 1984).

Demographically, the character and the experience of the electorate have also changed significantly. By the 1984 election, only 40 per cent of the electorate would have been twenty years or older at the time of independence in 1965. Sixty per cent would not have had any experience or memory of the turbulence and difficulties of the fifties and the sixties—difficulties on which PAP pragmatism was built. By the 1989 election, the margin of the new electorate had expanded to 70 per cent (*Petir,* Aug., 1984). This younger generation is much better educated and possesses higher

political and social awareness, especially 'of the negative effect of an over-regulated society' (Quah, 1983:287). Consequently, criticisms of both specific issues and the general political milieu intensify precisely after all the tangible problems, such as employment, housing and health issues, have been successfully taken care of, and government interventions begin to move into the less tangible features of social and personal life. For example, university graduate women had criticised the 'graduate mother' policy as an unnecessary direct state intrusion in their private lives, even though they stood to gain by the policy.

In addition to lay complaints, professional groups are also voicing their reservations about the way and speed with which the single-party PAP government passes legislation that significantly affect their professional practices and jurisdictions; an example was the move, by a group of younger lawyers, to have the Law Society formally appeal for the repeal of the earlier mentioned mandatory minimum sentence criminal laws (*Straits Times,* 1 Sept., 1984). By mid-1984, the cummulative effect of emergent criticisms of government's pragmatism was quite observable. One Minister complained that the population seemed inclined to criticise rather than praise the government (Ong Teng Cheong, *Straits Times,* 18 July, 1984), only to be met by a letter to the editor of that national newspaper suggesting that dissent was indeed there and that it was all to the good (*Straits Times,* 25 July, 1984).

1984 ELECTION AND AFTER

The pressure for opposition voices in Parliament to check the overly interventionist government was undoubtedly building under the new social, political and economic conditions. It was with an eye to heading off this pressure that the PAP government passed, in August 1984, a bill in Parliament that guaranteed the presence of three opposition MPs in the House. The three, designated as 'non-constituency MPs', were to be appointed only when none or less than three opposition MPs were elected in a general election. They were to come from those candidates who had won at least 15 per cent of the votes in the constituencies in which they stood. In Parliament, they were not entitled to vote on certain issues, including votes of no confidence (*Petir,* Aug., 1984). There was a mixed reception among both opposition parties and the public to this measure which indicated the PAP's recognition of the significant pressure towards

greater democratisation. But if the scheme was aimed at appeasing growing dissatisfactions with the PAP government, the December 1984 general election result clearly showed that it had little if any impact.

The PAP lost significant support in all the constituencies which opposition parties contested. Its share of the popular vote in these constituencies dropped from 75.5 per cent in the 1980 general election to 63 per cent, a loss of more than 12 per cent. Many of the Ministers were returned with substantially reduced majorities. In one case, the opposition candidate who stood against the Minister of Home Affairs, won 5,000 votes, in spite of having withdrawn from the campaign for reasons of psychological exhaustion! Two of the candidates publicly endorsed by the Prime Minister as more than ordinary MP material lost to the leaders of two opposition parties. However, no one was under any illusion that the shift in voting behaviour represented an endorsement of the opposition. A post-election survey confirmed that frustration with certain policies, and a desire to keep a check on the PAP government, were the overwhelming reasons for casting protest votes (*Straits Times,* 10 Apr., 1985).

The depth of the dissatisfaction was not lost on the PAP government. In the very first post-election Parliament sitting, many of its back-benchers reiterated the citizens' grievances. The instrumentalist interventions of the government were directly criticised by a former Cabinet Minister and ex-High Commissioner to Britain. He said, 'The government was seen as being too caring [*sic*], too paternalistic and overbearing in areas which people felt were their own personal and private domain' (Jek Yuen Thong, *Straits Times,* 6 Mar., 1985). Education, population and manpower policies were criticised by PAP back-benchers for their elitist implications. One pointed out the priority school registration scheme for graduate mothers, early streaming in education and special schools for gifted children were all policies that 'had been defended as not significantly depriving the majority of their rights', but 'the fact that they benefited so few alienates the majority' (Tan Cheng Bok, *Straits Times,* 2 Mar., 1985). Finally, financial and statistical approaches to social issues, two main elements in PAP pragmatism, were also criticised. One MP stated, 'our hard-headed and statistical approach to problems have given the impression that we are beginning to care less for the people and more for those who can

achieve' (Tan Cheng Bok, *Straits Times,* 2 Mar., 1985). Another felt that 'the government often relied too much of fiscal measures to achieve its objectives' without exhaustively searching for other available options before embarking on certain tough policies (Chandra Das, *Straits Times,* 6 Mar., 1985).

The most significant event in this first sitting was the announced intended withdrawal, by the then new Minister of Education, of the priority registration scheme on grounds that it was not going to achieve its aim of encouraging graduate mothers to have more children; instead it was hurting the pride of the non-graduate mothers. Furthermore, parents were to be given the right to decide in which stream they would like to place their children at the Primary Three level; the Ministry of Education would only act in an advisory capacity to this decision. The Minister argued that at such an early age, the future of the schoolchildren was the responsibility of the parents and not the government, even if the former should err in their decision and corrective actions might have to be taken later. The general implication that citizens be given the rights and freedom to choose certain options, to find out for themselves the limits of what was possible, even at the risk of making mistaken choices, came to be seen as preferable over rigidly imposing the limits to options in order to forestall any mistakes. The latter strategy would always lead to personal unhappiness and political charges of paternalism, authoritarianism or simply of being anti-democratic (Lee Hsien Loong, *Straits Times,* 9 Apr., 1985).

CONCLUSION

After 1984, the general orientation of the new PAP Cabinet, constituted by the younger generation Ministers, became one that stressed the need to forge a new consensus with the electorate, through its greater participation in the decision-making processes in the national forum and its greater freedom in personal affairs. This is a significant departure from the first generation's interpretation of the mandate to govern. The explicit orientation of greater consultation and participation appeared to be steps towards the development of a democratic culture beyond the mechanics of election. This shift to a less mechanically defined democracy would require the undoing of some of the intrinsic features of pragmatism,

and a new ideological system be thought out in order to regain the eroded faith that the PAP suffered among the citizens. How these necessary steps and changes unfolded will be the focus of the final three chapters.

For now, it is time to examine the substantive successes of the ideology of pragmatism to which the abstract analysis of this and the previous chapter have constantly referred and which constitute the impressive record of the PAP government during the past three decades.

NOTES

1 Utopia is used here to signify an orientation to a future. To the extent that actions can be conceived as attempts to realise this future, they are by this orientation necessarily radical.
2 The 'final' analysis of 'final' instance will never arrive because it is a permanently receding horizon towards which the political realm moves.
3 Dr Goh Keng Swee sees this as 'the Asian problem', quoted in Koh (1980:301).
4 The following discussion draws heavily from Wong (1983).
5 This was argued by Goh Kim Leong, Permanent Secretary of Education, *Straits Times,* 30 Aug., 1984.
6 For the counter-evidence and arguments, see Chee and Chan (1984).
7 This is the charge levelled by university students. See the National University of Singapore, Student Union Newsletter, July 1984.
8 For a local attempt to present these counter arguments, see English (1984).
9 During March through April 1994, compulsory caning for vandalism became a focus of contention between American and Singapore public and press as a result of the incrimination of an American teenager in Singapore. The debate was covered almost daily in the *Straits Times* during the two months.
10 Citizenship laws discriminate against women in that similar citizenship privileges are not automatically granted to the children of a Singaporean female citizen and a foreigner.
11 A clear theoretical formulation of this, supported by substantive analysis, can be found in Barthes (1972).
12 In ideological analysis a methodological asymmetry exists. Any action by an individual that is in accord with an ideological prescription is not necessarily an action that abides by it. The motivation to behave thus may be completely different from the prescription itself. On the other hand, any action counter to the prescription is an instance of ideological disruption in consequence.

Chapter 4

The business of living

Transformation of everyday life

To assess the achievements of the long regime of the PAP and its ideology of pragmatism, this chapter will attempt to provide a sense of the massive changes that have taken place within the everyday lives of Singaporeans from self-government in 1959 until the present.[1]

The late Alvin Gouldner, in tracing the role that the concept of everyday life has played in Western thought, suggested that it was often used as a counter-concept, and hence as a critique, of political life (Gouldner, 1975). If the political arena be conceived as one of struggle, competition and conflicts, crowded with heroic acts of leaders and political parties, the concept of everyday life emphasises the stable, recurrent, seemingly unchanging, mundane features of social life that maintain the continuity of society. A certain rigidity in such a conceptualisation led Gouldner to argue that the concept of change contained within the concept of everyday life views social change in terms of a 'massive movement in the collective minutiae of existence' and not 'primarily through the initiatives of elites'. Such distinctions too stringently sever the two spheres of everyday and political life. I would argue for an interactive conceptualisation of the two spheres. The massive changes that take place in everyday life are often the amplified results of initiatives taken by political leaders. Once these changes take root and everyday life is transformed, that transformed social life in turn may act as a source of constraint on subsequent decisions by political leaders. This reversal becomes obvious when the realm of everyday life begins to throw up resistance, passively as scepticisms and indifference and actively as protests to the initiatives of the leaders.

A second conceptual elaboration proposed by Gouldner is to contrast history with everyday life. If the everyday life of a group

'constitutes its standard of the normal', history is constituted by the 'more-than-normal, or extraordinary'. A historic act is thus an intervention by a particular event that has serious reverberations in everyday life. Although Gouldner might have had in mind only extraordinary acts of individuals, I would suggest that in modern bureaucratically administered states such extraordinary events should include governmental decisions. The cumulative effects of a series of administrative decisions could transform existing everyday life into a new configuration, a new everyday life. Methodologically and substantively, the two configurations become mutually illuminating when placed side by side.

It is clearly impossible to trace the trajectories of the elements of Singaporean everyday life over the span of twenty to thirty years. In accordance with the above conceptual elements, I shall freeze two points in time separated by these years, namely the end of the 1950s and the mid-1980s, and describe the two respective configurations of everyday life serially. The contrast, which serves as an impressionistic measure of the massive changes that have taken place, will be immediately observable.

What hold these two discontinuous and contrasting configurations together are the elements which provide for their continuity. This continuity can be conceptualised at two levels. First, at the individual level, the memories of individual Singaporeans, who participated in and bear witness to the continuing changes, serve to frame the changes as a sequence of continuous adjustments to the opportunities and pitfalls thrown up by the societal environment. Second, in line with the postulated conceptual relations between history and everyday life and between political activities and the mundane sphere, at the societal level the two configurations may be rendered continuous by the public policies that were aimed directly at transforming the first everyday life into the second. The two elements of continuity will be woven into this essay at different points.

The description of the first stage is made possible by my own recollections of daily life in an urban village and that of the second is served by ongoing observations of contemporary Singapore, particularly daily life in the public housing estates. Finally, an assessment of the general societal tendencies that the administrative policies have put in place will be made at the close of the chapter.

THE 1950S—LIFE IN THE URBAN VILLAGE

Bukit Ho Swee village sat on one of the edges of the functional urban area of colonial Singapore. This was evinced by its being adjacent to the then modern housing estate of Tiong Bahru built by the colonial government, and by its being within walking distance of the Singapore General Hospital and of the oldest English primary and secondary schools in Singapore, namely, Pearl's Hill and Outram respectively. The two schools in turn flanked the Outram jail and the extensive police barracks on Pearl's Hill itself. Despite proximity to the above, Bukit Ho Swee had no modern amenities and stood in stark contrast to Tiong Bahru in all aspects of physical and social environment.

Only the two main 'roads' of the village were paved; that these were hardly roads was indicated by their names. One was called simply Bukit Ho Swee, signifying the hillock on which the village was erected and from which it derived its name. The other was called Beo Lane. Timber houses with thatch, corrugated zinc plates or asbestos sheeting as roofs formed a continuous facade along the well-defined edges of the roads, punctuated only by the openings of the unpaved tracks that branched off the roads themselves. Shops serving the minimum daily necessities for the villagers, such as provisions shops, Chinese herbal and medicine shops, barbers and coffee shops, were interspersed between the homes. Owners lived either adjacent to their shops or behind the shopfronts.

The wealthier villagers were to be counted amongst these shop owners who, in addition to their own dwellings and shops owned other houses for rent. In three or four cases, the shop was run by the wife and children while the husband had his own business away from the village. It was among these shop owners that the proverbial Chinese extended families were quite visible. One of the biggest home owners in Beo Lane had two wives. The first wife had five sons and an adopted daughter who was intended as a bride for the youngest son, while the second had two sons and two daughters. All the married children lived in different sections of the sprawling *atap* house. In part of this house lived the patriarch's younger brother and his family who owned the largest provisions shop in the village. The two brothers and their families were exceptional as most extended families involved only children from single-stem monogamous marriages. Polygamy and bigamy were commonly

known, and even aspired to by the men, but were seldom practised in the village.

The physical environment along the two main roads was quite good. The relative width of the roads provided the houses with good frontage. The substantial size of the houses and the heights of the roofs, sometimes reaching 20 feet at the pitch, kept them well ventilated. Simple glass panels wedged between *atap* fronds and thin wooden slats brought ample daylight into the houses. The relative wealth of their owners kept them in good repair. The ‘T’ junction of the two main roads was the hub of social and simple commercial activities pertaining to daily needs, giving the roads a constant social liveliness. In sum, the segment along the two paved roads, especially at their junction, provided the fundamental and necessary ingredients for an essentially ‘romantic’ view of village life.

Beyond this short segment of the relatively wealthier minority was quite a different environment and form of life. A network of unpaved tracks spread out from the two roads; each track was again generally lined with houses. Each track in turn had its own even narrower branches, which were often merely gaps between adjacent houses. One such gap might run the length of several houses or lead, surprisingly and quickly, into an unkempt open clearing, often surrounded by houses facing into the opening.

The state of maintenance of the houses within this network of tracks depended entirely on whether they were owner-occupied or rented premises. The former were generally well maintained and substantial both in size and number of rooms, and were adequately ventilated. Some of them might equal in appearance those along the main roads. The rented houses were just the opposite. Consisting generally of only one sitting room and one bedroom, two at the most, and a small kitchen either at the front or the back section of the house, these premises had low ceilings, often without windows in the bedrooms, in which case the only source of light and ventilation was the main door. Hence it was not uncommon to find an oil lamp lit throughout the entire day inside the house. Interspersed with dwellings were outhouses, as there was no modern plumbing, and the occasional pigsty. Both sources of stench were substantially reduced only by the cooking activities in the late afternoon.

Unemployment and underemployment were common among the villagers who were renting their homes. Irregular odd jobs and physical labour were the norm among men and not uncommon among women who were widowed or whose husbands were either

unable or unwilling to assume any responsibilities. Thus, the wife of a rickshaw rider was a Harbour Board odd-job worker, and a woman and two of her three daughters worked at construction jobs while her husband and two eldest sons did nothing.

The housewives of the poor, who had to manage and stretch the meagre incomes of their husbands to keep the family afloat, resorted to obtaining credit or even short-term loans at substantial interest from the shopkeepers. One way in which economic difficulties might be alleviated for a few days was by striking lucky in numbers games. Indeed, numbers games provided, on the one hand the hope of a respite from financial difficulties for the poor and, on the other, a constant source of substantial income for the runners, collectors, and organisers. Personnel at every level of the organised games were found in the village, with the organisers being among the wealthiest villagers. Everybody knew who they were, including the plainclothes policemen who came to the village regularly to get their pay-offs. Thus, if the main road area is what the vision of *Gemeinschaft* is in part made of, then the conditions of the families in the rental houses was where the inhumanity of poverty of the majority of villagers was to be found.

If poverty separated the poor from the relatively wealthy, disease made no such distinctions, for the general public health conditions were equally poor for all villagers. Tuberculosis, known even among the illiterate by its acronym TB, was the most common. It affected the wealthier and the poor, adults in their prime, and ageing individuals. Those affected withered away slowly, becoming a taut layer of skin stretched over a skeleton. In physical appearance it was difficult to differentiate them from opium addicts on the decline. When the disease began to attack the soft tissues of the major arteries in the lungs, eventually bursting the arteries themselves, blood flowed into the bronchial tree and had to be coughed up— colloquially known fearfully as ‘vomiting’ blood. The end for the TB-infected came tragically and dramatically. Anyone who had witnessed the following scene would not have been able ever to erase if from his or her memory: the deaf-mute son of the proprietor of the largest provision shop, who slept outside the shop for fear of contagion, was found dead early one morning on his camp bed in a pool of his own blood. Fortunately, by the early 1960s TB patients in the village were availing themselves of the facilities and treatments of the Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association (SATA).

The population was largely illiterate; consequently the few

marginally literate adults emerged as resource people for the villagers. One particular man who had a primary English education wielded substantial influence at both the individual and village levels through helping the villagers with correspondence with the government. This social standing was achieved without any moral ambiguity or aspersion arising from the fact that he was not gainfully employed and derived his income exclusively from being a collector in the numbers game.

Despite their own illiteracy, parents were not without hope that their children could be educated. By the late 1950s, the economic importance of an English education was already recognised, and many boys born during the post-war baby boom were sent to nearby English schools; girls were sent to Chinese schools because of the presumed negative cultural influence of the West. Unfortunately, only a handful entered secondary schools; the rest stopped anywhere within the six years of primary education. Chinese education, on the other hand, was more of a collective responsibility of the village. A substantial coeducational primary school was established within the village by the villagers themselves. Its operational costs were derived from school fees and annual contributions by the board of governors, comprising the wealthier legitimate or illicit businessmen in the village. Again, the success rate of the students making it to Chinese secondary schools was marginal, although numerically greater than those entering English secondary schools.

Generally then, boys were already out of school and in the streets by their early teens and, depending on the effectiveness of parental restraint and personal character, they entered into irregular odd-job employment, petty criminal activities or even full-fledged gangsterism. For those who successfully finished secondary school and were able to secure better-paying jobs or proceed to university, both paths enabled them to break with the village and enter the life of the middle class—if they were able, that is, to capitalise on the economic opportunities of the next two-and-a-half decades.

The collective effort in building the Chinese school was indicative of the co-operation among the villagers when it came to provision of collective needs, an area which was neglected by the colonial government. In addition to the school, villagers contributed to the paving of the main roads, the maintenance of the village temple and its annual religious festivals. Common hazards were also dealt with collectively. The village policed itself against property and personal crimes. Thus, clichéd as it might be, the

villagers took the public security of the village for granted. Collective vigilance was always maintained against the greatest apprehension of the villagers, namely fire. At the slightest indication of fire breaking out, the village men would be there attempting to put it out rather than rushing home to help their own families prepare for evacuation.

In both crime policing and fire prevention the unemployed young men in the village were indispensable. There was no contradiction at all between their life of petty crime and gangsterism on the one hand and crime prevention on the other because the two activities were spatially separated. The crimes were conducted away from the village because the goodwill of the home-based villagers had to be preserved in case the young men needed shelter from pursuit by the official authorities.

If the physical conditions were wanting, the men underemployed and the youth uneducated, the social life of the village was, perhaps contrary to expectations, lively and amicable rather than despondent.[2] It was this social dimension that was one of the most endearing elements of village life. Underemployment and unemployment had two effects. First, they imposed a low standard of living and acted as a restraint on an individual's demands from his or her environment. Expectations, material and otherwise, were drawn tightly around the level of meeting the necessities of everyday life. That was all that the intermittent employment and irregular wages would permit. Second, it left the villagers with plenty of time and imposed upon them a relative sense of ease in their daily life. With time on their hands, no money to engage in commercial recreational activities and little education for the pleasure of abstract pursuits, 'collective idling' was the major leisure pursuit in the village.

The village institution *par excellence* was undoubtedly the village coffee shop. The largest coffee shop in Bukit Ho Swee was to be found at the 'T' junction of the two roads. A wide, open shopfront with tables and chairs spilling beyond its sheltered premises on to the side of the road, all well shaded by a huge tree, this coffee shop was never without several men and teenagers in it, huddled in groups or scattering themselves at different tables. The activities were always the same. A huddled group was as likely as not to be engaged in one of several forms of gambling, some of which were quite ingenious. The most peculiar might be the challenge to slice through a ripe banana with a very sharp blade such that the sliced off section hung precariously on a thin sliver of

the skin. The skill involved was substantial for the general tendency was to slice the banana right through. The one who literally produced the cliffhanger won the bet. Other more conventional modes of gambling involved cards, matchsticks and fighting fish.

If it was not gambling, then it would be plain idling and intermittent repartee. The substance of the conversation was never rarefied discussion of weighty issues but trading of jokes, mild putdowns, boastful self-defence and aggrandising embellishments of one's exploits. During these routine idling sessions, one man stood out as a resource person. He was an opium addict who fed his habit as a numbers game collector. He was literate in Chinese and would read the Chinese newspaper aloud to the audience present. The latter would contribute their opinions at will. All was conducted in Hokkien, of course. Agreements were always based on immediate judgements of rights and wrongs, wins and losses; and if China were involved in the news item, then the audience's sentiment was entirely predictable. It would be unembarrassingly pro-China, such was their taken-for-granted Chineseness.

While the coffee shop might be the prime gathering spot, such spots were multiplied and distributed throughout the village. Every shopfront and every clearing would have benches for anyone to perch on. The ever-present knots of people at these gathering spots unintentionally but simultaneously served to keep a watchful eye on the comings and goings of villagers and strangers. The camaraderie generated by collective idling imparted to the villagers a strong sense of belonging and community.

An external source of 'affordable' entertainment was the Rediffusion, a privately owned cable radio service. The programme most listened to had to be the half-hour segments of serialised *gong-fu* stories narrated in Hokkien, which were broadcast at 9:00 p.m., five nights a week. The coffee shop radio would be tuned to full volume, males of all ages gathered around the table stirring and sipping coffee and catching the unfoldings of the struggles between good and evil—the moral of the stories were that simple. The end of the segment at 9:30 p.m. also signalled the end of a routine village day. So, after allowing for a few minutes of discussion regarding the segment of the story just broadcast and for downing the coffee that was still in the cup, the coffee shop closed after about fourteen hours of business.

The signal for the end of this mode of living, in which life was lived largely in the open, could not have had more apt symbolic significance than the razing of Bukit Ho Swee by fire in the very

first year of the 1960s, and two years after self-government had been obtained by the People's Action Party government from the British Crown. On the ground where *atap* houses had stood was to be built the very first substantial housing estate by the then newly constituted Housing and Development Board (HDB). The conjunction of these events imparted to Bukit Ho Swee a symbolic place in the history of Singapore, as the quintessential urban slum and squalor in official terms,[3] while the HDB was to go on from there to achieve its own status as the symbol of the successful transformation of Singapore, from rags to riches.[4]

THE MID-1980S

If the everyday life in the late 1950s could be described with some generality and relative coherence, it was because the prevalent condition of underemployment at the individual level and underdevelopment at the national level imposed a relatively uniform material and psychological horizon on the majority of the population, one characterised by the paramount concern of satisfying basic needs. The same level of uniformity and generality cannot be obtained when one attempts to describe the everyday life of the mid-1980s and beyond. This is because the opportunities provided by the rapid industrialisation and economic growth have resulted in a greater differentiation of society through a wider spectrum of income divisions. Each income stratum now sustains its own way of life.

In addition to this differentiation by income, there is a further fragmentation of group activities by age. Even the simple collective gatherings that used to accommodate individuals of all ages have become age conscious. The old stay close to their residential base in the public housing estates while the young are attracted to the corridors of the shopping complexes and fast food outlets. A McDonald's hamburger outlet is a greater magnet for attracting the young than the entire town centre of a large public housing estate with its multiplicity of facilities. The gainfully employed no longer have the leisure to idle.

Although these differentiations are undeniable and must be dealt with analytically, there are nevertheless some uniformities as a result of all being ruled by the same governmental decisions and policies. These uniformities should be dealt with first to serve as a framework within which the differentiated features may be examined.

The most immediate broad-based transformation of the everyday life of all Singaporeans is the absence of unemployment and the resulting enhanced standard of living. Large-scale unemployment was wiped out by the early 1970s, and real growth in income has also increased steadily since that period. An interesting indicator of these developments is the change in women's participation in the labour force. In 1957, the age-participation profile of women had two low peaks: one for young women employed mostly in service and sales occupations, and another for women over forty engaged mainly in domestic services. In 1980, women's labour-force participation increased sharply, peaking at around the age of twenty-two before falling rapidly in subsequent ages. Significantly, the second peak at over forty has disappeared (Pang, 1982:19).

Attention is commonly focused on the increase in the overall proportion of women's participation. However, of equal importance is the absence of women over forty in the labour force. This absence is an indicator of the relative affluence of the families so that middle-aged and older women no longer need to earn supplementary incomes—as they would need to do in instances of economic insecurity and poverty. Domestic services are now managed by foreign workers drawn from neighbouring nations on a temporary-work-permit basis. The sources of such servants are the Philippines, Indonesia and South Asian countries. The incomes of Singapore women themselves more than compensate for the cost of engaging such a service, even with the hefty employment levy imposed on the employer by the government.

Absence of unemployment has also channelled a floating, irregular labour force into the disciplined routines of Singapore industries. This has probably been adopted by the workers with mixed feelings of acceptance and reluctance: acceptance because the regular employment provides economic security, reluctance because the regularity and discipline of industrial work does not admit the easy pace of life of irregular work. This loss of ease and its contrast to a disciplined daily life may be contributing elements to a common nostalgia for the 'good' village life (Chua, 1994).

The transformation of a loosely structured labour force within a trading economy to a regularised one employed in a diversified industrial economy is greatly assisted by the massive development of public housing. The motivation to mount a national public housing programme was largely the deterioriating physical living conditions, with their attendant social, psychological and health

problems. However, one of its consequences was to keep the workers in regular employment. Simply put, regular employment is necessary to meet either the monthly rent or the mortgage payment for the ninety-nine-year lease-ownership of the flat purchased from the HDB.

Indeed, rent or mortgage payment has become the uppermost concern for families who are unable to take their financial condition for granted. It is the first standing-cost item to be lopped from the monthly household income, followed by the payment for public utilities, and then finally the remaining dollars go for food. Food is the most flexible item in the household budget because it is controlled directly by the family itself. Nevertheless, this willingness to place rent or mortgage before food is a measure of the seriousness with which Singaporeans take their social responsibilities. One can readily imagine that households in financial difficulties might choose to neglect rent payment, especially since technically the landlord is the government, whose function, among other things, is to provide welfare for the citizens. However, these people are in the small minority of the more than 85 per cent of the national population who live in HDB flats.

For the majority, the need to meet monthly payments is not even part of their conscious budgeting. That it will be paid is taken for granted because it is deducted at an anonymous bureaucratic distance from their Central Provident Fund (CPF) accounts, a compulsory saving mechanism devised by the government. With mortgages excluded from the phenomenological horizon of their expenditure awareness, they are quite free to spend their income at hand on improving their already substantial material life. Indeed, the CPF device for financing home ownership may have succeeded a little too well, judging by the relative unconcern with which Singaporeans spend money on decorating their HDB flats and private condominiums.

As to the material life of Singaporeans, a sea change has taken place. Inside the house, the possession of consumer durables is at the level of the developed nations. Refrigerators and television sets (TV was introduced into Singapore in 1963) are found in practically all homes. A substantial proportion of public rental households possess telephones, disclosing that while they may not have title to their flats they are, nevertheless, not deprived of modern amenities. Indeed, for some to continue renting instead of buying is perhaps for reasons other than the affordability of the flats themselves. It should be noted,

too, that the high standard of living is often maintained through multiple incomes of several members of the family.

On the street, the raised standard of living can be seen adorned on the very bodies of the citizens. The traditional ethnic dress codes for women and simple functional clothes for men according to their respective occupations—T-shirts for the labourers and starched white shirts for the office workers—have been replaced by a plethora of the latest designs and colours. Traditional ethnic clothes are now worn as intentional ethnic identity markers, that is, they are now an ideological statement maintained against the tide of internationalisation of the dress codes. They are also used on explicitly ethnic-based, social occasions, especially by Malays and Indians. For example, young Malay women dress traditionally as an overt proclamation of their religiosity as Muslims. As for the Chinese, traditional clothes have been all but abandoned by those less than forty years old.

Apart from the minority groups and formal occasions, the fashion on the street follows trends imported from all over the world. The brand-name shops found in the more expensive shopping complexes on Orchard Road not only serve the tourists but bring with them a significant cultural influence. Increased fashion and brandname consciousness cuts across class lines. The latest Japanese fashions are available at affordable prices to teenagers, while further up market the latest Paris and Milan designer clothes are available not only to women but also to men. As for expensive accessories such as watches and leather goods, there are plenty of imported imitations that bring the 'names', if not the quality, within the consumption horizon of those who cannot afford the real thing.

With the exception of a minority who may claim it as an occupational necessity, the most extravagant consumer item in this little island nation is the car. This has not escaped the government's notice. Consequently, the car is taxed with a duty of 150 per cent over and above the actual import price. So too is the price of petrol subjected to heavy customs duty. In fact, duty on petrol is the foremost revenue earner of the Customs and Excise Department. The government's reason for imposing such heavy taxes is to discourage car ownership and reduce congestion on the roads. Yet an entire network of interlinking expressways that criss-cross the island has been built to accommodate the ever-expanding car population. Car ownership has increased every year, except during

the brief recession in 1985, when a decline in new car sales led to a substantial reduction of revenue for the government. That the car is a status commodity is disclosed by the admission of some car owners that they often have to budget between personal expenditure and the need to fill up at the petrol pump. Offering a ride to a friend does not come easily, despite the best of intentions, with the price of petrol in Singapore.

Full employment, modern buildings that house shopping facilities and people, fashionable clothes and cars—all these are highly visible signs and symbols of the relative affluence of Singaporeans in general. These icons of modernity and consumerism float above a sub-stratum of the mundane, uneventful reproduction of daily life which, for the overwhelming majority of the population, is enacted within the confines of the public housing estates. Thus, a description of the rhythm of this reproduction in the high-rise, high-density housing estates is essential to fill out the sense of everyday life in the mid-1980s.

The people to be seen in an estate earliest in the morning are those who serve the residents. Food vendors arrive at their market stalls before 6:00 a.m. to set up for the brisk three hours of business from about 7:00 a.m. The newspaper vendor arrives and leaves bundles of papers at the void deck and delivers from there to all the subscribers in different blocks. Then come the daily-rated cleaning crew who collect the refuse from the day before and sweep the open areas of the estate. Maintenance of all the public areas is directly assumed by the HDB or a town council rather than left to the residents; the latter pay a conservancy charge for the service. This accounts for the high level of maintenance as compared with public housing authorities elsewhere which leave it to the residents and hence to chance.

The residents leaving the housing blocks earliest are usually the schoolchildren, the youngest ones often accompanied by mothers or grandmothers, heading for public buses or waiting for privately run buses that ferry them to and from school. They sport uniforms of indescribable colours. There was a time when one could tell the names of the schools by the styles and colours. Not anymore. Schools have mushroomed, and so have the colours. They are laden with more than just heavy school bags. As in all developing countries, they are burdened with the consciousness that education is the only road to upward mobility, and are only too keenly aware of the competition. This consciousness is further reinforced by the anxieties of the

parents and the constant public discussion of education as an issue that has refused to settle down since the late 1970s.

By 7:00 a.m. the tempo of life is picking up. There are many more schoolchildren, in a hurry now, for school begins in half an hour. Workers, individually and in groups, start to leave for work. The lower-income workers are clearly identifiable by their clothes: jeans and T-shirts for the men and, in addition to jeans, skirts and T-shirts for women production workers. The T-shirts often advertise consumer products or the names of companies, indicating that they are gifts from advertisers. For these working people, the modes of transport are either motor cycles, Japanese vans and pick-up trucks or the public transportation system. The white-collar workers are differently attired. However, it is not possible to guess which level each is at in the modern bureaucracy. Some possess their own cars, others wait to be picked up.

There used to be a symbiotic arrangement between car owners and those who need rides. The car owners, happily or otherwise, needed three passengers if they were to save themselves the five-dollar entry fee into the central business district between 7:30 and 10:15 a.m. The passengers thus got a comfortable and free ride to work instead of a hot and humid squeeze in crowded buses. However, the law has been changed. Now every car entering the central business district has to pay a surcharge of two or three dollars, depending on the time of the day, regardless of number of passengers. As a result, such symbiotic arrangements have all but ceased.

Attending these human movements is the din of traffic that rises to its maximum pitch at around 8:00 a.m. After this morning rush, the traffic noise throughout the estate drops very noticeably, almost instantaneously, into peace and quiet. By then, having seen their charges off either to work or to school, the housewives begin to go to market. Some early birds are already returning with their purchases. The differences in generations among the housewives are again signalled by their clothing. The middle-aged and elderly sport short-sleeved blouses with flat Chinese collars, buttoned down the front, teamed with baggy straight-legged trousers of the same material; the younger women wear simple shirts, shorts, or rayon batik nightshirts. They go to market without the shopping baskets which were *de rigueur* during the 1950s. Purchases come in thin pink or white plastic bags these days. The time at which the housewives go to market is significant. Those without family budget constraints tend to shop early to get the freshest foods, those with

tight budgets shop at the tail end of the market morning because by then vendors readily sell perishable fresh produce, meat, and fish at much reduced prices.

These marketing trips are more than merely functional. They are occasions through which social ties among the women are renewed and revitalised in a routine, uneventful process. From the point of view of community sentiments, these short repetitive occasions are of greater significance than any one of the formal or ritual occasions in which large groups of residents, often unknown to each other, are brought together. For the women, the marketing activities and the people they meet constitute the taken-for granted sense of being among friends and acquaintances as they move among the mass of people in the large housing estates.

By the late morning, there is a lull in activity in the residential blocks. The middle-aged and the elderly women will return to the void decks[5] of the residential blocks at around 3:00 p.m. and spend time together. They sometimes engage in Chinese card games but usually just sit around the concrete tables provided by the HDB and exchange 'hearsays'. Strong neighbourly ties develop among them; they come to know each other's daily schedules and expect each other at particular times of the afternoon. Absence therefore constitutes an event worth noting and for which an explanation will be sought and given. Those without domestic responsibilities will stay till dinner time, the others will go upstairs to prepare dinner at around 4:30 p.m.

From 5:00 p.m., workers begin to return home. Now the much-neglected playgrounds, abandoned to the fierce tropical sun all day, come into their own. Mothers and grandparents accompany their charges at play. The older children and teenagers use the hard courts for different games such as soccer, rounders or basketball. Badminton is played everywhere. After 6.00, students from the afternoon sessions of schools will also start to stream home, playing along the way and taking as much time to get home as permissible. They know that once they arrive home play stops and homework takes over after dinner.

After dinner, the elderly women return to their gathering points. This time, working-class men of all ages can also be seen in their own clusters either at a different section of the void deck from the women or in different void decks of different blocks. Gender segregation is still maintained among this generation. The same is not true of the teenagers, who mix freely as they also spend the

evenings at the void decks. For the senior members among the residents, the night gathering is only for a couple of hours as they are drawn more to television. The Chinese serials come on at 9:30 and to these they will turn, in the comfort of their own sitting-rooms, as the final activity of the day.

Full employment has removed the able-bodied from the residential community in HDB estates. They are to be seen only at weekends. The demands of formal education have removed children and teenagers from the streets; in the latter case, conscription of males into two-and-a-half years of military service adds to their absence. For the larger part of each weekday, the housing estate remains the territory of the retired and the housewives. Among these residence-bound individuals, the social isolation of the flats themselves has spawned a significant cultural transformation. Rather than being hidden in the households according to cultural dictates, women have broken down the confines of the flat and freely use public spaces at the ground level, treating such public exposure of themselves as unproblematic. The cultural horizons of the women have certainly expanded, and for the better.

If the above description of everyday life in public housing estates appears closely tied to clock time, this itself is a consequence of the changes that have taken place. Industrial time-consciousness does not and cannot confine itself only to the work-place but must necessarily pervade the entire social body in order that the schedules of industry be maintained.

THE TRANSFORMATION ASSESSED

As suggested in the conceptual opening of this chapter, in modern bureaucratically administered states, the cummulative effects of a series of administrative decisions may affect the transformation of the existing everyday life into a new configuration. Therefore, in any effective government—people relation, the realm of everyday life is necessarily the realm of political and administrative practices. The people's expectation of an effective government is the changing of their everyday life incrementally for the better. Correspondingly, this expectation must also be a core interest of the political leaders because the moral basis of their tenure in the seats of power depends significantly on its fulfilment. The PAP government's ideology of pragmatism aims precisely at realising a society where all citizens can have a decent living with rising incomes and improved standard

of living. The transformation described above attests amply to the success of the government in fulfilling the people's expectations.

One significant factor contributing to the success is, of course, domestic political stability. The long duration of the PAP leadership enables it both strategically and tactically to dominate the political arena through the use of the law. This has changed the public sphere to one that is largely in need of administration rather than one fraught with political contestations. The everyday life of the people becomes conducive to rational planning and administration by large public service agencies and statutory boards. These agencies are operationally relatively unrestrained in the absence of strong opposition parties. The only check on them is one of instrumental effectiveness in achieving the targets of their respective plans.

For a large part of the population, the goals of full employment, improved standards of housing, health and education all made immediate sense. They have therefore co-operated with the government, for their own material benefits if nothing else, by returning the PAP to power in every election since 1968. Up till the mid-1980s, it must be said that the people had accepted the PAP government's definition of the situation that faced Singapore. The end result has been to transform the everyday life of Singaporeans from one that was constituted by struggles for necessities to one constituted by the presence of choices and the ability to exercise them. It is from this new situation that one must look towards the future.

Concomitant with the rapid increase in employment opportunities is the emergence of income strata within the population; instead of being unified by common relative poverty, it is now stratified by significant income differences. It may be divided thus: (1) the technocratic-bureaucratic elite, who run the public services and the statutory boards and manage the Singapore branches of multinational corporations; (2) the middle management of the above, together with independent operators in the private service sector; (3) the production and labouring workers; and (4) those who continue to live in poverty despite the overall improvements in the nation. As the demands generated by each stratum will be significantly different, government's responses to their demands will have to be much more specific than in the past when one rule or one standardised service for all would generally suffice.

For the labouring and the poor groups, the priority will still be the upgrading of material life. Here, employment opportunities still have to be stressed. Yet even in these strata, personal choices are beginning to

play a part. For example, an unemployed person is no longer willing simply to take any job but awaits one that suits personal disposition. The problem may not become serious if the economic restructuring to middle technological levels proves successful and if the production work-force can be trained to fill the jobs made available.

The demands of the middle class are much more complex. Secure in their material comfort, their future demands will be largely for what may be called a better quality of life. The most obvious of which is a desire for 'high culture' refinements. This is given official recognition in so far as the government endorses 'gracious living' for the future. Another source of demand will be political in nature: more control over one's own private life and more say in the management of the public sphere. From the government's position, the best strategy would be to incorporate these desires into its organised feedback network and provide some individuals with opportunities to be active in the multiple levels of the political domain. However, while this may suit those who are ideologically in accord with the government, it is not likely to satisfy those who have either generalised or particularistic discontents. For the latter groups, dissatisfactions may not coalesce into explicit opposition in the realm of party politics but instead crystallise into scepticism and resistance by disregarding government initiatives in general or in specific issues and sectors of the social life. Scepticism and resistance may be gleaned from the PAP's failure to regain the popular support to the pre-1984 level of around 75 per cent in the two subsequent general elections in 1988 and 1991; instead support has slipped to around 60 per cent.

In the context of such possible resistance, the government has not abdicated its responsibility to manage the welfare of the nation but has nevertheless changed some of its operational procedures. It is now more willing to convene select committees of parliamentarians to hear public submissions on specific issues and to establish specialised committees with members drawn from non-government sectors to examine specific problems and recommendations, such as the 1985 Economic Committee. It is also using White Papers more frequently to solicit public discussion on important legislative proposals; the most recent and most important of which has been the White Paper on the proposed 'Goods and Services Tax', which was issued a whole year ahead of its implementation in 1994. In general, the government is now more inclined to float an idea

publicly and draw as much discussion as possible before implementing certain policies.

Broadly speaking, clearly formulated, singular goals backed by firm resolve and simple rules that facilitate speedy administrative execution have cautiously begun to accommodate complexities in the definition of the goals and to make room for individual differences. In addition, the government has also recognised the need to make greater efforts to convince and persuade the citizens of the rationality of its policies. The public relations functions of government agencies are being strengthened and their officers instructed to provide the fullest information possible without breaching confidentiality.

Beyond the income-differentiated demands, the general attitude of society has also shifted significantly towards increasing individualism. Given their immigrant background, Singaporeans may have developed a keen self-centredness in their struggle to survive the migration and to support the families they left behind (Lee Kuan Yew, *Straits Times,* 1 May, 1981). This plausible cultural heritage is further reinforced by two related factors. First, the logic of the marketplace in which an individual's value is calculated exclusively in terms of utilitarian exchanges and not social moral worth. Such economic individualism is given impetus and reinforcement by national economic success. Related to this is the government's promotion of meritocracy since the early 1980s in its desire to extract 'excellence' from every individual Singaporean. This emphasis is double-edged. While it may encourage the pursuit of excellence in individuals, it also encourages them to demand their just economic and other returns as individuals, without much concern for the social supports that have underpinned that pursuit. Furthermore, at both the societal and individual levels, meritocracy serves to legitimise income stratification as the natural outcome of individual effort or the lack thereof. One's willingness to aid the poor and needy is at best one of humanitarian largesse rather than an intrinsic social moral obligation. All these cultural and ideological concepts contribute significantly towards intensifying individualism.

Whatever merits individualism may have, the government's attitude towards it is categorically negative at two levels. First, in its assessment of the productive superiority of Japanese industries over those of Western developed nations, teamwork appears to be the crucial explanation. Hence, teamwork and consensus are stressed in the work-place without, it is hoped, undermining meritocracy itself

(Chua, 1982). Second, at the political level, the rising demands for alleged rights by various groups in the West—a phenomenon not unconnected with entrenched individualism—are read as negative and therefore to be avoided.

Rather than allowing emerging individualism to run its own course, it is being directly confronted in all possible institutions within the ideological terrain. Foremost among these efforts was the attempt, abandoned in 1990, to institutionalise moral education in schools through the Religious Knowledge curriculum and by teaching Confucian ethics; the ideological history of this attempt will be analysed in Chapter 7. In addition, wherever possible administrative regulations are designed to shore up the family as the basic social institution, pre-eminently as in housing and health policies. In this, the government is greatly aided by the continuing strength of the family as a moral institution for Singaporeans, even without its explicit encouragement. Finally, the government is helped by the popular acceptance of the 'logic of smallness' of the nation which argues that the fragmentation of a national consensus by individual demands may mean the demise of all.

The end result of the ideological contest appears to be a cautiously circumscribed language of rights contained within a well-developed language of social responsibility. This appears to be holding among the majority of the population. However, given the increasing educational attainment and what is described above as the middle-income groups' likely demands, the pressure appears to be for greater freedom in all sectors of everyday life, especially in the cultural sphere.

The resistance and expectations that have arisen or may arise from the transformed everyday life emerge out of a significant feature of the everyday life itself. In practice, the level of well-being in a nation may slide downwards as a result of either man-made or natural causes and the population by necessity will adjust to these downturns. However, people's expectations are asymmetrically orientated towards the enhancement of well-being, incrementally but continuously. This process is generically conceptualised, often with negative overtones, as the 'problem of rising expectations'. People expect the government to provide opportunities to match their aspirations and motivations. There is thus sustained pressure on the government to outperform itself on every front.

In political and administrative practices, 'rising expectations' has

to be accepted as a point of departure. The PAP government's manifesto for the twenty-first century, identified with the new generation of leaders and encapsulated in the statement called *The Next Lap* (1991), appears to recognise the increase in demands. It explicitly articulates some measure of what the government, with the co-operation of the people, expects to be able to achieve by the end of the century. This manifesto serves both as a promise—hence a yardstick against which the present generation of leaders may be measured—and as a goal which it is hoped will unite the population and channel their collective energies. However, it must be noted that this vision contains largely items related to increasing the already quite high standard of material well-being and an explicit commitment to expand artistic and cultural activities. What has been left undefined is the future of the political system, the contours of which the PAP government is attempting to define with a set of ideological concepts under the master discourse of communitarianism.

NOTES

1 'Everyday life' as an analytic focus is a relatively recent development within sociology—decades after it was given its due in literature by James Joyce's *Ulysses,* first published privately in Paris in 1922. Consequently, as an object of enquiry it is still largely unformed and the conceptual boundaries have yet to be firmly demarcated.

2 Statistical representativeness for this descriptive account can be drawn from the social survey conducted by and reported in Goh Kent Swee, *Urban Incomes and Housing* (1955). Instead of footnoting item by item, a summary of the relevant statistics is provided here: *atap* houses were the most important welling units outside the inner city, and the largest concentration was to be found within Ward VI of the city's administrative divisions, which included Bukit Ho Swee Village, covered by the survey. Seventy two per cent of the heads of households were employed; this included casual contract labourers who moved from one employer to another as opportunities offered themselves. Fifteen per cent engaged in 'one man' business, including hawking. Individuals of eighteen years and under were generally not employed; 4 and 2 per cent of boys and girls respectively were employed. Seventy eight per cent of the heads of households had no education or had only elementary vernacular education; of the householders, presumably including children, only 10 per cent had an English education and 45 per cent a vernacular education. The average income of employees was $138 per month, while the poverty line for households was $125 per month. Households were often held together financially through a multiplicity of supplementary incomes. Poverty declined with increases in income, of course, and became negligible when it reached $300 per month.

3 See *The Emergence of Bukit Ho Swee Estate: From Desolution to Progress* (Singapore: Singapore News and Publications, 1983).

4 The success story of the Housing and Development Board is told in two commemorative books issued by the Board itself in 1985, its twenty-fifth anniversary: Wong and Yeh (eds), *Housing a Nation: 25 years of Public Housing in Singapore* (1985) and Chua, *Designed for Living*.

5 The ground level of most public housing blocks is left vacant as a social space for the residents, hence this level is known as the ‘void deck’.

Chapter 5

The making of a new nation

Cultural construction and national identity

With Eddie C.Y.Kuo

The massive transformation of everyday life in Singapore is the result of fundamental structural changes in practically every social and cultural sphere. These structural changes are all the more radical and their effects more impressive when one considers that Singapore as an independent nation-state was first and foremost a political reality foisted on a population under conditions beyond their control. Once this was a *fait accompli,* a 'nation' had to be constructed. In this sense, the birth of a Singaporean national identity can be located precisely at the point of its founding in 1965. However, the state was not without encumbrances.

Having been a British colonial trading post since 1819, the island of Singapore was not without a past with its attendant culture, economy and polity. The population was drawn from a variety of geographical origins. These origins were embedded in the population's cultural orientations to different 'homelands' that did not include the island itself. Immigrants, who had no initial intention of settling permanently formed the majority of the population in the 1960s. They, especially the Chinese, were characteristically highly adaptable and displayed shifting loyalty towards different authorities at different times (Wang, 1989). However, even the local-born inhabitants had anchored their cultural orientation to imaginary homelands, transmitted at homes and in schools financed by the respective vernacular groups. Singaporean culture as such was an 'absence', something inconceivable.

The colonial economy imposed its own cultural effects on the population. The entrepôt trade imposed an ethnically determined division of labour. At the top of the ethnic stratification structure was the white population. Then came the English-educated Indians who

manned a significant proportion of junior colonial administralive jobs. The lowest colonial jobs, such as postmen and rank and file policemen, went to some Malays. The Chinese majority, excluded from the colonial service, spread through the entire spectrum of the economy, with high visibility in both trading activities and low-paid physical labour, signified by the ‘coolie’. This was the classic ‘plural society’, where different ethnic groups could maintain relative racial peace living side by side because crossing over racial lines was near impossible. Unity of the population as a ‘people’ did not exist nor was it thought of as desirable.

Politically, there was the legacy of approximately 150 years of British colonialism, from 1819 to 1959. Within this regime, Singaporean as an political category did not exist; an inhabitant was either an alien or a British subject. In addition to their being subjected to humiliation at the hands of the colonialists, the political legacy also imparted to the population, especially the English-educated constituent, a semblance of understanding of Western democracy and other Western cultural elements, such as political freedom and scientific and technological rationality. This colonial legacy might be said to be the one shared experience of the Asian population. Finally, there was the inescapable fact of geography. The cultural elements interacted with geography to produce on the tiny island an enclave of numerically dominant Chinese population, in a region where Malay speakers were the regional, indigenous majority.

The above configuration conspired to discourage the idea of Singapore as an independent nation. Only when it had become a *fait accompli,* was it necessary to produce a ‘nation’ and a ‘people’.

SINGAPOREAN CULTURE AND IDENTITY AS DISCURSIVE OBJECTS

Collectively, the cultural, economic, political and geographical elements constituted a field of criss-crossing concepts and conceptual relations that overdetermined the formation of ‘Singapore’ as a nation and of ‘Singaporeans’ as its citizens. These terms, Singapore and Singaporean, refer not to the ontological geographical feature of the island nor to the biological being-as-such. They are unavoidably the results of discursive practices that formulate them as objects with specific but temporally changing characters, which are ‘called into existence’ by statements that circulate in different discourses, in different spheres of social

practices. Each of the given ontological elements, singularly or interactively, can be discursively thematised to produce specific social, cultural and political effects in the discursive formation of the new nation and its people.

Take, for example, a person's racial origin. This ontological element can be transformed into a discursive object and inscribed on an individual as his/her 'true' attribute in the discourse on race, the better to invoke such elements for various institutional disciplinary practices. Thus, race can become not only the substratum for explaining one's behaviour, it can also become the reason and focus of political decisions and social control. Each time, statements are produced to bring forth different aspects of race in order to constitute it as the relevant element in the rationalisation of institutional practices.

The given elements will be strategically deployed for specific moves in the discursive formation of 'Singapore' and 'Singaporeans'. In each deployment, some elements of the past will be discursively suppressed or erased, others accented and given added semiological significance. The context of each deployment is constituted by responses to changes in social environment and changes in the purpose at hand of the individuals who are responsible for the constitution of the discursive objects of Singapore and Singaporeans themselves. The history of Singaporean culture and identity is thus characterised by a state of fluidity. Indeed, one may even say it is characterised by a series of discontinuities that reflect the changing conditions rather than one of constant and consistent unfolding from some naturally given characteristics. Hence, instead of taking the past as a given that is to be positivistically honoured, all retrospective reference to 'historical' reality before 1965 must be analytically treated as part of the discursive processes of 'nation' formation in the current conjuncture.[1]

The ontological elements have been, and will continue to be, invoked in the design and implementation of government policies which are ostensibly designed for specific objectives in the realms of economy, housing, population, education and language within immediate and ongoing concerns of management of political stability. However, in addition to these specific purposes, at an abstract symbolic level, the policies collectively partake in a concerted and continuous effort in the construction of a new national identity. This chapter examines how the policies and their accompanying events and discursive statements have led to the

making of a new state, a new economy, and indeed a new social order; in other words, how they have led to the formation of emergent 'Singapore' and 'Singaporean-ness'.

The history of the Singaporean identity as a discursive object is of very recent origin and the depth of the accumulated statements that circulate within the state's ongoing attempt to construct a 'nation' and a 'people' is relatively shallow and thus extremely fluid and formative. The actual shapes of these discursive objects remain relatively unclear compared to other nations with thick cultural memories. Yet analysis of the Singapore case will be of particular significance precisely because we are able to map the processes of the shaping and evolution of these discursive objects from their 'inconceivable' past within a short span of three decades. Under the circumstances, we are able to see most clearly the role of the state and the process of 'construction', relatively free from layers of historical and cultural memories.

THE GENEALOGY OF SINGAPOREAN CULTURE

As mentioned earlier, in the late 1950s, the population in Singapore believed that Singapore as an independent political entity would be economically non-viable for want of natural resources and a viable domestic market for its industrial goods. They saw their destiny as being tied to Peninsular Malaya, which would serve as the natural hinterland, as both its market and supplier of necessary resources. Consequently, when Singapore obtained self-government in domestic affairs in 1959, under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, Malay was made the sole national language, in preparation for eventual merger. Loyalty of the people of Singapore was, therefore, to be directed towards Malaya. Merger eventually took place in 1963 but the partnership lasted for less than three years before Singapore was asked to leave the Federation of Malaysia to become an independent city-state.[2] A new national identity and new loyalty had to be forged, this time to the new state of Singapore.

Once independent, Singapore immediately embarked on an ambitious industrialisation programme with an aggressive export orientation; a path blazed by South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and, of course, Japan (Rodan, 1989). Subsequent economic success has injected itself as an element of self-definition and pride in the people of Singapore, boosting their sense of national identification (Willmott, 1989). Indeed, the term success has become symbolically synonymous

with the history of the past three decades since independence, as reflected in the titles of two major works on contemporary Singapore (Drysdale, 1984; Sandhu and Wheatley, 1989).

Although successful industrialisation undoubtedly contributes to development of national culture and identity, it is itself dependent on the development of certain cultural traits. Industrialisation is not just a technological and economic phenomenon but requires as one of its necessary conditions the active transformation of a population into a disciplined work-force (Offe, 1987:94), that is, the emergence of a new social order characterised by instrumental rationality and a population with strong achievement motivation. Cultural development, in other words, had to abide by the dictates of the logic of the economy.

Some cultural developments concomitant to economic development are (1) discipline at the work-place and, by extension, generalised social discipline (Quah, 1983); and (2) a general orientation to a deep sense of competition with others for relative advantages in consumption, a competition that manifests itself, among other ways, in a constant personal upgrading of education qualifications. These cultural features are the predominant qualities and anxieties that characterise the everyday life-world of Singaporeans today. For example, education of children has become one of the highest anxiety-causing phenomena of parents. Structurally, these economy-dictated values are the predominant defining characters of the high-growth city-state, over and above other cultural sentiments.

Significantly, these economy-based values were not extant on the island at the time of political independence. As described in the previous chapter, high unemployment had given rise to a lifestyle that left an individual with a very significant degree of freedom *vis-à-vis* work-related activities, albeit a freedom accompanied by very substantial material deprivation.[3] In Singapore, the cultural requirements of the industrial regime had, therefore, to be actively established with the interventionist hand of the government. The promotion of a disciplined work-force became ideologically linked to the people's daily struggles with 'making a living'; job creation became a priority in the agenda of the new nation in view of the very high population growth rate of more than 4.3 per cent (Lim and Associates, 1988:6). The two in turn became ideologically linked to the survival of the new nation and its people. The promotion of a disciplined work-force was, therefore, given precedence over the

promotion of other cultural practices from the very outset of independence, and remains so today.

This generalised picture of cultural development since political independence describes the processes that are explicitly put in place by the government. It does not, however, imply that such politically intentional cultural production is automatically or necessarily successful in the sense that the citizens unreflectively abide by the government's decisions. Resistance leading to policy reversals has occurred at different historical junctures, signalling that sections of the population are often guided by their own cultural drummers, as the analysis of specific policies will demonstrate.

THE MAKING OF A NEW STATE

On political independence, a 'new nation' had to be formulated and produced. This was discursively achieved through the concept of 'national interest' which lends substance to the abstract entity of a nation. The first strategic move for the newly formed government was to distance itself from particularistic groups including those, such as unions and Chinese-educated students, who were crucial to the electoral success of the PAP government itself, in order to better constitute itself as belonging to all (but none in particular). So, upon independence, Foreign Minister Rajaratnam immediately proclaimed that the PAP 'has come to realize that the workers are a class with a vested interest, and that as a political party, the PAP must work for the interest of the whole country and not for not one class' but to 'seeks to represent all the interests within the state' (Quoted in Pang, 1971:21).

This distancing from specific groups enabled the government to redefine the political space for race through the concept of 'multiracialism'. 'Race' is held in abeyance politically by an explicit recognition that Singapore is a 'multiracial' society and that racial tolerance is to be safeguarded in the law. In so doing, the government places itself in a neutral space that arguably compels it to act in ways that do not privilege any particular group; racial cultural practices are then relegated to the realm of private and voluntaristic, individual or collective, practices.

The neutral stance preserves for the state a very high level of autonomy and insulates it from pressures that may be generated by race. First, race cannot be constituted as a legitimate basis of special claims on the state without violating the norm of multiracialism. Second, by not being identified with any race, the political

leadership is free to consult any racial majority or minorities without, however, having to act in the particular interests of any group. Thus, in spite of the overwhelming Chinese majority, the Singapore state has never been a Chinese state to its own political detriment (Chua, 1994). Multiracialism thus has a two-pronged effect: a high visibility of race is promoted voluntarily in the social body and, concurrently, the strategic effect is one of pushing race out of the front line of politics.

The logic of such a political strategy is best seen in contrast to the Malaysian model of political development. Instead of adopting 'multiculturalism' to bury 'racialism', political parties in Malaysia are organised along racial lines; consequently, representation and protection of racial interests continue to be central to national politics. The overall result is the unavoidable identification of the interest of the ruling Malay Party with those of the Malay majority (Ho, 1993). Whereas in Singapore, with only one exception, all political parties are multiracial in composition; even the exclusive Malay Party attempted a multiracial stance in the 1988 election.[4] In Parliament, additional demands are inevitably imposed on MPs from minority groups to represent not only their electoral constituencies but also their highly visible racial communities. However, they are obliged to speak of so-called racial community concerns within the terms of multiracialism and national interests.[5]

Multiracialism and national interests together provide the grounds for interpreting political questions that are based on specific interests of a racial group as 'racial chauvinism', which supposedly can potentially destabilise the precarious balance of the new state and wreck the nation from within. Alleged chauvinistic agitation is, therefore, subjected to severe legal sanctions, including incarceration under the Internal Security Act, which gives the government the power to detain anyone without trial for up to a two-year renewable term. It should be apparent that while racial tolerance was given constitutional recognition, promotion of racial differences is carefully restricted to largely privatised celebration of festivals, dances and ornamental adornments.[6]

In sum, the discursive formulation of a 'new nation' with 'national interests' provides the legitimate space for the political containment of race, class and other possible sectional differences. The concept of national interest simultaneously denies these differences as a rational basis for legitimate political organisation and prevents them from being politically thematised in the public

domain by casting them as potentially against the national interests themselves.

Taking the 'national' stance opened up several possibilities for the state: distancing itself from potential interest groups enables the government to delineate its relative autonomy which is absolutely central to its smooth functioning (Poulantzas, 1978; Lewis, 1981). Compared with other capitalist states, the autonomy of the new Singapore state was secured with relative ease because (1) the PAP government had already formed a partnership with labour prior to coming to power; and (2) in a declining entrepôt economy under a dying colonial regime, strong industrial, intellectual or landed bourgeoisie that could resist the social penetration of the new political power were all absent (Rodan, 1989).

Finally, having secured relative autonomy, the state acquires for itself space to define the 'national interests' within the discourse of 'national survival'. The discourse on survival was in turn fed by the forementioned conjunctural elements, namely, perceived economic non-viability; a Chinese enclave in the Malay Sea; mounting domestic difficulties of unemployment, high demographic growth rate and poor public health and housing conditions; and finally, absence of political identification with the new nation by a population of different individuals, each orientated to their own respective homelands (Chan, 1971). Concerns with the survival of the nation under such inauspicious circumstances can then be ascribed to and implanted in every Singaporean without exception; an implantation that facilitates the disciplining of the population through the promotion of work-related values necessitated by industrialisation. It should now be apparent that the discourse of the 'new nation with national interests' floated, and continue to float above any preceding cultural practices of pre-independence days.

THE MAKING OF A NEW ECONOMIC ORDER

Nationally, economic survival meant the transformation of the entrepôt economy to an industrial-based economy employing foreign capital (Tan, 1976). In this drive for foreign industrial capital, the experiences of the domestic trading community were completely neglected in spite of representations made to the state by small and medium indigenous enterprises. It was not until the severe but brief recession in 1985 that the voices of indigenous capitalists were taken into account with regard to economic policy considerations along

with increased attention to developing the service sector economy (Chalmers, 1992).

At the individual level, industrialisation required the development in the new Singaporeans of an interest in 'rising incomes and improved standard of living', to be achieved through willingness and ability to work hard (Goh, 1976:81). It meant developing concurrently the mutually supporting consumerist and productionist orientations. At the work-place, the overarching cultural ethos promoted is one of mutual trust and co-operation between labour, employer and the state in order to maximise production from the workers, profits for the enterprises and achievement of the national objective of economic growth and survival. The dovetailing of national and individual concerns, therefore, generated their own concepts regarding the type of interests and social behaviour which had to be inscribed on the new 'Singaporeans'.

The desired productionist orientation of the worker was, however, not left to cultural promotion alone; it was secured institutionally by legislation aimed at creating and maintaining stable industrial relations. First, the control of labour unions had to be wrenched from the pro-communist leadership by deregistering their organisations and detaining their radical leadership; in its place the pro-government National Trade Union Congress was installed.[7] Next, the role of trade unions in collective bargaining for better wages and working conditions was restrained by successive legislation in 1968, 1982 and 1984. Bargaining was further limited by a National Wage Council which annually recommends the level of wage increase for the work-force as a whole. The working population was in turn rewarded by real improvements in the standard of living (Deyo, 1981). The government's retort to criticisms that the work-force has been labouring under less than desirable legal conditions is, 'but have they not benefited from economic growth?'[8]

The implantation of a production orientation requires further material support. An important source of support comes, significantly but perhaps unexpectedly, from the government's concerted effort to improve the housing conditions of the population. Detailed analysis of the public housing programme will be undertaken in the next chapter, however, and only a brief statement needs to be made here. Active encouragement of public housing ownership has as one of its consequences the incorporation of the population into the industrial work-force because an individual can best meet the regular schedule of mortgage payments through income derived from regular

employment. This means of incorporating the population into the economy is not lost on the government, which has declared its intentions to create a 'home-owning democracy', so that the citizens would have a material stake in the nation. The promotion of home ownership has its own social and cultural implications which will be discussed in the next section.

The fashioning of a new productive work-force requires also other cultural pre-requisites. One of these is workers' facility with the English language, especially given the economic dependence on foreign capital. From the outset, English, the colonial language, was retained as the language of the new government, law and commerce. However, multiracialism requires the languages of the different racial groups to be formally given equivalent status. Here, intra-group differences of dialects and languages among the Chinese, Malays and Indians were radically reduced by the installation of a single language each for the 'Chinese', the 'Malays' and the 'Indians' (Clammer, 1985). The three other official languages were thus Mandarin,[9] Malay and Tamil, respectively. These three offical langauges in turn signify the presence of the three racial groups that are to be administered through multiracialism. From then on, the population of the island was constituted into a convenient set of ready-made categories, abbreviated into 'CMIO', (Chinese, Malays, Indians and 'O' for others) (Siddique, 1989).[10]

In the meantime, vernacular schools continued to operate (Kuo, 1980 and 1985b). However, given the overwhelming comparative economic advantage of English in an expanding civil service and an industrialising economy, vernacular schools were soon to lose their student enrolment absolutely. The language issue will be further discussed, but for now it should be noted that the predominance of English, reflecting the dominance of economic rationality, was further entrenched when the government made it the sole language of instruction for academically weaker students who fail in regular school examinations, just so that they, it was hoped, could be gainfully employed. Thus, ironically, the language of the residual 'other' is the politically dominant.

Finally, within the productionist orientation of a capitalist economy, and with the suspension of race as a basis for resource distribution, formal meritocracy that allegedly denies particularistic claims is ideologically promoted. This is most consequential in the area of public goods. For example, housing is allocated according to

a household's ability to pay instead of other deserving grounds such as poverty with a large family. Social inequalities are individualised as the result of one's own lack of 'natural' intelligence or diligence or both. The insistence on individual effort is presumed necessary to maintain productivity and to avoid the expansion of social welfarism.

THE MAKING OF A NEW SOCIAL ORDER

Obviously, political and economic strategies have their effects on the organisation of society itself; concommitant to the making of a new state and a new economic order is thus the emergence of a new pattern of social organisation. Three areas of the population's everyday life have been severely affected by policies designed for economic development and the promotion of national identity, namely, public housing provision, education and language policies and family planning policies. The roles of the first two in the formation of national interests had already been mentioned; we will now flesh out their effects, along with the effects of family planning in the social organisation of the new state.

Restructuring education

In addition to discipline, industrialisation requires that the workforce be made efficient and productive through education. Opportunities were greatly expanded from the early 1960s. However, education is not restricted to imparting of technical knowledge, it also partakes in inculcating social values that support nation-building objectives. The second function was pursued as much as the first; education became a major instrument of 'social engineering' (Wilson, 1978).

Under the colonial regime, with the exception of limited opportunities for education in English-medium schools, the education needs of the bulk of the population were largely financed and staffed by the racial and dialect groups themselves. The vernacular schools, divided along political, cultural and linguistic orientations, had their divisive effects on the population. Both teachers and textbooks had to be imported from the respective 'homelands' abroad, and the content of the books was of little relevance, if not detrimental, to the emergence of the new nation. However, to keep potential political tensions at bay, education policies of the early 1960s retained nominal equality among

vernacular streams. In the meantime, a new national system was being devised and instituted. Common curriculum and syllabus were introduced; textbooks were locally prepared, teachers locally trained, and a common examination standard imposed (Wilson, 1978:235). The possibility of forging a common political, economic and social orientation among the population through education was in place for the first time.

Politically, nationalistic rituals were introduced. There is a weekly flag-raising and -lowering assembly, during which the national anthem is played and sung. A national pledge is also recited, initially in four languages but by now only in English. All these acts are, of course, aimed at instilling a sense of national identity and loyalty. However, like routinised ritualistic performances, they are done with less than the requisite enthusiasm. In the case of the national anthem, it is sung without much comprehension on the part of the majority of the students as it is written in Malay, which although retained as the nominal national language is not a compulsory language requirement for all students. Yet its repetition may have cumulative effect among the successive generations of students that now constitute a substantial part of the citizenry.

At the individual level, educational qualifications have long been a deciding factor in social and economic mobility. Being originally from largely uneducated immigrant communities without established intellectual traditions, the population generally maintains an instrumental orientation towards education, with the contemporary emphasis on making a living. The stress is to pass successive examinations so as to obtain the necessary paper qualifications (certificates of formal education) for a better job and better material life. This process of the ‘certification of the self’ ends in self-worth being measured through the number of educational certificates in one’s possession.

The government sees its role as one of providing equal opportunities to all at entry point, then to let meritocracy account for the inequality of results. The shrinking number of spaces at successively higher education levels results in very keen and stressful competition, for both students and their parents. Such competition intensifies the instrumental orientation itself to the exclusion of other values. This is reflected in the unbridled dominance of English as the medium of instruction and the *lingua franca* of the society. This led to an exodus of students from and the eventual demise of vernacular institutions, which in turn facilitated

the unification of all schools into a 'national stream' in 1987. Thus completing the restructuring of the education system.[11]

However, by the late 1970s, the success of the materialistic orientation was read as a cause for concern. The education system was reviewed. In the process, several cultural consequences of the dominance of English were revealed. First, while English proficiency gives Singaporeans greater access to global economic opportunities, it also renders them more susceptible to cultural influences from Western sources, whose effects are discursively labelled 'Westernisation'. This 'Westernisation' was, and continues to be seen in individual Singaporeans' inclinations to such acts as drug abuse, sexual permissiveness, consumerism and political liberalism. Second, it is argued in essentialist fashion that the domination of English is emotively problematic because it remains a 'superimposed' Western language, thereby lacking cultural authenticity and legitimacy. The then Prime Minister stated: 'English will not be emotionally acceptable as our mother tongue' (*Straits Times,* 22 Sept., 1984).

The government's perceived deficiency in moral education and the cultural entailments of 'Westernisation' were to be corrected by the promotion of bilingualism and moral education at both primary and secondary levels. The mother tongue of a child was to be acquired in school as the second language along with English as the first. It was believed that learning a mother tongue would facilitate acquisition of 'traditional Asian values', which would in turn act to resist the creeping negative influences of Westernisation. A moral discourse is thus constituted by drawing a line between the discursively constituted 'Asian' culture and 'Western' culture; privileging the former over the latter. In addition, retention of the different mother tongues by the respective racial communities supposedly satisfied the emotive attachment each group has to its identity (Kuo, 1985b). Finally, a short-lived new moral education curriculum was instituted in the early 1980s which included the teaching of religious knowledge at secondary school level, as will be discussed later.

Restructuring community

The vast improvement in the population's physical living conditions brought about by the public housing programme is not to be disputed. Nor should the programme's role in sustaining the diffused mass

loyalty of the population to the PAP government be doubted. The social costs incurred in the process of housing a nation should be assessed against the background of such generalised benefits. One of the most obvious and immediate costs was imposed on residents of established settlements which had to be demolished in order to make land available for new housing estates. After initial protests by residents who were among the very first to have their land acquired by the government for redevelopment purposes, organised resistance to the resettlement had dissipated by the early 1970s (Aldrich, 1985). Arguably, it is the generalised distribution of the benefits that has rendered the social costs bearable to those who were so negatively affected (Chua, 1991b).

As the communities of urban squatters or semi-rural villages tended to be racially homogeneous, and in the case of the Chinese also dialect exclusive, demolition of these settlements was tantamount to the destruction of 'racial' residential areas and their attendant cultural practices. Subsequent dispersion was intensified by the first-come-first-served rule in the allocation of public housing flats; a rule which literally prevents individuals from electing to live in close proximity.

The consequences, although suffered by all affected, have been, nevertheless, unevenly distributed. They have been more severe for members of the minority populations because the dispersion deprives them of certain social supports that can be provided only by their respective members. For example, in the case of Malay Muslims, strict religious observations in terms of food and gender relations make it difficult for working parents to entrust childcare responsibilities to non-Malays. In addition, lower income also renders it difficult for them to avail themselves of paid childcare centres.

These negative consequences have been justified in terms of the national interest to promote inter-racial understanding and avoid potential group violence, through the physical integration of all racial groups within the new housing estates. Indeed, inter-racial mixing is now enforced not only at the estate level but down to that of the block itself. Quotas for each of the three races in each block are monitored and maintained by obliging a vendor to sell his or her flat only to a household which is from a race that is not already overrepresented in the block.

Promotion of home ownership has also accelerated the nuclearisation of families. Easy access to a home through the public housing programme, combined with economic independence that comes from wage labour, has made it relatively easy for newly weds

to move out on their own and manage their own affairs, rather than being involved constantly with the complexities of an extended household. Indeed, it was argued, by then Minister of Finance in the early 1960s (Goh, 1972:63), that because of its ethos of pulling resources, the extended family acts as a damper to individual initiative and productivity. Hence, the nuclear family with its implied selfishness was better for the promotion of industrialisation. In the late 1970s, the government was to come to reassess this rate of nuclearisation and introduce, again through housing policies such as priority of allocation and extension of the income ceiling of eligibility, steps to attempt to slow it down by encouraging multi-family housing arrangements (Chong *et al.,* 1985:252–257), with uncertain results.

Restructuring the family

The material problems of unemployment, housing shortages and declining trading economy faced by Singapore, as a new state in 1965, could be further alleviated through reduction of the then high population growth rate. A stringent population control programme was therefore instituted. The ‘two is enough’ policy consisted of granting a set of material incentives and disincentives in housing allocation, education opportunities for children, tax and health care benefits, accompanied by constant, aggressive publicity campaigns.

After two decades of the programme, helped by higher educational levels and economic development, the fertility rate declined from 3.6 per cent in 1960 to 1.6 per cent in 1984. This apparent success was in part dependent upon the demise of certain traditional values; a demise that was once encouraged by the government. Important among the ‘discredited’ traditional values included the preference for large and extended families, preference for sons over daughters, and dependence on children for care in old age. The success also resulted in more pragmatic attitudes towards marriage, family life and kinship patterns (Wong, 1979). For example, as the appeals and incentives were mostly financial and materialistic in nature, decisions on courtship, marriage and raising of children tended to be based on rational, even calculative, considerations.

Finally, the drastic reduction of the birth rate appeared to produce its own problems, namely, the decline in population growth rate similar to that of advanced developed countries. This raised the issue of potential shortages of able-bodied citizens for both economic and

defence activities. The government projected a future drastic increase in dependency ratio among an expanding retired population on its shrinking economically active counterpart. This led it to abandon the 'two is enough' policy and to promote the current 'three or more if you can afford it'. However, the monetary incentive for the lower-income mother to have two or less children remains in place, while generous tax incentives were given to working mothers of high income. The result of the new pro-natal policy has been unimpressive. There have been only marginal annual increases in birth rates since the new policy was introduced in 1987.

THE EXCESSES OF SUCCESS

From the above analysis, it should be apparent that evidence of successful implantation of new cultural attitudes in the new Singaporeans was abundantly clear by the late 1970s. The economy grew in double digits annually while demographic growth subsided radically; there was a shortage of labour as opposed to high unemployment; the population became one of the best housed in the world, so much so that some economists argued that there is an overconsumption in housing (Lim *et al.,* 1986); education attainment of the population advanced with the expansion of educational opportunities. In short, the material standard of living had improved massively by the end of two decades of political independence. By the late 1970s, the material orientation was well entrenched as part of the 'truths' of being Singaporean. In the eyes of the government, amongst others, this was manifested behaviourally in the various forms of 'excessive material consumption' and attitudinally in 'excessive individualism'.

The consumer service sector had expanded rapidly, up-market hotel food and beverage facilities intended to cater to well-heeled tourists are patronised equally by locals. Branded goods imported from fashion centres of the world are largely purchased by local customers (Chua, 1992b). However, one should not be hasty to label this process as 'excessive' or 'conspicuous' consumption. Within the historical context, the rapid expansion of consumption was, first, to a significant degree one of 'catching up' or compensating for the hitherto material deprivations of an underdeveloped nation. Second, limits to consumption are quite identifiable. The extremely high costs of housing and car ownership, in addition to the high rate of forced savings through the compulsory social security savings scheme,

known as the Central Provident Fund, collectively extract a very significant proportion of a wage earner's income and substantially reduce the disposable income for consumption. Nevertheless, consumption of items of self-adornment, such as clothes and accessories, will likely be less affected, and indulgence will continue.

As for individualism, the first signs read by the government were found in the work-place. In the constant search for more money, workers appeared to be 'job-hopping', i.e. to be too willing to change jobs. To the government this was symptomatic of an absence of loyalty to the employer. Such an interpretation was conceptually problematic because under circumstances where market forces are the only constraints, a worker who actively seeks better opportunities would rightfully be considered as enterprising. Indeed, the tight labour market was largely responsible for the willingness of companies to poach each other's staff, knowing well that the employees who join readily could leave just as readily. In any event, this so-called 'job-hopping' was affecting productivity and was thus duly considered a moral problem.

Elsewhere, 'creeping individualism' took a different form. It was observed that single young professionals were applying for government constructed middle-income flats in increasing numbers, apparently in a hurry to leave their parental home. It was presumed that this would lead to premature break-up of the family unit, and therefore that it must be stopped. The government promptly returned the deposits to the applicants, shut the register and with it the opportunity for singles to own public housing flats (Chua, 1982). This effectively reduced the degree of personal freedom of the single individual who cannot afford the steep cost of private housing.

It should be noted that individualism is but a relative phenomenon and it is common enough to hear criticisms of Singaporeans, by themselves and others, as being overly passive and conformist, particularly politically. Socially, there is yet another check on individualism that arises in the very social organisation of Singapore, without direct government intervention. Being a small island nation with a relatively stable population, the density of social encounters is relatively high; the frequency of chance meetings between acquaintance, friends and relatives, near or distant, is very high. These possible meetings act as informal checks on an individual, reducing one's inclination to public misdemeanour or individualist behaviour.

Qualifications on individualism and consumerism aside, the perceived 'excesses' began to acquire a concreteness in public

discourse and led to several interesting formulations. Among the positive images is: 'Given the achievement that has been attained and the far-flung benefits that have accrued, the Singaporean has gained self-esteem, is confident—at times overly so among some—ambitious, on the make. He travels widely, carrying his lap-top computer and his confidence with him' (Thumboo, 1989:766). Other formulations are disparaging, of which the most inarticulate and unoriginal is 'the ugly Singaporean'; a more intellectual label for the perceived nascent attitude of the new Singaporean is 'the cult of materialism' (Ho, 1989).

Conjuncturally, similarly criticism against individualism was being raised by American intellectuals as a self-critique of the post-1960s social developments in advanced capitalist nations of the West. It was one of those few occasions in recent intellectual history in which the intellectual right and left arrived at the same critical conclusions. For both parties, notionally the neo-Marxists and the neo-conservatives, the malaise of the West in the 1970s was unchecked individualism in terms of the ever-expanding claims of subjective interests and expressions, without regard for responsibility of the social sphere. The landmark intellectual works of this American self-critique were *The Culture of Narcissism* (Lasch, 1979) on the left and *The Cultural Contradiction of Capitalism* (Bell, 1976) on the right. In the latter case, the critique was accompanied by a call to return to traditional family and religious values. While there is no evidence that the Singapore government was influenced by such arguments, Lasch's book did receive public endorsement, by the then Minister of Education, as foretelling the future of things to come in Singapore if nothing were done to check the nascent individualism.

The meeting of sentiments between the PAP government and neo-conservatives will be subjected to greater analysis in Chapter 7, for now it should be noted that it was in part in this intellectual context that the incipient Westernisation of Singaporeans was formulated as a potential threat to the continuing prosperity of the new nation. 'Westernisation' became a convenient holder of all the ills of capitalist developments in Singapore, against which a very loose formulation of 'Asian values' (Ho, 1989:688, Rajaratnam, 1977) was elevated supposedly to arrest the rot that threatened. The government then proposed several society-wide campaigns for the 'revitalisation' of Asian values. These included introduction of policies that would reinforce the family institution, such as giving priority allocation to

three-generation families; reversing the earlier nuclearisation of family public housing policy; intensifying the teaching of mother tongues as second languages, as in the special aided schools for Chinese children with higher than average academic performance; and renewed effort to teach moral education in schools. The latter culminated in the introduction, in 1984 in secondary schools, of courses in Religious Knowledge, including Confucian ethics for Chinese who do not profess any book religions, a policy which, as mentioned in Chapter 1, was abandoned in 1990.

In contrast to the earlier policies that were aimed at producing an efficient and disciplined work-force necessary to the economic development of a new nation and the material well-being of the new citizenry, the policies and programmes of the mid- and late 1980s have as their motivation the inscription of selectively reinvented 'traditional' attitudes and values as the 'truths of Asians' in general, encompassing all 'three' racial groups which constitute Singaporeans. Such 'truths' are invoked to resist the other 'truths' of the Singaporeans as individuals. In this context, the revival of such 'Asian values' has the additional advantage of inciting individuals to voluntarily assume responsibility to the social sphere without disturbing the hierarchical social order itself. The inscription of Asian values on the individuals, therefore, dovetails with the prevailing ideological discourse that has a very developed vocabulary of responsibility and a correspondingly weak set of terms for individual rights.

CONCLUSION

In the first two decades of the emergence of Singapore as a new nation, a very conscious discursive distinction was maintained between 'national interests' and 'racial culture and racial identity'. The need to survive as an island nation without natural resources and with a declining trading economy had dictated that the rhetoric and the substantive task of nation-building be exclusively concerned with improving the material conditions of the population. These concerns were incessantly promoted through various ideological institutions and inscribed on to the population. The ideological efforts were backed by legislative measures to police their propagation and entrenchment when necessary.

Meanwhile, racial cultures and identities, administratively reduced to three discursively constructed units of Chinese, Malays and Indians, were given very high visibility through the concept of

multiracialism but relegated to the private sphere of individuals or of voluntary groups. The government played a supportive role in the religious holidays and major cultural festivals of each group, as it polices the limits of such cultural expression through the elastic idea of 'racial chauvinism'. Furthermore, it actively sought to diffuse the political potential of the constructed racial constituencies through the demolition of exclusive racial enclaves, the unintended demise of vernacular schools and the weakening and replacement of some traditional values by those necessary to capitalist economic development such as competitiveness and meritocracy. The total effect of the policy of multiracialism is thus, simultaneously, the very visible display of the racial constituencies which have minimal political effects and efficacy.

Ironically, at the point at which the economic and materialist orientations were fully established, an apparent reversal of cultural priorities took place. By the beginning of the third decade of the new nation, the 'possible' demise of racial cultures was raised in relation to the apparent fear of the wholesale 'Westernisation' of the essentially Asian population. The inculcation of so-called 'Asian values' came to be seen as the necessary defence against the insidious encroachment of 'morally dubious' social values of the West. In such a discursive move, individualism, a cultural entailment of capitalism, was detached from the economic sphere and dressed up in the moral language of anti-Westernisation.

Comprehensive reviews of education and language policies were conducted in the late 1970s, cumulating in the announcement of the new educational policy and the Moral Education Report in 1979. The same year saw the launching of the Speak Mandarin Campaign to promote Mandarin among Chinese; this has become an annual event. Then, in 1984, Moral Education and Religious Knowledge were introduced as part of the compulsory secondary school curriculum. Furthermore, with the ascendancy of the view that Confucianism was a basic, if not the primary, explanatory element for the success of post-war Asian capitalism, the promotion of Confucianism as a way of life for the Chinese was mooted.[12]

In all the instances of apparent reversals, selective cultural elements, discursively recategorised as 'Asian' culture, were called forth and re-inscribed on the citizens to check the domination of the economic orientation in the Singaporean character. The moral contest of the two sets of implanted characteristics has been

discursively rendered as that between the good/Asian and the bad/Western.

However, despite their supposed link to traditions, the programmes for inscribing 'Asian-ness' were ultimately aimed at shoring up production and economic growth and, perhaps more importantly, the existing political order. Where such supportive role becomes tenuous or uncertain, an about turn in policy is readily taken. Thus, in 1989, the teaching of Religious Knowledge, and along with it Confucianism, in secondary schools was abolished and legislation introduced to control religious activities which merge with social and political issues. In the final instance, it is the demands of the existing economic order, and the political order that ensures its continuing growth, that are privileged.

Indeed, it may be argued that in the discursive formation of nations, reversals between communal/individual, traditional/modern, indigenous/foreign (Asian/Western), ethnic/national orientations at different historical conjunctures are to be expected. What complicates the Singapore case is that traditions are embedded in different racial cultures. Revoking or reinventing traditional values, therefore, means revoking and reinventing the various racial cultures. The dilemma appears to be one of whether such moves may prove detrimental to the social integration of Singapore as a nation and hinder the evolution of a national culture and a national identity that rise above and beyond race. Yet, the formation of the nation so far has showed that such issues in themselves can be used as discursive building components of a national interest; the potential presence of the issues arising from multiracialism provides the discursive ground for the conceptualisation of a national interest aimed at avoiding the realisation of the issues themselves.

Nevertheless, politically the state appears to be unable to live with the potential disruptions that may be caused by the differences which are embodied in multiracialism. Consequently, in 1989, the government initiated the process of formulating an explicit 'national ideology'. In 1990, a set of 'values', henceforth to be known as 'Shared Values' in Singaporean political and cultural discourses, were accepted by Parliament. However, it should be noted that the Shared Values remain, until now, a floating signifier without any institutional site because they are constitutionally of unclear status, being neither enshrined as a preamble to the national Constitution nor as an actionable piece of legislation.

NOTES

1 For the conceptual stance taken in this essay I am indebted to the writings of the late Michel Foucault although no explicit citation to his corpus is given.
2 As recently as in 1990, when Singapore celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary of independence, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew lamented that the greatest disappointment in his life was 'the failure to make Singapore succeed as part of Malaysia' (*Straits Times,* 13 Mar., 1990).
3 Indeed it has been suggested that the absence of a work-force accustomed ot the industrial regime was the prime reason why American semiconductor industries chose Hong Kong over Singapore as the first offshore base for the internationalisation of semiconductor production in the early 1960s. The flight of industrial capital from mainland China because of political instabilities since the 1930s has led to the industrialisation of Hong Kong for more than two decades by then; it thereby possessed the prerequisite proletarianised labour force (Henderson, 1989:77–80).
4 Electoral legislation in that same year has further entrenched the multiracial composition of Parliament by instituting the Group Representative Constituency (GRC) legislation, in which political parties contesting in a GRC must field their candidates as a slate, of whom one must be from a minority population. The slate that polls the largest number of combined voles win all the seats in the GRC.
5 In this instance, the few women MPs similarly have to carry the additional demands of the national women's constituency.
6 An exception to the general distancing from race should be noted. The Constitution recognises Malays as the 'indigenous' population of the island although the nature of this special status is rather ambiguous. The only concrete policy that signified this status was the granting of free tuition to all Malay students in tertiary education. In 1989, allegedly due to complaints from segments of the Chinese population against the fact that while poor Chinese households had to pay fees middle-income Malays were exempted, fee exemption for the Malays was subsequently tied to a means test in each case and granted only to financially deserving cases. However, the money so saved is transferred to a general fund, managed by the Council for the Education of Muslim Children (Mendaki), for education purpose. The government therefore does not stand to gain financially from the policy change. This is a significant instance in the post-1984 political development of Singapore where class features are beginning to make themselves felt in the body politic.
7 For details of the suppression of radical unionists and individuals of the left generally see Bloodworth (1986).
8 This statement was made in Parliament by the then Secretary-General of the National Trade Union Congress and Minister without Portfolio in the Prime Minister's Office, Mr Lim Chee Onn (*Straits Times,* 24 Mar., 1982).

9 Reflecting the multiracialism policy, Mandarin in Singapore is known as the 'language of the Chinese' (huayu) as opposed to the 'national language' (guoyu) in Taiwan and 'the common language' (putonghua) in People's Republic of China (Chun, 1994:50).

10 The government's active promotion of the Speak Mandarin campaign among the Chinese, aimed at eliminating their dialect differences, has caused some to suggest that there is a generalised attempt to 'sinicise' the entire Singaporean population implying a desire to produce a 'Chinese' nation. However, as one of the PAP's critics points out, this would contradict the logic of multiculturalism (Clammer, 1985:112– 113) which is itself useful in giving the state a high level of political autonomy, as argued earlier in this essay.

11 The so-called 'national stream' is a glossing over of persistent differences among schools. Differences in school 'spirit' and 'ethos' are noticeable and very much determined by the histories of the schools, which are in turn coloured by their original language medium of instruction; the results of streaming students with different capabilities into different schools of very different standards of education also has an effect on the social stratification of schools themselves.

12 The attempt to 'Confucianise' the Chinese population has gone through a difficult trajectory in a very short period of less than a decade, for greater details see Chua (1992a) and Kuo (1992).

Chapter 6

Not depoliticised but ideologically successful

The public housing programme

Mention has been made regarding the linkage between a successful national housing policy and the ideological hegemony of the PAP government. This linkage can be examined as a particular instance of the general discussion regarding the effects of welfare provision on electoral behaviour in capitalist societies. Interestingly, within social science theorising of this linkage there is a version of the 'depolicitisation' thesis that is conceptually similar to the one developed to account for the apparent absence of 'politics' in Singapore, as discussed in Chapter 2. Drawing on the public housing programme as a major social welfare provision of the PAP government, the argument for conceptual preference of 'ideological hegemony/consensus' over 'depoliticisation' as an explanation of political behaviour under conditions of administrative efficacy, will be made. Placing this discussion within the debate on welfarism also provides an occasion to examine its general applicability beyond the boundaries of Singapore politics.

THE DEPOLITICISATION THESIS ON WELFARISM

With the taxes collected, the capitalist state provides the collective consumption goods and services which are necessary for the reproduction of labour and which the private sector finds non-profitable because of the slow and low levels of returns relative to very high capital investment (Castells, 1977; Saunders, 1986). However, their necessity is not always ideologically recognised (Peterson 1981:43). Significantly, despite overt protestations, capitalists may in

fact be better able to accept state provision of such goods because, in addition to being necessary to the reproduction of labour power, the expenditure stimulates economic growth and thus opportunities for profits, and the provisions appease the working class with obvious economic concessions (Saunders, 1986:197; Castells, 1978).

Employees, on the other hand, can only translate the provisions as tax increases and reduction of disposable income. Indeed, in most capitalist countries, tax levels have risen partially to defray the rising costs of collective consumption because the redistribution has been largely one of transfers within the wage-earning class, rather than vertically from the capitalist to employees (Offe, 1987:154). One would therefore expect wage earners to resist increases in collective consumption provision. Consequently, those who pay tax are pitched against others who benefit from public provisions; the gains of the latter are seen as the loss of the former, resulting in a political alignment that cuts across production class lines (Saunders, 1984).

This political cleavage results not from the intrinsic nature of the collective consumption goods themselves but in the way they are provided. Take housing, for example: because housing may be provided either by the private market or the state, housing consumption can be divided into two distinct modes—'individualised-commodity-private' mode and 'collective-service-public' mode. The two modes become the basis of a vertical political cleavage that cuts across production class positions, with the former group voting right and the latter left (Dunleavy, 1979), thus fragmenting the working class.

Following the above observation, it has been argued that without split provision the issue of politics of consumption at the macro level may not arise at all. Complete absence of state provision would, of course, remove altogether political considerations, as in the case of entirely privatised consumption of consumer durables. Conversely, Dunleavy argues that 'near-universal provision' by the state also effectively 'depoliticises' collective provision of any goods and services (1979:419). The idea that state provision of a particular good or service could be depoliticised bears closer examination.

Similar to its variant used in the Singapore context, the 'depoliticisation' thesis is predicated on a conception of politics as various groups or classes of people united behind some explicit and articulated interests, entering into open bargaining, as expected by liberal pluralist analysis, or into class struggle, as anticipated by Marxist analysis. Offe calls this 'the most superficial and most visible

level of politics' (1987:159). In electoral politics, such bargaining or struggles are presumed to be reflected in the voting behaviour of the electorate. Where overt confrontation is not immediately observable, 'depoliticisation' is deemed to have occurred.

Such a concept of depoliticisation is ideological in three ways. First, being descriptive rather than explanatory, it glosses over rather than exposes and explains the political dimension by equating voting behaviour with politics as such. In contemporary politics, the body politic is characterised far more by the deep penetration of administrative and governing strategies than by the periodical formality of elections. It is in these strategies that a larger and more adequate conceptualisation of politics is to be found. From an electoral perspective, politics may have been submerged, but it has far from disappeared as strategies of government. Those who stand to benefit from the reduction of universal provision, including the state itself, are merely kept in the wings of the political stage, waiting to make their re-entry at the first opportunity and with their appearance to 'repoliticise' the issue of public provision at the first opportunity. This is abundantly clear in the state's own effort to privatise any provision whenever the political cost for doing so is manageable without losing the electoral majority.

Second, the descriptive concept reproduces precisely what the state would have its citizens believe and how it would have them behave. The state would prefer the electorate not to make political issues out of the provisions. Instead, it would rather encourage the electorate to treat such provisions as a purely administrative matter, and to confine their comments and criticisms to that of improving the bureaucratic effectiveness of the agencies entrusted with the delivery of the goods. This strategic division between technical administration and politics is part of the management procedure of the modern state (Habermas, 1975:68–75).

Third, while the state desires to administer the provision without public hindrance, it nevertheless will not entirely depoliticise it. For the success of the provision, measured in terms of the electorate's appreciation of the government's effort, is the very basis of maintaining the popular support that legitimatises the government itself. Hence, the ruling government will always attempt to make political capital out of such successes; conversely, it will distance itself from failures, blaming them on state functionaries.

The xabove critique is also an affirmation that every state intervention is necessarily a political act, even in instances in which

the political dimension is submerged. To keep the political dimension of collective consumption provision in view, we should conceptualise this submersion as an effect, the ‘depoliticisation effect’, achieved through precisely those strategies of state intervention. Instead of accepting it at face value, the ways in which this ‘effect’ is achieved and sustained should be analysed.

The contention here is that the depoliticisation effect results from the state’s ability to maintain ideological hegemony or, in the government’s own language, to achieve ideological consensus on issues that surround a particular provision as a social need; in other words, the state is able to provide the terms of discourse that circulate as ideological currency in public discussion on the provision and, in being accepted as currency, the terms concurrently delimit the horizon of such public discussions. Furthermore, since the ideological hegemony/consensus is not achieved once and for all, the state must be constantly engaged in ideological work to prevent the provision from being politicised; i.e., from dividing the electorate into different alignments that may rupture the hegemony/consensus. This is especially the case when inevitably different sets of administrative rules and strategies have to be deployed within the general terrain of a particular good or service. Such differences must be normatively justified if the ‘diffused mass loyalty’ necessary to the legitimacy of the state is to be sustained. Consequently, the ideological work required to maintain the depoliticisation effect is never done.

Hitherto, near-universal provision of public housing has not been achieved in any Western capitalist nation because developers’ lobbies have been effective in limiting direct government housing production to welfare housing alone (Wright, 1982). Contrary to this situation, virtually universal provision has been achieved in Singapore. This near-universal provision ‘appears’ to have made public housing a political non-issue. A small minority of dissatisfied real estate developers and related professionals, unable to put their dissatisfactions on the political agenda, have had to restrict their profit making to the small market of very expensive private housing development. This depoliticisation effect is the ideological achievement of the PAP. It is therefore an exemplary case to substantiate the above theoretical argument regarding depoliticisation of welfare provisions. Before analysing this instance, a brief recapitulation of the main points in the conceptualisation of ideological hegemony/consensus, explicated in Chapter 2, is in order.

DEFINING IDEOLOGICAL HEGEMONY/CONSENSUS IN SINGAPORE

First, an ideological system is a loosely organised complex conceptual system that develops over time with an ever expanding network of concepts, guided by a few core concepts, as the governing group copes with solutions to problems in the body politic. Analysis of how ideological concepts work must therefore focus on their contextual rationality rather than their systematicity. The distance between the demands for systematicity and demands of contextual rationality may, nevertheless, be analytically exploited as the grounds for ideological critique.

Second, ideological hegemony/consensus designates a condition in which the system of ideas of the ruling group is loosely accepted and reproduced by the governed as part and parcel of the latter's 'natural reality of everyday life'.[1] Under such conditions, policing of the society—an indication that hegemony is never complete—is treated as a reasonable step to maintain the welfare of the society as a whole, because the governed and the governing constitute themselves as a political whole in pursuit of a social order according to the shared ideological concepts.

Third, due to systemic inconsistencies between concepts and the latter's dependence on contextual rationality, related concepts can be invoked to provide competing interpretations to the one preferred by the governing. This is yet another avenue of ideological critique. Under hegemonic/consensual conditions, however, such critique may not shake the legitimacy of the ruling interpretation which is supported by a diffused mass loyalty (Offe, 1987:53; Habermas, 1975).

Finally, because ideological hegemony/consensus is a generalised and diffused condition throughout the body politic, it cannot be achieved restrictively in the specific terrain of social life. Our analysis of the housing sector must, therefore, be placed in the larger ideological discourse of Singapore, which must now be out-lined.

Substantively, the PAP's ideological system unfolds from the central concern of the survival of an independent island nation through continuous economic growth. This concern is encoded and encapsulated in the ideology of pragmatism, in which every activity that contributes to economic development is considered 'pragmatic' or 'practical'. Legislation is enacted either to

promote or repress activities that may be presumed to enhance or endanger national survival. Pragmatism as an ideology has much success in Singapore; the generalised improvement in the material life of the entire nation makes it difficult to argue against this success. So much so that the stringent social discipline, rationalised under its auspices, has been hailed by some as a model of social development (Quah, 1983). This success gives the PAP government a very high degree of political legitimacy and it is wont to remind the electorate of its success in providing the collective consumption goods and services, one of which is the vast improvement in housing for all Singaporeans.

UNIVERSAL HOUSING PROVISION IN SINGAPORE

The Housing and Development Board (HDB), established in 1960, is entrusted with extensive powers in land acquisition, resettlement, town planning, architectural design, engineering work and building material production—that is, all development work except the actual construction of the buildings, which is undertaken by private contractors. It is also responsible for the allocation of flats both for sale and rental, and until recently the management of all aspects of the housing estates. In short, it is responsible for the total management of the public housing sector except for the setting of sale and rental prices, which are decided by the Minsitry of National Devel-opment.[2]

With centralisation of such power and resources, the HDB is able to provide housing at substantially lower cost than comparable accommodation in the private sector.[3] Beginning modestly with provision of basic rental units for the poor who lived in squats and congested shop-houses in the central area of the city, a home ownership scheme was introduced in 1964. Large supplies of new housing units have been sustained throughout the nearly thirty years of its history. More than half a million flats for rental and sale and a substantial volume of related facilities, such as commercial spaces, recreational facilities and light industrial estates, were completed, all within comprehensively planned and self-sufficient high-rise, high-density new towns. Currently more than 85 per cent of the 2.7 million population live in public sector flats, of whom more than 70 per cent are owner-occupiers. This achievement was made possible by three decades of double-digit growth of the Singapore economy

since the mid-1960s, and a set of policy decisions. Apart from the obvious government financial commitment to house every cititzen's family, two of those policies bear detailed examination.

COMPULSORY LAND ACQUISITION

The first of these to be considered is land policy. In order to develop housing for all, the Land Acquisition Act of the British colonial government was amended in 1966. The amendments empowered the government to acquire any land deemed necessary to the interest of national development, including acquisition on behalf of private developers. Such a law is not exceptional; every state has one. What is significant is that the rate of compensation is to be determined by the state itself. For example, an amendment of 1973 permits the state to compensate the owners of acquired land at 1973 market value or at the date of notification of acquisition, whichever is lower. Furthermore, in determining the market value, the existing use or the zoned use is considered, whichever is lower; no account is taken of any potential value for other intensive uses. This rate was not adjusted upwards until 1986, when the state estimated that it already had sufficient landholding for all public needs, including housing, and further acquisition would be marginal.

The Act clearly violates the common laws that govern property rights (Koh, 1967), but in the official language of the HDB: 'The majority of the acquired private lands comprised dilapidated properties or neglected land where squatters had mushroomed. The government saw no reason why these owners should enjoy the greatly enhanced land values over the years without any effort put in by them' (Wong and Yeh, 1985:41). In a land-scarce island nation, such draconian land policy not only reduces the cost of acquisition but effectively cuts down speculation, for every landholding is constantly threatened by acquisition.

However, the effect of the law is unevenly distributed. As the law covers acquisition for major private developments, it implicitly favours large development capital at the expense of small landlords, as it can be invoked to acquire and amalgamate small lots and make the latter available for large private developments. Also, land acquisition has been unevenly applied. Property owners who represent both domestic and multinational corporate sectors of the economy in the high-value city centre were given ample opportunity

to redevelop their holdings into commercial buildings under the urban redevelopment process initiated in the early 1970s. Acquisition in the city area was executed as a last resort against small property owners who were either unable to redevelop their limited holdings or to sell or amalgamate with adjacent property owners for economically viable commercial developments (Chua, 1989).

RATIONALISING DIFFERENT STRATEGIES OF LAND ACQUISITION

The difference in acquisition treatment between commercial and public housing development is politically significant. On the one hand, preserving commercial development in the private corporate sector was both economically and ideologically necessary. Economically, the post-colonial government was financially unable to redevelop the city on its own. Ideologically, as a nascent state which had identified foreign investment as the engine of economic growth, it had to demonstrate not only to existing corporate capital but also to future investors its commitment to private property and profit. Indeed, an undertaking was given in 1970 by the then Minister of National Development that the government would not nationalise any of the commercial properties developed by corporate capital. This assurance was necessary to attract foreign capital into a city-state whose political and economic viability was then very much doubted by all concerned, not the least by the government itself.

Conversely, acquisition for the purpose of public housing development did not need to confront similar economic issues, for obvious reasons. Ideologically, public housing provision was politically embraced by the same nascent state as testimony to its commitment to the betterment of the material conditions of the newly enfranchised citizens of Singapore. This was all the more ideologically effective when set against the neglect of the British colonial government which had resulted in overcrowding in the city area (Kaye, 1960) and the proliferation of squatters in the urban fringe. Within this context, compulsory acquisition of land for public housing could be carried out without any apologies to the landlords; on the contrary, it allowed the government rhetorically to occupy the moral high ground in terms of its commitment to the people.

Affected landlords were left either to accept their losses with altruistic generosity and recoup some level of self-esteem or to face the losses with bitterness and alienation from the new government.

The popularity of the government's action among the overwhelming propertyless majority of the electorate enabled it to bear the rejection of this very small minority. There is evidence that the attitude of those affected by resettlement has changed from resentment and resistance in the early years of the public housing programme (Gamer, 1972; Aldrich, 1985) to one of resignation, even acceptance, on the basis that everyone in squatter areas throughout Singapore is affected 'equally' and that the land is necessary for the housing of the nation (Chua *et al.,* 1985).

The different strategies substantiate the argument that concretely different strategies, requiring different explanations, are used by the state in its economic and political interventions (Saunders, 1986:306). They are conceptually significant, demonstrating that in an advanced capitalist society it is possible (1) to eliminate private small landlords without jeopardising the economy or the legitimacy of the state and, (2) to provide public housing without jeopardising the dominant position of capital, or more generally, to provide for a fairly high standard of collective consumption goods without undermining capitalism. This is in accord with the Swedish case (Duncan, 1981) where advanced capitalism and its demand for high concentration of capital and high growth rate exists quite comfortably with a high level of social welfarism.

Within the specific political and economic context of Singapore as it was then, the PAP government offered no additional normative justifications because the different acquisition procedures were 'obviously the practical thing to do'. Conceptually, the government was not in any legitimation deficit so as to require additional normative justification.

THE MORTGAGE FINANCE SYSTEM

The second contributing policy was the creation of a mortgage finance system through a compulsory savings fund. Instead of a conventional general pension plan which operates on the principle of pooling contributions, a Central Provident Fund (CPF), where 'an individual's total benefits are equal to his total contribution plus interest credited into his account' (Lim *et al.,* 1986:1), was instituted by the colonial government in 1955 for all workers. In this case, the employer is required to contribute the same rate as the employee to the latter's savings. Reflecting the rapid economic expansion since self-government in 1959, membership in the Fund rose from 180,000

to reach 1,847,000 in 1984. The rate of contribution for each employee and his/her employer steadily increased, from 5 per cent in 1955 to 25 per cent in 1984. The ceiling of contribution was raised from S$300 a month in 1971 to S$2,500 in 1984. Finally, the contribution received by the Fund increased from S$9 million in 1955 to S$5,386 million in 1984.[4] During the 1985–1987 recession, the employer's contribution was reduced to 10 per cent but was increased progressively as the economy turned around, reaching 20 per cent by 1994; correspondingly, employees' savings rate is reduced to the same level. It is envisaged that the contribution rates will be maintained permanently at this new level.

The CPF also acts as an anti-inflationary instrument by withholding a substantial amount of the employees' disposable income for discretionary consumption. The rapid capital accumulation in the Fund had enabled the government to build up a hefty foreign reserve, which stood at S$30 billion in 1989.[5] It is also invested in government securities that are partially used to finance development projects, including public housing, without relying on foreign loans. The very high CPF savings rate has had a tremendous effect on the public housing home ownership programme.

When the programme was introduced in 1964, only about 1,500 households out of 11,000 public housing tenants opted to buy. Then, in 1968 residents were allowed to utilise their CPF for down-payments and monthly mortgage redemptions, making it possible to own a flat for a period of ninety-nine years without any reduction in monthly disposable income. With such facility, and the fact that an individual's savings can be withdrawn only at retirement if it were not immediately spent on housing, public housing ownership soared.[6] In 1968 alone, 44 per cent of all housing applicants elected to buy their flats. By 1970, 63 per cent applied to buy, and in 1986 this figure reached 90 per cent.

THE PUBLIC HOUSING SECTOR

The government's commitment to home ownership is evident from the periodical raising of the monthly income ceiling for eligibility to purchase public housing, in step with the general economic growth, so as to include as many households as possible. The current ceiling of S$6,000 per household covers more than 90 per cent of all households. This inclusive reach and the comparatively very high

price of private housing result in making the HDB a virtual monopoly as producer and supplier of housing for the entire nation.

From the start, prices are fixed by the government with reference to its own fiscal position, the general economy and the level of affordability to the different target groups. With this price fixing, public housing is to a significant extent decommodified,[7] and in the first decade of the home ownership scheme it led to artificially low prices. For example, whereas the GNP kept growing annually, the sale prices set in 1964 were not adjusted until 1974, and rentals not until 1979. The cumulative effect of the decade resulted in the need to hike prices up by an average of about 50 per cent in 1974. This triggered a rush of applicants who were afraid of further sharp increases. Indeed, another increase of more than 30 per cent was imposed in 1982. In both instances, clearly the later purchasers were paying for the subsidies of the earlier ones. They also reflected the contextual rationality of the policy-making process. However, since then price increases have been rationalised and adjusted marginally each year.

In shifting from rental to ownership at a very early stage of the national housing programme, the government has avoided the political difficulties generated by such instances as the conversion of council housing to owner-occupation in, for example, Britain (Forrest and Murie, 1983). Furthermore, the home ownership scheme has proved to be one of the strengths of the public housing programme itself; income derived from the sale, along with rents from residential, commercial and industrial premises, and revenues from ancillary services like car parks, combine to ensure a significant return from the housing and attendant infrastructure investments. The return can be ploughed back into the next cycle of new housing production. The result is that only a margin of subsidy from the government is required—about 2 per cent of the annual budget estimates since 1975 (Wong and Yeh, 1985:501). This situation is vastly different from ex-socialist nations, where attempts at universal public housing provision have led to a constant drain on the national economy (Szelenyi, 1983).

The market, however, operates in the public housing sector in two ways. First, the type of flat purchased is dependent entirely on the household's ability to pay and no other measures of need. Second, a household is permitted to sell its flat after five years' occupancy to another who is within the eligibility rules of the HDB, at a price that is agreed between themselves. The seller keeps the

capital gains and in turn applies for a new public housing flat. The seller is entitled to do this twice, after which he or she must go into the expensive private sector.

This resale mechanism has given the masses in Singapore an investment opportunity which is restricted to a smaller portion in other capitalist nations. To the benefits of the HBD, it has also led many families to upgrade their houses, thus reducing overall construction subsidy because the larger-room types are subsidised at a progressively reduced rate. The upgrading in turn achieves the filtering-down effect of the market mechanism in the housing sector, enabling the poorer families to purchase the smaller and older flats, making ownership even more extensive.

So successful is the programme that the government reaffirmed its commitment to universal housing provision by making 100 per cent home ownership by 1997 a social and political goal. To this end, the HDB has introduced more stringent criteria for eligibility to rent. The income ceiling for rental units has been drastically lowered; the eligible age has been raised from twenty-one to twenty-nine, forcing younger couples to live with either spouse's family for a much longer period, until they have accumulated enough CPF for the down-payment on a purchased flat; and finally, the type of rental flats available are now restricted to the least desirable of the public housing range of one- or two-room flats, the latter consisting of one bedroom and one sitting room. The availability of these bottom-of-the-line flats is further constrained by their demolition without replacement. The result is similar to attempts at privatising public housing in other countries; the worst of the existing housing stock is designated for the poorest of the population (Williams, 1986; Forrest and Murie, 1983).

Significantly, even with its goal of 100 per cent home ownership, the government had not, until recently, abolished the income ceiling for eligibility, although logically this would be the popular thing to do. This is not due to internal constraints in the public housing sector. For example, if the ceiling were lifted, it would only add a very small fraction to the existing demand, which could be readily met by the HDB. Furthermore, those who are excluded are at the upper income end and would correspondingly apply for the largest flats, which have the smallest subsidy, and would therefore add little financial burden to the system. The only possible apparent reasons for not lifting the income ceiling are (1) to protect the private housing market where Singaporeans and foreigners have invested very substantial amounts,

and (2) to keep private housing as a socially differentiated housing class so that it may act as the 'prize' for those who have broken through the housing norms of the nation—in other words, private housing as status consumption. However, in August 1989 the income ceiling was removed for the purchase of resale flats, while the S$6,000 income ceiling has remained for the purchase of new flats. No reasons were given for this policy change.

BUILDING HEGEMONY/CONSENSUS AROUND PUBLIC HOUSING

Incorporating the population

From the above description we can tease out the elements that serve to maintain ideological hegemony/consensus around the public housing provision in Singapore. To begin with, extensive promotion of home ownership is itself an efficient process of incorporating the population, ideologically and materially, into a commitment to a society transformed by rapid industrialisation. First, regular payments can be met only by regular employment in the formal sector of the economy, often by pooling the incomes of several, including the female, members of the family (Saleff, 1987). Encouraging home ownership was therefore an important step in the active proletarianisation of the population, while simultaneously improving their material living conditions, as the government had promised. Indicative of the underlying active transformation of the work-force is the steady decline in the unemployment rate from 6 per cent in 1970, two years after the introduction of the CPF home ownership scheme, to 2.7 per cent in 1984 (Krause *et al.,* 1987:190).

Second, ideologically, one of the effects of property ownership is 'the expansion of commitment to the prevalent social order by the development of personal stakes in its survival' (Agnew, 1981:457), not least of which is the desire to protect or gain from such property investment. In the Singapore case, the resale policy gives every household an opportunity to make potential gains in real estate. Due to the artificially low prices of the early years, very real gains were made by the early owners, such that they could sell off their old flats and upgrade to larger, new flats with a tolerable level of additional investment. Among these were the lower-income groups that were the first to qualify for public housing.[8] This further intensified their

ideological and material commitment to the system as a whole, and reinforced the popular support base of the ruling government.

AVOIDING CLAIMS OF RIGHTS

To incorporate the population is very much the ideological motivation behind the PAP government's promotion of 100 per cent home ownership, creating what it calls a 'home-owning democracy'.[9] However, within this overarching ideological motivation, care is taken to preclude the possibility of housing becoming a legal entitlement of citizenship. This is to avoid the institutionalisation of housing provision as a welfarism that may eliminate the consumption differences between those who are unemployed and those employed at the lowest rung of the occupational structure and thus contribute to the decline of commitment to labour.

Although under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of National Development, the HDB, as a statutory board, operates financially and administratively as an independent corporation that 'freely' enters into contractual relations with any party. The political advantage is that, unlike a Ministry, a statutory board is in effect formally removed from the political arena, even if Singaporeans routinely treat the HDB as synonymous with government and public housing flats as 'government housing'. Indeed, the PAP government is not beyond claiming this identity when it is to its political advantage, while simultaneously being able to distance itself from public criticism and dissatisfactions with the HDB.

As an independent agency, the HDB is at liberty to impose conditions of sale or rental on interested parties. The legal position of a Singaporean seeking to purchase or rent a public housing flat is that of a client in the strict business sense and is viewed as freely agreeing with the conditions stipulated by the vendor or the landlord respectively. Housing thus remains at the level of property rights of individuals, the government's commitment to adequate housing for the nation notwithstanding.[10] This arrangement prevents housing provision from becoming part of a citizen's rights and legal entitlement, hence a political and ideological issue.

ELIMINATING CLASS-BASED POLITICS

Rather than espousing any ideological position on equality of housing for all as a matter of intrinsic rights, the PAP government is

committed to equality of opportunity of all individuals to purchase up to their capability as consumers through the home ownership programme. The class-specific beneficiaries of the early years of the rental public housing programme was replaced by an abstract definition in terms of 'maximum income levels'. Much like the Belgian public housing programme in the 1920s, ideologically, this substitution of the concrete by the abstract category 'allowed the aid given to the poorest to justify the aid given towards improving and promoting the middle classes' living standards' (Mougenot, 1988:533). The substitution removes class as a criterion for qualifying for public housing; it eliminates the potential dissension of those who would have been excluded from the class-specific definition of eligibility; and it removes from the allocation process a source of moral and legal appeals by the lower-income groups regarding the adequacy of their housing conditions.

The persistence of housing inequality is displaced onto each household's own consumption ability rather than on to the state. State subsidy is treated by the government as benevolence rather than welfare responsibility; in other words, the housing subsidy is still very much conceived as 'helping people to help themselves' rather than as their legal entitlement. In fact, as in all instances of generalised provision, the advantages of government subsidies are not evenly distributed within the housing programme itself. Instead, it is somewhat regressive in that those who purchase a larger flat and carry a larger mortgage enjoy greater benefits than those who by force of financial circumstance must purchase a smaller flat (Lin, 1986). However, the inequalities are individualised as personal failures against an ideological background in which the government is vehement in maintaining 'meritocracy'.

It should be apparent that the PAP government is actively preventing public housing from becoming a social welfare institution in the conventional sense of the responsibility of the state to the well-being of the citizens, while at the same time subsidising housing provision to practically the entire nation. In this sense, Castells (1988) has suggested that Singapore is a social welfare state *sui generis*.

RATIONALISING EXCLUSIONS

However, an eligibility ceiling inevitably excludes those whose incomes are above it. Here, the preservation of a small private sector

of very expensive housing is of ideological significance. By excluding only the very high-income households it also preserves the social status of this group, symbolically displayed through their private housing. The prestige of private housing, including high-rise condominiums, also acts as a social status attainment target that potentially keeps up the work ethics of those at the top end of public housing eligibility; relative consumption advantage being an essential normative element of capitalism itself. Thus, not only does the exclusion not raise political issues, but instead it reinforces the normative structure of the developmentalist ideology.

Nevertheless, there remain occasional complaints in the press from the excluded group. The latest policy change to allow every household, regardless of income, to buy resale flats, effectively removes some of the grounds for dissatisfaction with the government's housing policy. There is, however, one constraint attached to this opening up of the opportunity for all to own public housing flats; the owner must live in the dwelling unit and not hold it as investment rental property. This restriction is likely to discourage those high-income households who view housing as much as status consumption as necessary shelter.

SYMBOLS OF SUCCESS

Finally, the materially tangible blocks of building are powerful symbolic monuments to a government's efficacy. This explains the tendency of policy-makers and politicians everywhere to try to solve housing problems through numbers of units built alone (McLeay, 1984:97). In Singapore, the overwhelming presence of more than half a million completed dwelling units is a constant reminder to the population of the PAP government's achievement. The extensive public housing programme is symbolically, hence ideologically, a powerful sign of the existing regime's ability to fulfil its promise to improve the living conditions of the entire nation. The housing programme therefore gives the government a very substantial measure of legitimacy among the people and abroad. This legitimacy allows the PAP government to determine and propagate the terms of discourse regarding housing.

All the above elements collectively justify the near-universal public housing provision while simultaneously rendering it difficult for critics to mount any alternative ideological discourse around the issues of housing. This difficulty is itself an effect of ideological

hegemony/consensus, in which the conceptual terms provided by the state act to exclude alternatives from being circulated in the social and political spheres. This is not to suggest that alternatives cannot be thought of, just that the alternatives generally fail to become incorporated by ordinary individuals into the everyday rationalisation of their life-world.

ADDITIONAL IDEOLOGICAL GAINS

The high degree of political and ideological legitimacy derived from near-universal housing provision has ideological pay-offs in other regions of social life. Being the sole provider of public housing enables the HDB to further serve as an agent for the propagation of certain values that the PAP government deems ‘necessary’ for the ongoing operation of society. The housing authority can thus extend its jurisdiction, *de facto,* to non-housing realms. The efficacy of this extension lies in part in the condition imposed on the masses by the absences of alternative housing, and in part by the ideological legitimacy of the interventions themselves.

ELIMINATING ETHNIC AND CLASS POLITICS

As suggested in the preceeding chapter, the housing programme has been used to break up racial communities and to remixing them in public housing estates through (1) the first-come-first-served rule that governs the allocation of flats, and (2) maintaining a quota on minority population in every housing estate so as to prevent the development of racial enclaves. The race-mixing rules took on greater emphasis in 1989 when the government noticed that substantial Malay households were regrouping in certain housing estates through the purchase of new and resale flats. Thus, from then on, in addition to maintaining the approximate proportional distribution of the three racial groups in every new town, the racial composition of every block of flats is to be monitored. Where there is overrepresentation of a particular group, anyone in the block who wishes to sell a flat must sell it to a member of the racial group that is underrepresented, as specified by the HDB itself.

The breaking up of established communities is ideologically justified as a necessary step to pre-empt any possibility of race riots, last seen in Singapore in 1964, reflecting the government’s tendency to make pre-emptory moves in societal management.

More positive is the suggestion that dispersing and remixing all racial groups will lead to national integration. There is some evidence that the level of inter-racial neighbourliness has increased over the years, but this is not so in other residentially based community activities. For example, there is a notable shortage of Malay members in various community organisations, such as the government-sponsored Residents' Committees and the Citizens' Consultative Committees (*Straits Times,* 23 May, 1989). In any event, the desirability of promoting inter-racial harmony ideologically undercuts the defence of racial enclaves and criticisms of the repressiveness of the quota rules.

The same logic of national integration is applied to the mixing of classes. Class enclaves are dispersed by the planning process in which the rental flats for the lowest income groups are spread among the various classes of purchased flats. Thus, each housing estate is a mixture of different-sized flats catering to different income groups. Income group mixing can be built into a block of flats itself because flats of different sizes can be designed into the same block. In practical terms, this dispersion reduces ghetto effect. Some even argue that this mixing is beneficial to the lower-income groups because they may be served by the better educated who volunteer as community leaders (*Straits Times,* 18 May, 1989).

Spatial concentration which is necessary for either class- or race-based political organisation, is thus denied by a combination of planning and allocation procedures. The absence of spatial concentration effectively renders both class and race inefficacious as political elements in an electoral Parliamentary system. While both procedures are politically difficult to defend in themselves, and even morally culpable, their ideological reinterpretation as necessary to both the national and individual resident's interests has made them normatively defensible.

REINFORCING THE NORMAL FAMILY

The monopoly of housing is also used to shore up the family institution. Public housing is only available to households. Only single persons who are presumed never going to marry—males of more than fifty years old and single females of over forty years old—are eligible to rent; and then only if they share with another person. Young single individuals are as a rule excluded in line with the government's pro-family policies.

Housing is used directly to support the family through a number of schemes: families of siblings or a married child and the family of his/her origin may apply to be neighbours in order to maintain mutual support; these joint applicants are given priority of allocation, and the waiting time for their flats is reduced by as much as two years. Furthermore, in addition to priority of allocation, the income ceiling for eligibility is raised substantially for a young family which chooses to live with one of their parents. In a country where the government explicitly eschews any social welfare support and relegates this largely to voluntary associations, these pro-family rules reduce the government's share of social welfare responsibilities. However, they are being justified ideologically as supporting the family as the basic social institution of the society and, in even more explicit ideological language, as maintaining the 'Asian traditions'.

Tying the promotion of certain normative values to the allocation of public housing is obviously politically motivated. In this sense, the housing issue is politicised. Indeed, single professionals or newly-weds, who are excluded because their monthly income is marginally above the eligibility ceiling and who are without savings for a down-payment for expensive private housing, do complain about being discriminated against. They are, however, unable to generate either much popular political support or sympathy among MPs. With the new rule that permits all households to buy resale flats, the newly-weds' grounds for complaint have all but disappeared.

The absence of public interest in such instances of complaint, or even in the underlying inequity of the housing allocation rules themselves, is symptomatic of the legitimacy of the PAP government. As Offe argues, 'the autonomy and capacity of the political-administrative system to act is dependent on 'mass loyalty'' (1987:53). State intervention without precipitating political troubles is possible only if there is a sufficient legitimacy; in this case a legitimacy derived from having 'delivered the material goods'.

SOME PROBLEMS IN THE SYSTEM

An almost absolute monopoly on housing, no matter how politically and materially effective, generates its own problems internally. Space limitation restricts us to illustrate this by only one significant problem, namely, rent and mortgage arrears. Here, ironically, the state-owned monopolistic housing provider denies itself the power to

evict those who are in arrears. Given that public housing is the only form of housing for the masses, the arrears cases cannot be evicted from their flats without the eviction itself becoming a public issue; an evicted family would immediately become homeless, and hence a visible social problem requiring social welfare measures publicly—an act which the PAP government is vehemently unwilling to entertain.

A distinction between mortgage and rent arrears needs to be made; in the former case, the household can be forced to sell its flat and downgrade its housing consumption by moving into a rental flat, but no option exists for those who are already in rental flats, since there is no room for downgrading. This problem becomes increasingly insoluble as squatter housing grows scarce as a result of resettlement. Consequently, although rent arrears exist within the system, there is little effort to publicise the arrears, beyond an occasional mention. Arrears thus become a management problem that has little or no solution, practically or ideologically, within a monopolistic public housing system with universal provision which also eschews welfarism.

However, even in this irresolvable contradiction there is one instance which returns to the PAP government a high degree of legitimacy. During the recession of 1985–1987, the then Minister of National Development declared that the HDB would not penalise any household that went into arrears as a result of unemployment, and that the arrears would be collected over a period of time in reasonable instalments after re-employment. Of course, the generosity of the HDB as a landlord with compassion paid political dividends to the ruling government, accordingly it was turned into legitimacy capital. The issue of mortgage and rent arrears, however, brings out a deeper problem in Singapore's public housing programme.

LATENT PROBLEMS

It is obvious that the home ownership programme is a pay-as-you-go programme and that its success is due largely to the absence of unemployment in Singapore for close on two decades, which is itself a result of the fact that Singapore's capitalist industrialisation is still in its early stages. In these early stages, and under conditions of widespread real material deprivation, the task of the state is, ironically, comparatively easy. Conjuncturally, capital accumulation is of

uppermost importance for development and the political and ideological dimensions are positively subordinated to the economy (Offe, 1987:39). The job of achieving 'a situation in which every citizen can take care of all of his or her needs through participation in market process' may be relatively easy because the work ethic remains high in the face of material deprivation itself; furthermore, during these early stages, 'the inherent test of rationality of policy-making is the extent to which it approximates this situation' (Offe, 1987:138). Ahead, the task of sustaining the drive of the population —when the basic necessities are already satisfied and when incremental material improvement is no longer the sole criterion for assessing public policies—is increasingly an uphill battle. The difficulties are publicly recognised and proclaimed by the second generation of ministers who have taken over the management of the state.

The latent problems in Singapore are: (1) when 'delivering the goods' is no longer sufficient ground for ideological consensus, the legitimacy of the state may become increasingly an issue, especially in connection with the more repressive measures in housing provision and in wider government policies; and (2) should unemployment become an endemic element in the economy, as it does in all mature capitalist economies, the anti-welfare stance of the state will become increasingly untenable. However, while these are conceptually logical future possibilities, they are not inevitable.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let us return to the theoretical linkage between the universal provision of collective consumption goods as welfare goods and the political behaviour of an electorate. As the concurrent existence of the 'individualised-commodity-private' mode and the 'collective-service-public' mode of consumption of services tends to give rise to cross-class political cleavages, in terms of one's dependence/independence on public provision, it is suggested that universal provision of collective consumption goods could eliminate such cleavages. In other words, universality 'depoliticises' public provision itself. The very successful near-universal public housing programme in Singapore shows that such a concept of depoliticisation glosses over the massive and constant ideological work that the state has to perform in order to prevent public provision from becoming politicised, even when it elects to provide universally for the citizens.

The ideological work of the state is necessary because the rules that govern eligibility to state provision are, unavoidably, at the same time social control mechanisms with repressive tendencies, which must be ideologically justified if they are not to alienate the electorate. Public housing in Singapore shows that efficacious justifications may be obtained by invoking some 'higher' values of the collective interests. This may act to undermine, or at least to reduce, the apparent legitimacy of any complaints against the system of provision itself.

Where the state is able to determine the terms of public discussion regarding collective consumption goods provision, it may be said to have achieved ideological hegemony/consensus among the governed. This condition is empirically observable when public complaints are overwhelmingly of the type that attempt to make the agencies more efficient in serving the population, rather than involving issues of principle. The complainants aim to help the agencies as a way of helping themselves. Space limitation does not permit us to document this observation regarding Singapore's housing programme, but any perusal of the letters to the editor of the national paper will bear this out.

Finally, while near-universal housing provision in Singapore serves well in demonstrating the ever-present demand for ideological work to pre-empt the politicisation of public provision of collective consumption, conceptual generalisation from the analysis must proceed with caution. For while the need for ideological work is unavoidable, the actual timing, strategy and substance of every ideological manoeuvre is specific to the social and political conditions of the particular state in question, and furthermore, the ideological history of the country which provides the substance for analysis also stands in the way of generalisation.

NOTES

1 I adopt here Marx's conception of ideological transformation as the naturalisation of historically specific class interests.
2 The most comprehensive account of the entire range of a activities carried out by the HDB is to be found in a volume published to commemorate its twenty-fifth anniversary, edited by Wong and Yeh (1985).
3 For example, equivalent size flats in private high-rise condominiums are in excess of twice the price of an HDB flat.
4 The statistical data reported here is drawn from Lim *et al.* (1986).

5 For a discussion of the politicisation of the reserve, see Low and Toh (1989).
6 The use of CPF was extended to cover mortgage of private housing in 1981; we are however not concerned with this limited sector; for a detailed discussion of the financing system, see Tyabji and Lin (1989).
7 For discussion of the relationship between state provision of social services and the process of decommodification, see Offe (1984).
8 For comparative information on real gains by working-class home owners in Britain, see Saunders (1978).
9 Although there is no documentary evidence, this ideological effect might have motivated the PAP government to promote home ownership as one of the strategies to combat a communism in the early 1960s, as in the case of Australia a decade earlier (Kemeny, 1977).
10 For a discussion of the intrinsic ideological contradictions between property rights and formal legal entitlement in the modern state, see Offe (1984:197).

Chapter 7

Confucianisation abandoned

Edward Said, has not only proclaimed the death of 'Orientalism' as a discourse (1979:1) but more importantly points out that 'the modern Orient participates in its own orientalizing' (1979:325); that is, the discourse of Orientalism on the part of Western intellectuals in which orientals are defined as the 'other' is embraced by Asian intellectuals and policy-makers as a 'self-defining' discourse, thus participating in their orientalisation. This self-definition strategy produces several effects that may act concertedly in the perpetuation of politically authoritarian regimes, the ossification of cultural developments, and impose constraints on individual self-expression in public life. Indeed, it is precisely because of these intrinsically conservative tendencies that a current strain of the discourse of Orientalism, namely Confucianism, first raised by the West, has been embraced by the political leadership of Asia's newly industrialising economies (NIEs), including Singapore.

It is within the specific contemporary context in which pragmatism has been weakening as the basis of the ideological hegemony/consensus, that this chapter analyses the Singaporean government's attempt to redirect cultural and political development towards 'traditional' values. This redirection has been conducted in the name of 'discovering one's roots' and more aggressively in the name of resisting the 'corrupting influences of an incipient Westernisation'. It will provide an analysis of how the PAP government has attempted to 'Confucianise' the society, at least its overwhelming Chinese majority population, and draw out the possible consequences for the political development of Singapore towards greater democratisation.

As Said points out, Orientalism is a discourse fashioned by the West to rationalise its domination over the East. Hence, one must

first turn to the Western conceptual grid which initiates the process of self-orientalisation. However, as 'Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object' (Said, 1979:22), we must first turn to the circumstances that conditioned the Western intellectuals themselves.

THE PERCEIVED DECLINE OF THE WEST

That Orientalism is a Western discourse which presupposes the unchanging positional superiority of the West is manifest in the very preface of a book that proclaims the superiority of the East. In *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America,* Ezra Vogel, Harvard sociologist, writes that he had never 'questioned the general superiority of American society and American institutions' but by 1975, 'I found myself, like my Japanese friends, wondering what had happened to America' (1979:iiiv). One should, therefore, look at just 'what had happened to America'.

The passing of the 1960s—a decade of intense social activism and collective actions—coincided with global economic recession, rising inflation and increased unemployment, which in turn pressured the state to expand its welfare provision. Furthermore, the difficult economic condition, combined with other factors, such as fatigue and alienation from the social struggles, gave rise to the privatisation of interests and social withdrawal, bringing with it what the mass media called the 'me generation' of the next two decades. The two social developments were conceptualised as problems of 'expanding welfare demands' and 'excessive individualism'.

The two phenomena were conceptually linked: the call for increasing state provision of collective consumption goods was not matched by individuals' willingness to contribute to the programmes as a matter of social responsibility. The result was increasing fiscal deficits of the state, met only by borrowing from future generations, thus making ideological room for the emergence of Reaganite and Thatcherite conservatism of the 1980s. However, even before that set in, the West's declining dominance in the world economy combined with its own cultural perception of the presence of a runaway hedonistic individualism, itself seen as a core cause of the economic decline, gave rise to self-doubt and self-critique in America; hence, Vogel's concern.

One possible response to America's declining position is to condemn the apparently already excessive, and yet interminable

march of individualism, crushing any sense of collective responsibility: the adversary culture of claims to individual rights in liberal democracy and 'the self-seeking hedonism of the consuming masses …leaves modern society without a set of meanings to ground the spirit of civic sacrifice needed to sustain a liberal polity burdened with increasing responsibilities' (Steinfels, 1979:162). In this instance both the intellectual left and right shared the same diagnosis of the cultural malaise of capitalism, although they might have prescribed different solutions.[1]

The grounds for the left's response are somewhat negatively constituted. The critique of runaway individualism is taken further to expose the individualising tendencies of modern advanced capitalism itself, thereby turning it into a political-economic critique of capitalist ideology. It accepts the validity of the criticism but affirms both the possibility and the necessity for a concept of a social responsibility, within a liberal political realm. The resurrection of both a sense of the collective and of responsible individualism is to be realised not in the fine-tuning of the system but in a revamping of the economic and political realms to reflect the essentially socially constituted character of human society. This particular response, with Habermas as its eminent advocate, is assembled in terms of carrying on with the promises of modernity, first formulated in the Enlightenment period. It retains the grounds for a reconceptualised modernity and modernism to be resurrected.

On the right, the malaise is seen as the Frankenstein of modernity itself. It is argued that the modernist cultural injunction to be avant garde in all spheres of social life has resulted in the lack of a rooted moral belief system. As Daniel Bell (1976), who is arguably least committed to extreme solutions than other neo-conservatives, suggests that the solution lies in the shrinking of the state's welfare provision to some level of 'social minimum', returning to Protestantism with its injunctions for hard work and ascetism, and to a sense of responsibility to the public household, leading generally, to disciplined limits to all expectations from social life (Steinfels, 1979:173). Primacy is placed on cultural reformation as the key to the above solutions. It is argued that only with the proper revival of some traditional values will discipline be achieved voluntarily as public responsibility.

Although not part of the neo-conservative's agenda, one possible source of lessons for the much-needed value reform are the ascendant capitalist nations in East Asia, for here the traditional

values appears to remain operative. Such was Vogel's proposal. Just like the influential nineteenth-century European Romantic idea that 'Europe will be regenerated by Asia' (Said, 1979:113), Vogel counsels his compatriots to seriously study Japan, so as to revitalise America. What matters, then as now, 'was not Asia so much as Asia's use' (Said, 1979:115) to the modern West, to its revitalisation and continuing of superiority.

THE ASCENDANCY OF ASIAN CAPITALISM

The contemporary turn to the East stems from the search for an 'Asian' formula for economic success in the NIEs, which may be considered for adoption. Many answers have been proposed. These include: the massive infusion of capital by the US into some of the NIEs, during the long post-war period of sustained growth and the expansion of capitalism in order to keep out communism; the institutional network of the NIEs' state bureaucracies in planning and controlling the economy, and finally, the cultural heritage of the people of these NIEs.

The summary judgment in neo-conservative academic circles is that the cultural factor is an essential ingredient, although not the only nor the principal element, for success. Indeed, Berger argues, 'it is inherently implausible to believe that Singapore would be what it is today if it were populated, not by a majority of ethnic Chinese, but by Brazilians or Bengalis—or, for that matter, by a majority of Malays. Specific elements of Chinese culture have contributed to the economic success of the city-state; they have given it a comparative advantage—no less, but also no more' (Berger, 1987:166). A factual observation of the population composition of Singapore is turned into a social scientific 'explanation', with all its hints of racism intact, largely as a result of the institutional position of the speaker *qua* sociologist.

This preference for a cultural explanation may be understood within the neo-conservative perception of the decline in public morality in the West, specifically, within their critique of excessive individualism. The perceivable collectivist sentiments of Asian cultures serves all too readily as a quick answer to the success of the Asian NIEs. Collectivism, under different terminology, as commumtarianism, for example, became elevated to the level of a *sine qua non* of modern capitalist development in Asia. As a Sinologist states: 'if Western individualism was appropriate for the pioneering period of

industrialization, perhaps post-Confucian "collectivism" is better suited to the age of mass industrialization' (MacFarquhar, 1980:71).[2] And Confucianism is the essential philosophy of this collectivism; i.e., of placing the collective before the self.

CONFUCIANISATION OF ASIA

Confucianism is said to be the cultural root of the people of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, the loci of ascendency of Asian capitalism. The Confucian package is said to contain the following unchanging elements: hard work, emphasis on education, pragmatism, self-discipline, familial orientation and collectivism. All but one of these virtues can be translated into Western virtue, either present or lost but recoverable. Thrift and self-help were, after all, good Victorian values, and pragmatism can be translated into 'activism' and 'rational innovativeness' (Berger, 1987:166). Indeed, due to the translatability of the values, this thesis is asserted: 'The East Asian experience supports the hypothesis that certain components of Western bourgeois culture—notably activism, rational innovativeness, and self-discipline—are necessary for successful capitalist development' (Berger, 1987:166). The East is absorbed once again and is merely reproducing, two centuries later, the Western bourgeois culture and, by extension, universalising the Western bourgeois values again!

The only exception that is difficult to translate conveniently into Western values is 'collectivism', which supposedly inhabits the core of the Confucian political philosophy. To paraphrase MacFarquar (1980), Confucianism is a philosophical justification of government by benevolent bureaucracy under a virtuous ruler; a leader's benevolent rule is reciprocated by the loyalty and obedience of his subjects; in short, benevolence ensures harmony and obedience within stratified and unequal social relations. Similar harmonious inequality holds in the relations between father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger; family members are harmoniously fixed in their appropriate hierarchical relationships. These familial sentiments and their attendant behaviours are interchangeable with national sentiments and, more importantly in the modern capitalist economy, may be transferred to the level of the factory; 'filial piety fostered habits of disciplined subordination and acceptance of authority which could be applied the factory and the nation' (MacFarquar, 1980:70).[3]

Such harmony in turn engenders social discipline, social solidarity and community responsibility. As opposed to Western individualism, in the East 'the individual is less important than the collective of the company' (MacFarquar, 1980:71). Furthermore, even the profit-orientated corporations are collectivistic. MacFarquar (1980) cites an advertisement as example of 'responsibility towards the wider community': a picture of a skier with the caption 'Mitsui & Co handles sporting goods, thus contributing to healthier living'. According to him, even the mass consumption of the Japanese is an act of national interest overriding personal desires: 'Japanese consumers know they are the essential launching pad for their nation's export drive and they buy electronic gadgetry in profusion. Never mind the ubiquitous transistors and colour TV's; 20 % of all Japanese households possess an electronic organ'. This, after having pointed out that Japanese consumers are motivated by conformism rather than competition and that 'thrusters, attempting to keep up with and overtake the Joneses and to display their success by conspicuous consumption, are the exception' (MacFarquar, 1980:71). The logic of these two assertions is quite interesting, since Japanese are not given to conspicuous consumption, then an entire nation of excessive consumers of electronic gadgets can only be explained in terms of their doing their bit for the national economy!

The above characterisations of Confucianism are inscribed as the 'truths' of East Asians. Differences between the people of the different nations are reduced, if not eliminated completely, as contingent differences; Confucianism remains the bedrock of explanation. Reasoned arguments come perilously close to popular cliché with, however, serious social and political consequences.

It is, of course, entirely possible to list an endless string of instances to 'prove' that Asians are neither as Confucian nor as collectivist as the 'Confucian thesis' of East Asian capitalism would have us believe. This would, however, be rather tedious and ultimately futile because such listings on both sides of the argument could go on endlessly and inconclusively. Thus, I shall leave matters with a categorical summary: the way the issue of ascendancy of Asian capitalism is posed by neo-conservatives tells us more about their diagnosis of the 'dis-ease' of the contemporary American and some European societies and their desire to revitalise their superiority than about the nature of the Asian societies as such.

Focus must now be turned to the effects of 'Confucianisation' on the social political developments in Singapore.

EFFECTS OF DISCOURSE ON CONFUCIANISATION: THE SINGAPORE CASE

Effects on academic discourse

As a result of the 'Confucian thesis' of Asian NIEs' capitalist success, the cultural inscription of the people of these nations began to take shape in both academic and political discourses. Academics quote politicians who take a 'collectivist' line, neglecting the often transparent political motives of the quoted statements. For example, MacFarquar quoted liberally from North Korean President Kim II Sung, a communist, President General Park Chung Hee, a military dictator and Dr Goh Keng Swee, the former Minister of Finance of Singapore, an economic pragmatist whose political orientation was Fabian socialism; citing them as illustrative believers in good Confucian values. That Dr Goh had in his economic writings expressed reservations about the negative effects of extended families on economic development (1972:63) was neglected, but that he was explicitly praising Victorian virtues in the passages quoted was acknowledged by MacFarquar.[4]

Against the background of liberal democracy where social differences are enshrined in a multiparty political system, where individual rights are a matter of serious litigation and where the political culture is, according to Bell (1976) adversarial, the Confucian injunctions of 'avoidance of overt conflict in social relations, loyalty to hierarchy and authority, stress on order and harmony' (Hsiao, 1988:19) would appear not only 'traditional' but very desirable indeed. The conventional East/West cultural dichotomy may thus be recirculated, both analytically and politically within the 'Confucian thesis'.

The desire for social harmony and acceptance of authority is inscribed as an 'essential' characteristic of East Asians and, with 'such a political culture, East Asian states are certainly able to mobilize resources more autonomously, without being confronted with too much opposition from various sectors of the society' (Hsiao, 1988:18). In short, an authoritarian state is advantageous for national economic development. The acceptance of inequalities and

authoritarianism is inscribed as yet another truth of the citizens of the Asian NIEs.

Such inscriptions are philosophically intentionally naive. To begin with, within Confucianism itself, due to its ideological emphasis on harmony based on reciprocity of responsibilities between unequals, Confucianism does not think through the necessary processes of conflict resolution. There is, therefore, an absence of any channel of recourse for the governed, with the exception of violent rebellion against an unjust ruler. Promotion of rebellion is no ordinary affair, especially under conditions of increasing economic and material affluence, as is the case with all the Asian NIEs. In the absence of rebellion, acceptance of authoritarianism is thus assumed as self-evident within the 'Confucian thesis'.

Such inscriptions also neglect important details of the extant political situations of the nations themselves. Specifically, in the Singapore case, (1) the fact of colonisation, which imparted to the citizenry a generalised, if vague, understanding of democracy and its desirability; (2) it is this understanding and desire which in turn accounted for the successful removal of colonisation and the subsequent emplacement of the current single-party dominant government, and (3) the collective memory of political coercion in the earlier years of independence, which left behind, until the mid-1980s, a persistent rumour and fear that the ballot was not secret and that the state could trace and punish the anti-government voters—this fear substantially reduced voices of disagreement. These extant and historical elements have all been erased in the generalised assertion.

Of course, the presence of high degrees of visible, overt political control must be duly noted to satisfy the injunctions for balanced views in academic discourse. Thus referring to Singapore, Vogel writes:

> Singapore has procedures closest to Western democracies, but a strong, determined leadership is unwilling to put its fate entirely in the hands of democratic elective procedures. Opposition in the mid-1960s was considered potentially so subversive that some were arrested for political reasons. Districts have been gerry-mandered. Courts have relied on professional judges to make decisions rather than on the masses to constitute juries. Prime Minister Lee has in fact questioned the merits of the one-man-one-vote system [and goes] so far to suggest that it may be necessary

> "to try and put some safeguards into the way in which people use their votes to bargain, to coerce, to push, to jostle and get what they want…"
>
> (Vogel, 1989:1051)

One may rightly ask why does the populace accept such political and social constraints, if indeed accept it did.

The answer lies not too far afield for Vogel, 'The willingness of the populace…to allow more leeway to leaders than is common in Western democracies is rooted in Confucian patterns of relationships between subjects unaccustomed to exercising political power and their rulers' (Vogel, 1989:1051). This is not all, according to Vogel, even though Singaporeans have

> grown better informed and more insistent on having its views heard, the people still fear that reliance on entirely democratic procedures could dissipate the ability of a strong government leadership to represent the overall interests of the people. They are, therefore, more willing to accept strong able leaders who have not been fully legitimized by democratic procedures.
>
> (Vogel, 1989:1051)

In short, Singaporeans, as Confucianists, not only do not understand democracy, nor do they have the know-how to exercise their rights in the face of political constraints; they are in fact afraid of democracy for themselves. The subtext is, of course, a contrast with Western citizenry's political sophistication in exercising their democratic rights, even to excess.

The irony is that the statement by Lee Kuan Yew quoted by Vogel was made in 1984, in the first hours after the electorate had registered the highest level of protest votes against the ruling PAP since 1968. Even the government admitted that the swing was not one in favour of opposition candidates, rather it was a voice of protest against itself. As a result of this swing, the 1984 election has become, for Singaporeans, a political watershed signifying possible significant moves towards more political openness in which the populace is more willing to publicly voice its differences *vis-à-vis* the government (Chan, 1989).

The second irony is that in the quotation itself, Lee Kuan Yew appeared much less sanguine about Singaporeans being 'subjects unaccustomed to exercise political power'. It was precisely because

they were using their votes to protest against government policies that Lee felt there was a cause for concern about the one-man-one-vote system. Singaporeans realise that the PAP is overall an efficient and clean government able to secure increasingly better material conditions for the people; there is therefore massive popular support for the government, giving it a 'surplus' of legitimisation and hence, greater room for maneouvre in policy-making. Within this context of surplus legitimacy, the use of protest vote to register dissatisfaction without losing an essentially efficient government would surely be considered as an instance of electoral, political sophistication, were not the Confucian explanation already given legitimacy.

Such, then, is the invidiousness of the insistence to Confucianise Singaporeans. This attitude will not accept the political development of Singaporeans towards democracy at face value because the Confucian explanation requires for its own rationality the ever-unchanging character of a quiescent subject, rationalising his/her subjugation as loyalty and a desire to suppress any impulse to protest in the interests of social harmony. Furthermore, as democracy has its roots in the West, the logical demands of the West/East dichotomous discourse require that such signs of political development be read instead as political failures.

EFFECTS ON POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Concurrent with the academic citation of political discourse, Singaporean politicians began to take the 'Confucian thesis' seriously in their political thoughts and practices. They began to mobilise the ideological institutions at the government's disposal to attempt to inculcate so-called 'Confucian values' in the citizens.

As discussed in previous chapters, in the endeavour to establish the basic conditions for industrialisation, which include political stability, the PAP government had intervened massively in all spheres of social life. The repression of the 1960s and the early 1970s are etched in the memories of the Singaporean electorate.[5] Throughout these years, the PAP government saw itself as 'pragmatic' to the core, without being burdened and restrained by ideology other than good common sense, although, the leadership's political ideology then was nominally social democratic.

Much like all post-Second World War social democracies in Western Europe, the bargain between the people and the state was one of social and material stability in return for political allegiance.

Rapid economic growth enabled the state to consolidate its political and ideological positions, resulting in concentrating decision-making power in the network of political leaders and the greatly expanded civil service and statutory boards which provide any of the services necessary to daily life and the business community.

Economic growth continued into the first half of the 1980s. As pointed out in Chapter 5, by then, the government began to perceive, in its own terms, several socially negative symptoms of economic success. The 'signs' included: 'excessive job-hopping' among workers, which disrupts smooth operations of commercial and industrial enterprises; an overwhelming number of singles among applicants for government-sponsored middle-income housing, signifying the potential emergence of a hedonistic singles' lifestyle; intense competition at school and at work; conspicuous consumption among those who have 'made it'; and finally, the threat of all these, and more, everyday practices coalescing into a general social attitude of 'excessive individualism'.

It may be argued that if there was excessive individualism, it was in part stimulated by government policies themselves. Indeed, its unwavering promotion of the ideology of meritocracy unavoidably encouraged keen competition, which undoubtedly contributed to individualism. However, the government's position is that the emphasis on meritocracy has been correct but misunderstood; meritocracy should include the ability to lead a team or work as a member of the team. 'It is this misunderstanding of the meaning of meritocracy that has caused some of our scholars and high-flyers in the civil service and the private sector to develop crass, selfish and egoistic attitudes' (Goh, 1981:34–35).

Whatever its responsibility, the 'government began to be concerned with the adverse effects of heightened individualism, leading —as it believed—to the erosion of moral and ethical values on the one hand and on the other to the loss of cultural identity' (Tham, 1989:482).[6] The issues of individualism and cultural identity became ideologically linked. The state's immediate impulse was to turn to Japan for the necessary lessons because Japan appears to have been able to preserve its culture, encourage team spirit, diminish individualism and yet be highly innovative and productive. Consequently, in 1981, conceited efforts were made by government Ministers, using all the ideological apparatus at their disposal, to promote teamwork at every public appearance (Chua, 1982). In the eyes of two economists, the ambition was no less than 'to

collectivize the Singaporean consciousness and behaviour, both in the work-place and social life' (*Sunday Times,* 26 July, 1981). By the mid-1980s, the proposed solution to the problem of so-called 'excessive individualism' would take a different turn.

POLITICAL CONFUCIANISATION OF SINGAPORE

Conjuncturally, the ideological critique of creeping individualism in Singapore coincided with neo-conservative criticism of excessive individualism in the cultural core of the post-1960s West and the 'discovery' of Confucianism as the cultural explanation for the success of Asian NIEs. The arrival of the 'Confucian thesis' enabled the Singapore government to switch from looking for solutions from Japan, which is after all a country with an unique and homogeneous culture, thus raising serious issues of whether its practices could be easily adopted by multiracial Singapore, to examining Singapore's very own cultural roots, namely, the Confucian heritage of Chinese Singaporeans.

This concern with the 'cultural roots' of Singaporeans has been an abiding one since the very founding of independent Singapore because while it is recognised that English is the essential language for commerce, it is also feared that the exclusive learning of English will lead to the 'deculturation' or more conventionally, the 'Westernisation' of Singaporeans. Furthermore, while specific terms may change, discourses of culture and morality were always cast in terms of the 'immoral West' against the 'moral East'.[7] The battle was always one of the latter fighting hard to slow down the penetration of the moral decay of the West, often with great despair because of the global reach of the Western economy and mass media, especially its entertainment industries. Within the embattled terrain of the morality of the people, neo-conservative self-critiques of the West became handy evidence for Singaporeans who want to revive 'traditional values'. The language of Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong clearly reflects his invocation of the dichotomous discourse of Orientalism, in reverse. According to him, 'bad Western values' are: 'Me first, society second; the trend towards promiscuity, fun-loving, free-loving kind of society' (quoted in Koh, 1989:744), and, of course, the 'good Eastern values' are all the opposite terms, above all 'society first, me second'.

In 1980, it was announced that moral education would be taught, at the upper secondary level, with knowledge of the

various religions practised by Singaporeans as the vehicle. To this was added Confucianism, though it is not a religion. All the committees appointed to draw up the curriculum and develop the appropriate texts for Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Bible Knowledge were staffed by Singaporeans. For Confucian Ethics, the Ministry of Education admitted that 'As Confucian Ethics was a field which we were not familiar with and since we wanted to ensure that the right approach was used to teach the subject, eight Confucian scholars were invited from abroad in 1982 to help us draw up a conceptual framework for the syllabus' (Wang in Tu, 1983:x); indicating the absence of Confucianism in Singapore's everyday life.[8]

During their visit, in July-September 1982, the eight scholars gave public lectures, conducted seminars with public and select audiences and appeared on television talk shows. They publicised the suitability of Confucianism, an essentially Sinic cultural heritage, in a multiracial and multireligious environment by emphasising its 'universalistic' and 'humanistic' features. What were initially merely discussions regarding the curriculum for one secondary school course became a mass campaign for 'a moral system of the Chinese population in Singapore' (Kuo, 1989:24), involving all the mass media, public opinion leaders and Chinese voluntary organisations which shared the government's concern that Singaporean youths were becoming Westernised and lacking in knowledge of Asian traditions and values. In the words of one of the visiting scholars, 'If Confucian education were to succeed, one needs to build within the society a pressure [or force] of public opinion, in order to enable Confucian thought to have a foothold' (quoted in Kuo, 1988:16, Kuo's translation).

In 1983, an Institute of East Asian Philosophy, with a particular focus on Confucian studies, was established with generous funding and the highest level of patronage; the Chairman was the former Minister of Education and First Deputy Prime Minister who had introduced moral education into the schools, and the Deputy Chairman was the then Second Deputy Prime Minister. To add international recognition to the Confucian education initiative, an international conference on 'Confucian Ethics and the Modernisation of Industrial Asia', attended by some of the Western promoters of the 'Confucian thesis', was organised in January 1987 (Tu, 1991). This was followed later in the same year and with co-sponsorship with the Confucian Foundation of China, by an

international conference on 'Confucian Learning—Its Development and Influence', at the birthplace of Confucius himself.

All these events constitute one of the few occasions in Singapore in which the academician's interest coincided publicly with those of the politician, disclosing the inextricably weaved relations of knowledge/power. The language of the academics reflected their institutional powerlessness when all one could do is 'to venture a dream':

> Singapore a city-state, might well become the seed of a future global culture looked to by other parts of the world. Such a great global culture would represent the blending of many great traditions…. Four great traditions [Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism] are here in happy, peaceful co-existence. Because Confucianism is not regarded as a religion, it can interact with the other four great traditions and make this a wonderful place to plant the seed of a future global culture emerging out of the great traditions of the past.
>
> (Tu, 1984:139)

Among the politicians, no less than Lee Kuan Yew himself, with power at hand to move social events, was more candid: 'Our task is to implant these traditional values into our children when their minds are young and receptive, so that…these attitudes harden and are forged for a lifetime' (quoted in Koh, 1989:1099).

The entire exercise in the Confucianisation of Singapore is encapsulated in the term 'implant'; the traditional values of Confucianism are to be inscribed as the 'truths' of all Singaporean Chinese, not only of the young and receptive minds but also the older population. The adoption of the Confucian discourse made possible retrospective interpretations of Singaporean Chinese as intrinsically Confucian, albeit adulterated by Western education. Every Chinese may now be treated as being essentially Confucianist, in spite of possible overt protestations to the contrary. So inscribed, Confucian ethics becomes institutionalised as the conceptual framework within which one's demeanour is to be assessed; one is either acting like a Confucian or an anti-Confucian and is socially disciplined accordingly.

Within the terrain of political discourse, the most important elements in the pantheon of Confucian virtues are loyalty and obedience to authority and, of course, the reciprocity of responsibility

of the authority to the subject. So defined, the leadership can take two possible forms: authoritarian or paternalistic. In either case, decisions are made for the subject by the leaders. Given the presumed reciprocity, it is assumed that such decisions, whatever their consequences, have the best interests of the subjects in mind. Hence, subjects are to be grateful for the due consideration of the leaders and support the decisions in their own best interests. Given the presumed concern for the subjects, paternalism belies its own Janus-like face; when the subjects disagree and disobey the leadership, ingratitude may be levelled at the subjects, making ideological space for authoritarianism to be rationalised and justified. The uncomfortable co-existence of authoritarianism and paternalism is commonly rationalised in political discourse, academic or otherwise, as 'benevolent dictatorship'.

Until 1984, in Singapore, this particular concept of paternalism/authoritarianism has always been recognised as the *modus operandi* of the hegemonic PAP government. This is condensed in the categorical statement by Lee Kuan Yew, in his 1986 National Day Rally address: 'I am accused often of interference in the private lives of citizens. Yet, if I did not, had I not done that, we wouldn't be here today' (*Straits Times,* 18 Aug., 1986).

The decision-making and policy-setting process is undoubtedly elitist and top-down. It chooses to consult others, outside the political leadership—civil service nexus, at its own discretion and co-optation is the rule for having influence (Chan, 1989). There is no role for the outside critic. As a leading political scientist concluded in 1977, and this remains accurate today, 'the views of an independent intellectual receive no favor and if his views are critical of governmental power his function is not recognized as legitimate' because 'his claim to the right of criticism is an alien tradition born of Western liberal thought' (Chan, quoted in Quah and Quah, 1989:110).

With such hierarchically structured political sphere and practice, it is readily understandable that the 'Confucian thesis' is much welcomed by the political leadership of Singapore. The language of Confucian philosophy becomes a conceptual foil to reinterpret the now established practices of the state. What was simply practical and good government becomes retrospectively Confucianist in character. Meritocracy becomes the traditional Confucian way of selecting state functionary through stringent academic examinations; absence of corruption at the highest level is read as the presence of Confucian gentlemen at the helm; the introduction

of unpopular public policies is rationalised as the Confucian statemanship of a sage-leader. Pragmatism, the catch-word of good government for the past three decades, survives as a term in the this-worldly orientation of Confucian philosophy. The epitome of this Confucianisation of Singapore political discourse is the consecration of the nation's founding Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, by his successor as 'a modern Confucius' (*Straits Times,* 24 Apr., 1990). The effects of this Confucianisation must be assessed in view of the recent political developments in Singapore.

EFFECTS OF CONFUCIAN DISCOURSE ON SINGAPORE'S POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

To the extent that Singapore was an underdeveloped economy with very high levels of unemployment and material deprivation among its citizenry, government policies which were aimed at securing 'the basics' for the people were generally acceptable and accepted by the people, even if the policies translated into a significant degree of legal and administrative constraint. The success of these policies has given the PAP government a surplus of political legitimacy. However, with three decades of economic growth, the aspirations of the people have correspondingly expanded to include desires for greater participation in the formulation of the public policies that structure their life opportunities and define their social responsibilities. Evidence of this comes from protests against policies which have less obvious, or more tenuous, relations to the economy.

One means of protest is through the ballot box. This was precisely what happened during the 1984 general election. Submerged dissatisfaction with the 'arrogance of power, an inflexible bureaucracy, growing elitism, and the denial of consultation and citizen participation in decision-making' (Chan, 1989:82) led to a substantial swing in votes against the PAP. Protest votes increased in the 1988 general election to around 40 per cent, with a few serious contenders from the opposition parties.

In September 1991, when economic conditions which were most favourable to the ruling government because, after a brief recession and wage freeze between 1985–1987 the economy had experienced more than three years of substantial growth and the work-force had sustained annual wage increases, the PAP under the new Prime Ministership of Goh Chok Tong called a snap general election, ostensibly on the grounds that his leadership and the 'consultative'

style of his government required a fresh mandate from the people. Although the PAP branches and the people he met during his 'walkabouts' in public housing estates assured him that the 'ground was sweet' and the time was right for an election, he was to be disappointed by the result. His hopes for a recovery of the ground in the two previous elections were dashed. The opposition garnered only marginally more of the popular votes cast but managed to increase their representation in Parliament from one to four MPs, three from the Singapore Democratic Party and one from the Worker's Party. This and the 1988 election result affirmed that 1984 election result was a turning point in the political development of Singapore and not just a flash of unco-ordinated expression of dissatisfaction.

Since 1984, the new Cabinet, consisting of only one first generation leader, Lee Kuan Yew himself, stressed the need to build a new consensus with the citizens, on the basis of more openness and more consultation with the public on major governmental policies. The general implication was that citizens would be given greater freedom to choose certain options, to find out for themselves the limits of what is possible. The power of the bureaucracy, both in the citizens' everyday life and in the economy was to be progressively reduced over time. Generally, some dismantling and restructuring of the highly centralised political leaders-civil servants nexus was undertaken, with promises of more to come.

The general orientation of what is now known as the 'second generation' leadership is a significant departure from the first generation's interpretation of the mandate to govern. They appear to be taking tentative steps towards the development of a 'democratic' culture that extends beyond the mechanics of elections, even though they too hold serious reservations about democracy as such and have on occasions raised the spectre of certain weaknesses of democracy in terms of political and economic stability (Sandhu and Wheatley, 1989:1087). Political developments since the early 1980s indicate significant moves towards a more democratic political relationship between the leadership and the citizenry. Such developments require the corresponding introduction of a political discourse with an appropriate vocabulary that will help it to move towards a greater democratisation. The Confucianisation of Singapore, with its emphasis on centralised leadership and unquestioning loyalty and obedience of the subjects, attempted to pre-empt, and even threatened, this process towards greater democratisation.

LIMITS TO CONFUCIANISATION

Conceptually, the much-quoted refusal by Vogel to recognise recent events as failures in political development because of an insistence on regarding Singaporeans as essentially Confucianists may not help the cause of democratisation in Singapore. However, to the extent that such a position lives off the 'Confucian thesis', its influence on the political analysis of Singapore is limited because the thesis has not met with much support among local academics who are close to the details of Singapore's situation. Local commentators have raised serious doubts about the extent to which, if at all, 'Confucian notions' have informed the economic thinking of Singapore entrepreneurs. Even more significantly,

> it has become increasingly difficult to sustain that argument in recent years when more than two-thirds of investment in manufacturing has been provided by foreign firms, with more than a thousand foreign-owned enterprises locating themselves on the island.
>
> (Sandhu and Wheatley, 1989:1096)

Thus, in spite of the presence of such opinions as Vogel's, the political dynamics will exert their own momentum towards further democratisation.

Substantively, Confucianisation of political discourse risks the recentralisation of decision-making processes and the reinforcement of the paternalism/authoritarianism relations between the governing body and its subjects. Against the speed of a centralised decision-making process, ongoing experiments at consultation and dialogue between the political leadership and the citizens appear to be very time consuming and sometimes lacking in direction. The temptation, for a bureaucracy accustomed to the former mode of operation, to recentralise is, therefore, quite understandable. Fortunately, this desire for recentralisation is quite out of synch with political developments which disclose 'new interest in political opposition and government accountability' (Chan, 1989:86).

Some degree of resistance to recentralisation results from the fact that the 'pre-emptive' interventions of the centralised decision-making process has lost some of its lustre and credibility. Several instances have already been discussed in previous chapters; two instances will be repeated briefly as illustrations. First, the stringent

'two is enough' population policy of 1960s–1970s led to such a rapid decline in population growth that it had to be reversed. Attempts are now being made, through financial incentives and moral exhortations, to encourage families to have more children as long as they are able to afford them. The earlier restraint on family size had uprooted deep-seated cultural sentiments. Consequently, this policy reversal not only showed up the 'error' of the pre-emptive policy and its presumed rationality, but also gave vent to repressed resentment against the restraints themselves and thus, the government.

The second example is found in wage policies, a crucial piece of the PAP government's industrialisation strategy. Until 1979, low wages were maintained as a competitive edge to attract foreign investment. However, this led to a hoarding of labour by employers, resulting in a very tight labour market and a very slow rate of mechanisation, and hence very low value added production. Wages were then increased by decree at an annual hyper-rate of around 20 per cent for three consecutive years, so as to force employers to invest in machinery and move Singapore's economy up the technological ladder. This led to the brief recession in 1985–1987, when wages were adjusted downwards in order to restore the growth dynamics. Of course, the rationality of each step in this series of decisions can be justified contextually; however, the claim to long-term systematicity in economic policy formulation is now met with scepticism. Furthermore, the recession, the first in twenty-five years of economic growth, provided an opportunity for the business sector to give vent to its complaints against competition from government enterprises, leading them to press for privatisation of state businesses (Chalmers, 1992).

Changes in the last thirty years have increased cumulatively the resistance to the centralisation of power and the decision-making process. These changes, imperceptible until post-1984, can be summarised thus: the 1985 recession prompted the first sustained criticism of government economic policies; advocates of educational and cultural improvements have become more vocal; discontent with the prevailing low level of citizen participation in decision-making is publicly voiced.

These points of resistance to recentralisation are in their emergent state. Consequently, the political discourse and the new vocabulary, to which these nascent developments give but glimpses, have yet to be fashioned. Unfortunately, the inception of the Confucian discourse in the ideological sphere poses anew the

possibility of centralisation and rigid stratification of powers in spite of increased democratic aspirations in the people, however elliptically expressed.

CONCLUSION

Some elements of Confucian culture, however adulterated by historical experiences, no doubt inhere among the Chinese in Singapore. This inheritance has been shown to work its way through various social organisations among the Chinese, notably in the changing structures of the family (Kuo, 1987) and in family firms (Tong, 1989); these should, of course, be studied in their own right within the appropriate spheres of activities. The temptation to stretch the influence of this cultural inheritance to cover the political sphere should, however, not be entertained. Indeed, the most involved of the expert advisers on Confucian ethics to the Singapore government has himself warned against promoting 'politicised Confucianism'. This is because Confucianism promoted as a political ideology, 'forces people into obedience for no reason other than to protect the interests of a small minority' (Tu, 1984:23) and is, therefore, 'diametrically opposed to the democratic idea' (Tu, 1984:29).

The political sphere in Singapore had never been subjected to any Confucian strictures because it was a British colony and upon independence, declared itself a democratic state. That the subsequent single party dominant government had deemed it necessary to curtail democratic due processes in order to achieve political stability and economic growth does not alter this political heritage. Local observers would readily concur with the conclusion that the 1984, 1988 and 1991 general elections 'were symptoms for the populace and signs to the government' of 'an intensified political awareness' (Sandhu and Wheatley, 1989:1087) and, one might add, for more democracy. Hence, the language of democracy must remain the terms for political analysis and the nascent developments towards democracy must not be stifled by the installation of a Confucian political discourse.

Finally, the 'Confucian thesis' for economic success may after all be inadequate in satisfactorily explaining the economic success of East Asian capitalism. As Thailand and Malaysia start to join the ranks of the NIEs, the ring of truth of the thesis may turn quickly into a moment of aberration; as usual, the necessary

explanation turns out to be more complex than any singular cause. That being the case, it may be argued, alternatively, that if Singapore has been economically successful, it is because it played by the logic of global capitalism, albeit without the encumbrance of the liberal-ideological belief that the government be non-interventionist in the economy. To the extent that it has abided by this logic, under a new international division of labour, the singularly most significant cultural contribution of the government is in its concerted effort at actively transforming a population into a disciplined industrial work-force. This has been achieved through legislative measures and securing the co-operation of labour; the role of Confucian values, in whatever guise, was never pressed into service.

NOTES

1 The other response is to celebrate this individualism and eschew any conception of systematic rationality. Every claim to systematicity is to be deconstructed, so as to expose the irrationalities that hide in its core and the legitimacy of systematic rational knowledge exposed as nothing but naked exercise of power, veiled by the knowledge claims themselves. Free-flowing subjectivity, not being subjected to external constraints of rationality and systematicity, remains the only possible and the only permissible discourse. At a more skilful level, knowledge is aestheticised. This response now passes under the term ‘postmodernism’.

2 According to MacFarquar’s definition, ‘the term “post-Confusianism” is used to connote societies which bear the obvious hallmarks of industrialism/ Confucianism, but which have been significantly altered by the accretion of new elements’ (1980:68).

3 A cautionary, and ironical, note needs to be sounded here. Quite independent of the Confucian moral injunction, it has been commonly noted that in practice Chinese familialism has often meant an exclusive concern with the welfare of the family and a total absence of concern with the larger social environment. This has been raised by eminent Chinese philosophers like Dr Sun Yat-sen (see de Bary, 1987:33) and none other than the Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, although he was compounding familialism with the immigrant status of Singapopean Chinese (see Chua, 1982:328).

4 In his conjecture about the incompatibility between extended family and economic growth, Dr Goh is in good company with many Western thinkers, such as Max Weber, Clark Kerr and Chinese reformists (see Wong 1988:134–135).

5 For example, in early 1989, in a television programme which invited tertiary-educated individuals to think aloud about how ‘to fashion the next twenty-five years’ of Singapore, the participants had great difficulty in getting to the next twenty-five years; instead much of the time was spent in analysing the government-people relation of the last twenty-five, repeatedly complaining

about the political interventions of the past and calling for more political openness in the future.

6 There was no lack of resonance among intellectuals to the government's criticism of the supposedly excessive individualism and consumption of the increasingly relatively affluent Singaporeans (Ho, 1989).

7 In the late 1950s until the early 1960s when Chinese-educated were influential in the political arena, the term used to signify the 'decadence' of Western culture was 'yellow culture'.

8 Religious Knowledge and Confucianism, introduced as compulsory subjects for upper secondary school students in 1984 were withdrawn in 1989, after it was found that such education was reinforcing the religious boundaries which could potentially divide the multireligious society.

Chapter 8

Building the political middle ground

The previous chapter closed with some optimism regarding the momentum towards greater democratisation in Singapore. This chapter examines the concrete institutional changes, put in place by the leadership transition, which may contribute to the democratisation process.

First, a theoretical caveat must be submitted. The extent of democratic practices unavoidably, even necessarily, varies across nations and within a particular nation across time and circumstances; this is a truism. However, variations should not be excuses for anti-democratic practices. Precisely because of possible conjunctural fluctations, democracy requires a 'maximalist' stance; however democratic is a government of the day, there is theoretically always room for more democracy. The realisation of democracy thus assumes the status of an Althusserian 'final instance' which has a permanently receding horizon. Only such a stance provides the grounds for continuous critical assessments of extant political practices and forestalls lapsing readily into accepting the pragmatic rationalisations of political practices. Every instance of curtailment of democratic practice warrants an explanation from the government that claims to be democratic; otherwise, its legitimacy is held in doubt. It is from this theoretical stance on democracy that the question of democratisation in Singapore is posed.

This question is thus posed with clear recognition that: (1) clean electoral politics are well in place; (2) the massive economic development is largely to the credit of the PAP dominant government of the past three decades; (3) the electoral process and the economic development are the necessary basic components for the construction of a stable democratic polity; and finally, (4) in

continuity with the tentative conclusions of the previous chapter, it will be argued that the prospect for such a democratic polity is far better now than at the point of Singapore's unexpected political independence in 1965. It will, therefore, be useful to briefly recap the political conditions prior to independence.

MULTI-PARTY POLITICS OF THE 1950S

Immediately after the Second World War, the British colonial administration began to prepare Singapore for representative self-government. Election to a few seats in the Legislative Council was filled through a limited franchise in 1948. Without competition from the communist-led Malayan Democratic Union which boy-cotted the election (Drysdale, 1984:27), the hastily organised Progressive Party, constituted by Straits-born English-educated Chinese, secured three out of the six seats; the remaining seats went to independent candidates. The Progressive Party, in spite of its rhetorical pledges, was reluctant to accelerate demand for political independence because its constituency included the bulk of the colonial civil service which stood to gain from close relations with the colonial government (Drysdale, 1984:38). It was to win only one more non-representative election before meeting its instant demise in the 1955 election, which had a greatly expanded electorate and a relative proliferation of political parties. Expecting to win the election, it contested all twenty seats. The Progressive Party won only four seats, however. The PAP won three out of four seats contested and the Labour Front, a coalition of union leaders and other progressive individuals, won a majority and formed a government with David Marshall as the first Chief Minister.

The Labour Front government was faced with a by then highly politicised population. The economic and political grievances of both a highly underemployed working class and a disadvantaged Chinese-educated student population predisposed them to radical political demands. Consequently, when the colonial government attempted to impose military national service on the youths, student protests turned violent on 13 May, 1954 and 'a militant anti-colonial student movement under the influence of communists crystallised under the umbrella organisation, the Singapore Chinese Middle School Students Union' (Chan, 1984:97) was born. This organisation in turn provided support for the strike actions of left-wing labour unions, which erupted again in violence, exactly one

year after the earlier incident, adding symbolic intensity to the political struggles.

Chief Minister David Marshall refused to take a hard line on the radicals and resigned from office after failing to obtain independence for Singapore in 1957. His successor, Lim Yew Hock, moved quickly to dissolve the student union, shut down Chinese schools and invoked emergency measures to detain, without trial, radical union leaders. These were measures much appreciated by the colonial regime which by 1958 was prepared to grant self-government to Singapore. The heavy-handed repression, however, cost the Labour Front dearly; while the PAP, being in the position to provide both organisational leadership and legal services to the radical unions and students, gained political strength. The demise and ascendance, respectively, of the two became apparent in the general election for a self-governing Singapore in 1959: the PAP won forty-three out of the fifty-one seats contested.

With its political dominance established, internal divisions in the PAP itself could no longer be contained. Activities of the left faction had always sat uncomfortably with the English-educated social democrats during the period of political ascendancy. The split came with the issue of merger with Malaya with the left faction breaking off to form the Barisan Sosialis. Apprehensive that the stringent anti-communist repression in Malaya under emergency rule would be applied to themselves in Malaysia, the Barisan called for a boycott of the referendum in 1962. This went unheeded by the electorate and merger with Malaysia was enacted in 1963. It also signalled the first step towards the demise of Barisan. This was effected when it committed political suicide by boycotting the 1968 general election, leaving the PAP as the sole occupant of Parliament from 1968 till 1981, winning all seats in three successive general elections.

The presence and use of legalised repression which sapped the vitality of opposition notwithstanding—monopolisation of legalised force being essential to all modern states—what was remarkable in the PAP's road to absolute dominance was the continued maintenance, from the close of the 1950s, of a clean electoral process without the usual corruptions common in many Third World nations. The substantive and symbolic significance of this will become apparent as the argument develops.

THE HEGEMONY OF THE ECONOMIC

The success of the PAP in finding the 'practical' means to 'survive' as a nation, after 1965, by now requires no further elaboration. It is the hardships that have been carried by individuals in the name of collective well being that require further consideration.

Like all socially institutionalised practices, government policies and interventions have been enabling, productive and constraining simultaneously. This double-edged tendency frames the specificity of the political development of Singapore as a democratic nation; apparently, the single party PAP government was able to impose a high degree of social control yet maintain a high degree of political legitimacy among the citizenry, indexed by the unfailing support of up to 75 per cent of the electorate in three successive general elections, until 1984.

Ideologically, the idea of necessity for survival continues to have a sense of 'realism' in contemporary Singapore. It constitutes a 'normative environment' which provides a range of plausible rationalisations, justifications and criticisms, for state interventions, which often include legalised repressions that violate the common understanding of democratic principles. Between 1965 and 1980, the violations were underwritten by the strong ideological consensus/hegemony in the polity; consequently, social constraints tended to be accepted with a high degree of voluntarism by the citizens, resulting in sustained political stability. It should be noted that theoretically, the legitimacy of a regime is preserved when its interventions are 'discursively redeemable' (Habermas, 1975) within the established normative environment; legitimacy is, therefore, not synonymous with the building of democratic institutions.

Critics can and will point to the presence of repression as the cause of the electorate's tolerance of the PAP regime and its abuses of democracy. In this reading, the electorate is reduced to self-serving individuals cowed by fear of detention and denied the ability to judge for themselves regarding things that are important to their daily life. Such critics, therefore, unwittingly share the PAP leaders similar distrust of common-sense rationality. Ironically, it is this very trust that is needed if democracy is to be established. In any event, the 40 per cent anti-PAP votes in elections since 1984 should put paid to the unflattering views. This is why issues of greater democratisation in Singapore have gained some measure of

urgency and come to be posed in terms of the post-1984 elections and their political effects.

POST-1984 POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: DECLINE OF PRAGMATISM

Two electoral results of the early 1980s were to expose dissatisfactions with the PAP government hitherto submerged under a taken-for-granted strong hegemony/consensus. The first was a by-election in 1981 in Anson constituency. The seat became vacant when the incumbent PAP member, Devan Nair, was appointed to the ceremonial office of the President. Reflecting the Party's confidence, the PAP fielded a totally unknown young man, who by his own admission had no aspirations to high office and indeed no high office was promised. All PAP campaign speeches were made by the man entrusted with election strategy, namely, the present Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong. The candidate himself was relegated to low-profile door-to-door campaigning. His opponent was the veteran opposition politician, J.B.Jeyaratnam, who had the unified support of all the other opposition parties. The result: PAP secured its first defeat since 1968 by a narrow margin.

At the time, some Singaporeans interpreted the PAP defeat as a constructive jolt to the Party, which had become progressively arrogant and self-righteous about its ability to define 'what is good for the people'. Others saw it as a demonstration that from then on not only was opposition possible but that it would not inevitably break the nation's will and ability to survive; a threat commonly touted by the PAP. Ironically, this latter interpretation was particularly apt in this by-election. The constituency that had earlier elected a PAP candidate who was elevated to the ceremonial office of the Presidency, symbol of the nation, had in turn elected the first opposition MP in almost twenty years. Taken together, the two electoral acts symbolically demonstrated that to be loyal to Singapore was not synonymous with being loyal to the PAP (Chua, 1982:320). From the vantage point of the present, one consequence is now obvious: the opposition's win broke the psychological hold the PAP had on the electorate. This was confirmed by the three subsequent general elections.

In 1984, dissatisfactions with government policies and the general political culture engendered by the PAP in its more than twenty years of dominance left the PAP with 12 per cent less than

the usual number of votes it had won in the three general elections since 1968. Opposition to the presumptuousness of the single party dominant government was confirmed by a post-election survey (Chan, 1989:82). The election result also showed the sophistication of the electorate in using their votes to send the PAP a message without unseating what was essentially an acceptable government. As argued later in this chapter, such political acumen was later to have significant effects.

The 1984 election result was both a reflection and a consequence of the transformed conditions in the mid-1980s. There was an increasing proportion of the electorate who had no experience or memory of the turbulence and economic difficulties of the 1950s and 1960s; this proportion surpassed 70 per cent in 1989 (*Petir,* Aug., 1984). With social and economic stability and a declining threat of communism, the tight social discipline of a paternalistic/authoritarian regime which the first generation of PAP leadership had been able to impose became increasingly unacceptable to the citizenry. With increased education, the claim of the political leadership to be solely able to define 'what is good for the people' became increasingly untenable. Generally, the levels of aspiration in every aspect of social life had expanded, so too had the range of public opinions, reflecting an increasingly economically stratified society, itself a result of the economic success of the nation. Affluence opens up choices and preferences. Individual preferences begin to assume 'sacred' dimensions rendering state interventions less tolerable. Consequently, exhortations to stay at the level of securing the basics and not to make personal demands find few sympathetic ears. A new management strategy has to be developed to accommodate the new historical circumstances.

As suggested previously, the primary mechanism in this management strategy appears to be the opening of government sponsored 'feedback' channels to encourage greater public participation in the national decision-making process, including the establishment of a formal Feedback Unit in the Ministry of Community Development. Yet in spite of these efforts, erosion of PAP electoral support continued. Thus, in the 1988 and 1991 elections, the PAP again captured only approximately 60 per cent of the total votes cast. Furthermore, in the latter election, an increase of opposition in Parliament from one to four MPs was registered. These successive election results may be indicative of a settling in

of a critical attitude towards government policies, a phenomenon that demands new political management strategies.

BUILDING POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS: CULTIVATING THE MIDDLE GROUND

Until the mid-1980s, the PAP had paid little attention to political institution-building. The leadership believed in its own integrity and ability to govern rather than in strong political institutions, lest the latter hampered the need for quick management decisions. The only notable exception had been the establishment of the Political Study Centre. Its aim was to re-educate civil servants used to colonial ways into the national development orientation as defined by the PAP (Drysdale, 1984:233). After political stability was achieved the Centre was renamed the Civil Service Institute, and its political role was de-emphasised. Since the 1984 elections, however, there was a decided reversal of the earlier position.[1] Apart from opening feedback channels, new political institutions have also been established.

Immediately after the 1984 election result was announced, Lee Kuan Yew, while appreciative of the electorate's political cleverness in pressuring the PAP government without defeating it, raised a sinister scenario of a 'freak' election: asking the electorate what would happen if instead of just being given a message, the PAP government were defeated and a group of individuals of less than 'desirable' qualities were voted into office by 'accident', with potentially ruinous consequences. The spectre of this possibility led him to question the wisdom of the 'one person, one vote' system, hinting that it might have to be modified. However, instead of modifying the voting system, constitutional changes were introduced to establish political institutions as safeguards against the possible realisation of the imagined scenario. Such institution-building, in spite of its less than noble motivation, has positive consequences for the establishment of a stable democracy.

Three significant constitutional changes in parliamentary politics deserve attention. First is the introduction of two non-conventional categories of MPs; namely, the Non-constituency MPs and the Nominated MPs. The former are candidates of opposition political parties who did not win their seats but had polled the highest number of opposition votes in a general election. A maximum of three seats are automatically offered to such candidates who have the right to decline; if declined, no alternative offers need be made.

The Nominated MPs are non-politicians nominated by the public at large but selected by a committee of elected MPs. The injection of these MPs introduces contrary opinions into Parliament and, hopefully, reduces the circulation of dissenting voices outside the official political sphere and agenda. Having been given official recognition, dissenting voices are likely to be more moderate and to respond to the centre of the political spectrum. This process maybe labelled as co-optation, which has become necessary because of declining ideological consensus/hegemony under pragmatism.

Second is the introduction of the concept of the Group Representative Constituency (GRC). Three or more electoral constituencies may be grouped into one GRC. In a general election, each political party must field candidates as a slate, of which one must be a member of a racial minority. The slate that polls the highest combined votes carries all the seats in the GRC. This has two political effects. On the positive side, the insistence that a member of the GRC must be of a minority group will have the salutary effect of ensuring that the Malay and Indian populations will be represented in Parliament; this may alleviate the likelihood of extreme racism in politics. Indeed, such was the government's declared reason for promoting the change in the Constitution. Implicit in such a mechanism for minority representation is the recognition that the enforced physical integration of minority racial groups among the Chinese majority in all housing estates has created the possibility that only Chinese candidates will be elected to Parliament in future elections. On the negative side, in the current situation in which opposition parties are already having great difficulty in finding 'credible' candidates to pitch against the recognisably high calibre of the PAP candidates, this new electoral device has the immediate, and perhaps medium-term effect of reducing the chances of opposition parties at the ballot box.

Third has been the introduction of an elected Presidency. The most significant power, among others, of the elected President is to veto the annual operating budget of the elected government, should it decide to draw on the national financial reserve (Low and Toh, 1989). This initiative was motivated by the perceived need to prevent subsequent governments from adopting irresponsible fiscal policies, such as excessive welfarism, just to capture state power. Candidates for the presidential election are to be scrutinised by a government committee. Those who automatically qualify are ex-Permanent Secretaries in the civil service, ex-Chief Executive

Officers of government statutory boards or of companies with paid-up capital of a hundred million dollars and ex-Cabinet Ministers, although they would have to sever all party affiliations in order to contest an election.[2] Such a criterion is clearly undemocratic and has the built-in bias in favour of PAP leaders and against opposition candidates (Cotton, 1993).

In spite of the previously noted suggestion that these constitutional changes have immediate negative effects on the chances of the opposition in the electoral process, it should be realised that all these changes are double-edged in their consequences. On the one hand, in addition to reducing the electoral chances of opposition parties, they can lead to greater social control through an extended network of state agencies; on the other, they also open up opportunities for participation and introduce new constraints on the government itself.

Thus, while the new categories of MPs are a means of co-optation they can, nevertheless, use their presence in Parliament to criticise the government and to gain appropriate public attention. Should the government continuously ignore good suggestions, it would expose itself to criticism of 'bad faith' or hypocrisy in its expressed desire to be receptive to constructive criticism in the interest of the nation. While it is true that the GRC scheme is practically loaded against opposition parties it is, nevertheless, a structurally available avenue for them to gain control of an expanded constituency and, when so captured, to gain experience and demonstrate their abilities to manage local affairs. These latter qualities are central to the credibility of the opposition to an increasingly sophisticated electorate.

As suggested earlier, these changes reflect a fundamental change in the perception of the PAP government. Instead of trusting the integrity of political leadership, it now sees the hitherto respectable leadership as a felicitous happenstance. Instead of trusting such good fortune to hold, it now emphasises the need for strong political institutions to hold the leadership in check, so as to better ensure continuity of economic well-being and social stability. The collective political effect of these changes is potentially to channel politics into the middle or 'moderate' ground; the different MP schemes incorporate and moderate the range of political differences into the parliamentary process; the GRC scheme ensures racial minority representation and avoid racial chauvinism of the majority Chinese; and the elected Presidency checks against fiscal

irresponsibilities of future governments. This moderating/ centralising of politics can pay high dividends, of course, to the ruling government, especially one which effectively delivers material well-being to the majority of the population, like the PAP. Developing the 'middle ground' in politics may be precisely what the new Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, desires for the future of Singapore:

> I fervently believe that Singapore should be led by a dominant political party occupying the middle ground. That political party must try to enlarge the middle ground through a more accommodative and participatory style of government that seeks to include rather than exclude the greatest possible number of Singaporeans in the political process.
>
> (*Straits Times,* 24 Jan., 1990)

The Prime Minister's belief aside, analytically the politics of the middle ground is in itself a desirable, if not a definitive, characteristic of mature and stable democracies in developed nations. Its expansion is therefore a positive move in the direction of establishing a stable democracy in Singapore.

IMPROVED CONDITIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

After three decades of continuous economic growth, the political ground in Singapore has been transformed. Events since the mid-1980s have shown that the highly interventionist stance of the earlier period of the PAP regime is now likely to cause alienation in the electorate and other unhappy circumstances. Such is the irony for government. To apply past formulas, which had been instrumental in bringing about the successful present, to the present may lead to subsequent failure.

Singapore's economy is now well integrated into global capitalism. Any domestic economic failure is likely to be a reflection of difficulties in global capitalism itself. Consequently, responsibility for downturns can be diffused and displaced into the global system and not directly attributed to the existing government; management of the economy is thereby relatively distanced from the Cabinet. Education opportunities and attainment levels will continue to expand; thus increasing the cultural sophistication of the population. Demand for individual differences and preferences to be

politically recognised is inevitable. The citizenry has displayed its electoral sophistication, having had the experience of exercising its franchise in the past three decades. The combined effect of these developments has enabled the citizenry to pressure the PAP government to open up the political sphere (Chan, 1989).

The desire for greater participation of the population will be better accommodated if the newly installed political institutions eventually prove successful in producing political stability through encouraging the development of the middle ground. In the immediate term, popular demand for participation appears to have coincided with the new Prime Minister's personal political philosophy and temperament, again a happy coincidence for Singaporeans. It is therefore apparent that the conditions for democracy are better now than at the founding of the city-state. However, one should not be too sanguine about the inevitability of democracy even if the necessary conditions for achieving it are at hand. Certain obstacles remain in place and need to be examined.

FURTHER DEMOCRATISATION OF THE POLITICAL SPHERE

A defining character of democracy is freedom of belief and freedom to speak freely about that belief. This remains difficult in Singapore at three levels; the level of conceptual practice, the level of building of non-government-sponsored social organisations in civil society, and finally, the generalised effect of legal constraints.

At the level of social concept formation, the continuing emphasis on a strong ideological consensus tends to constrain an individual's ability to formulate different opinions; that is, under conditions of strong ideological consensus/hegemony, the issue is not whether one can speak freely but that the vocabulary for opinion formation is already greatly delimited. Furthermore, in practice, the desire for strong consensus has generated its own management strategies; in instances where a critic's opinion is contrary to that of the government, the latter either promises to consider it within its set policy directions, or provides the critic with more information so as to disarm the criticism itself. It is, therefore, extremely difficult to constitute the ground for political differences.

Second, emphasis on strong consensus, together with official initiation and control over the opinion feedback mechanisms, contributes to a sense that participation must be conducted within

the agenda and concepts generated and approved by the government itself. This is often criticised as repression against raising issues on an individual's own terms and against development of independent voluntary social organisations. Conversely, all officially sponsored social organisations become tainted as 'co-optation' agencies, an image which discourages involvement of certain segments of the society.

At a time when individual differences and preferences are making themselves felt, constraints at the level of concept formation and political practice will be increasingly deemed repressive for several reasons, not the least of which is an individual's basic resistance from being totally socialised in thought and behaviour.

At the level of generalised effect of legal constraints, the central obstacle is the continuing presence of the ISA (Internal Security Act) which allows the government to detain without trial any individual for up to a renewable period of two years. That this is a piece of undemocratic legislation has not been denied. The government's rationale for retaining it, having inherited it from the British colonial administration, is that it is necessary to deal with subversive elements whose clandestine organisations and activities are such that open investigations and prosecutions will not yield effective judicial results. Indeed, the Act has been invoked only against specific targets. Each time it was invoked, the government has been candid about its application publicly. Each case of detention, either of single individuals or groups, is publicly announced and the allegations clearly stated. In its actual application, the Act is thus not a device of general political repression.

Nevertheless, its political effect is highly generalised. It casts a long repressive shadow; no Singaporean can consider oneself truly out of its reach. Thus, it is very common to hear of individuals, who have no social or political status which might attract the attention of any policing agency, insisting that the 'system' is repressive and one cannot speak one's mind. For example, in a public forum, a first-year undergraduate stood up and espoused such a sentiment; whereupon he was reminded that there are not enough 'secret police' to go around tailing everyone, yet in his mind 'they' are everywhere. It is also common for Singaporeans to be asked, at home and abroad, whether they can speak freely. This is a question that even the highly educated find difficult to answer in a straightforward manner. With the awareness of the presence of the Act, the best answer will have to be either a qualified yes or a

qualified no. These are pervasive instances that reflect the generalised repressive effects of the Act, over which the government has no control regardless of its effort to assure the people and dispel any fear of generalised repression.

The government's position that the ISA is necessary to police extremism in the political spectrum reflects a fundamental reservation regarding the collective intellectual maturity of Singaporeans and their ability to discern the possible dire consequences of any form of extremism and to reject them accordingly. Historically, the electorate of the late 1950s might be said to have been susceptible to the promises of communism and racial communalism. However, within the present condition where the population has serious material and social stakes in the *status quo,* there are good reasons to believe that it will not succumb to political false promises. Indeed, if this were not so, the attempt to develop and expand the political middle ground would likely fail. The government's reservations now appear rather too stringent. Instead, it should increasingly trust the collective rationality of the citizenry; such trust is a foundation stone of a stable democracy.

The issue of trust should also be posed from the side of the citizenry—whether it trusts itself to make rational political choices. If, as a collective, it does not, then, it may in fact favour the retention of the ISA itself. In addition to being a reflection of citizens' indifference or feelings of inefficacy or fear of the ISA being visited on them, absence of public outcry in the instances when the Act was invoked may, indeed, reflect a certain agreement with the government; that is, in the eyes of some sections of the electorate the ISA is not without legitimacy. In the final analysis, the Act must be repealed, this is the *sine qua non* of establishing a democracy in Singapore. When should this be done is best answered by Singaporeans themselves.

CONCLUSION

Given the power effect of democratic discourse, post-colonial nations generally begin by attempting to install 'democracy' in their body politic immediately upon independence. Such attempts have often been short-lived and after a period of political instability resulting from unrestrained political contests between entrenched interests, authoritarian and repressive regimes have been installed. One reason for the failure to sustain a democratic polity is that the necessary

cultural and institutional conditions for democracy simply did not exist in the post-colonial societies. Politically, colonialism did not have among its objectives development of democracy among subject populations. Economically, colonialism had not assumed the responsibilities of bringing the subject populations into the industrial world. To have done either would be contrary to the imperialist interests of the metropolitan nations. Given such a legacy, the establishment of democratic institutions in post-colonial nations often means the imposition of a set of structures onto non-democratic cultures, and the process of economic modernisation can simply mean the imposition of a market economy onto non-market forms of social relations. Consequently, the so-called 'failures' of the post-colonial societies are not exceptional.

Singapore, as a post-colonial society, inherited the same legacy. It too went through a period of multiparty politics. However, it was hardly what one would call 'democracy in action'. The struggles among the political parties were not underwritten by a set of shared political values. There were no rules of negotiation nor was there a common desire to arrive at a negotiated political order as the logical outcome of democratic politics. Instead, the struggles were for political dominance and ideological hegemony. The PAP emerged as the absolute victor through a combination of judicious use of legalised repression and free election.

Having achieved political dominance, the PAP reversed the societal agenda, instead of then giving priority to building political institutions it set about building the economy, tampering with various conventional democratic values along the way, except for the electoral process that is. This did not simply undermine its political legitimacy in the eyes of the newly enfranchised Singaporeans. Instead, as the economic programmes proved successful, its interventions began to pay legitimacy surplus, as reflected in the PAP's continuing electoral victories and absolute dominance in the political sphere. Economic success, along with an increasingly educated citizenry with good understanding and experience of exercising their franchise, have created the necessary conditions for the establishment of a stable democratic polity. Consequently, structures towards greater democratisation of the political sphere may be said to have been put in place by the PAP government itself in response to pressures from the electorate. Of course, obstacles remain in the polity, the most notable of which is the continuing presence of the Internal Security Act and its

generalised repressive effects. The remaining obstacles should caution one from being overly optimistic about the future or the inevitability of democracy in Singapore. One should, nevertheless, conclude that the conditions for democracy are undoubtedly better than at the time of its unexpected, even unwanted, political independence in 1965.

NOTES

1 The shift to institution-building is also noted by Cotton (1993); he has a different take on the issue and focuses largely on the place of Lee Kuan Yew.

2 The first election for Presidency was held in 1992. The winner was the current incumbent, Ong Teng Cheong, who was Deputy Prime Minister until before the election.

Chapter 9

Towards a non-liberal communitarian democracy

Several notable changes have contributed to the declining popular support for the PAP at general elections throughout the decade of the 1980s; 75.5 per cent in 1980, 62.9 per cent in 1984, 61.8 per cent in 1988 and 61 per cent in 1991. These changes include greater social class differences; the emergence of new lifestyles reflecting increasing affluence and individualising tendencies; greater freedom and creative cultural expressions and unbottled desire for more control in the personal sphere and more say in the decision-making processes in the collective arena through multiple modes and nodes of representation. The electoral effects of these changes may be conceptually aggregated as expressing the desire for greater political democratisation and freedom from state intervention. This desire expressed through the ballot has caused the PAP government to rethink some of the ideological concepts and administrative practices that have underpinned its long regime.

Significantly, these developments in Singapore are taking place conjuncturally with a global historical context where 'democratisation' movements are challenging hitherto authoritarian regimes in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. There is a tendency to read these movements as indexing a desire for liberal democracy and the enshrinement of individual rights in the political sphere (Huntington, 1991). Where a middle class is emerging, it is often attributed a leading role in the march towards democratisation (Lev, 1990). Such a reading is premised on generalising the Western historical experience in which the bourgeoisie was instrumental in raising liberalism to the level of a globally dominant political philosophy, subjecting other polities to its moral and practical injunctions (Wallerstein, 1992).

Yet it is clear that the PAP government is both thoroughly

sceptical regarding the rationality of the ordinary citizen and unapologetically anti-liberal. However, the formal features of democratic electoral politics remain in place and intact. It would be easy but analytically inadequate to dismiss the latter as a facile feature that cloaks an authoritarian regime (Wong, 1991). There is a very significant distinction between a government that either dispenses with elections or rigs them to ensure a favourable outcome and one which conducts free and clean elections at regular intervals. Even if the two governments should evince apparently similar authoritarian management strategies, their political relations with their respective citizens are dissimilar. In the former case, the authoritarian regime will have little legitimacy with the people, the surface calm that repressive measures are able to maintain is merely waiting to explode. In the latter instance, state administrative interventions may be tolerated with a very substantial degree of voluntarism on the part of the electorate because of the covenant of having elected the leadership to govern. Indeed, it is this covenant that has enabled the PAP government, especially since 1968, to claim to be a democratic government with a high degree of political legitimacy, while maintaining its pervasive presence and interventions in all aspects of social life of Singaporeans.

The PAP government's vision for the Singaporean polity is that of an anti-liberal democracy where collective well-being is safeguarded by good government by honourable leaders. This chapter will attempt to delineate the contours of this conception of government and politics which the PAP is engendering. To do so, it is first necessary to separate and clarify three concepts which are dismissed by the PAP government, so as to create ideological room for its own conception of a communitarian-based democracy; namely, liberalism, legitimacy and democracy.

ABSENCE OF WESTERN LIBERALISM IN ASIA

As a consequence of its ideological dominance in global political discourse, liberalism is a word with much unintended conceptual baggage. It is, therefore, necessary to recover its intellectual roots. In its Lockean formulation, the individual stands at the centre of liberalism, alone, as the best rational judge of one's self-interests and must be permitted to act freely to achieve them. Like-minded individuals can freely associate themselves as interest groups to pursue shared corporate interests. The only moral injunction against

the pursuit of self-interests is that it should not be at the expense of others. The social is thus conceived in the negative. At both individual and group levels, the state is tolerated as a neutral and minimal convenience to maintain the rules of social transactions.

The state is neutral as an objective arena in which orderly transactions between individuals and interest groups are executed. It has no interest of its own *qua* state but merely acts as umpire to the transactions. Its interventions in the private sphere of the citizen is permissible only when public interest is demonstrably threatened as a result of disputes between private parties. For example, in the event of a labour strike that threatens the general economy, the state may coerce, by legislation, the workers to return to work. It is the ‘guardian’ of public interests only in this restricted sense. Where threats to public interest are absent, intervention constitutes an infringement or ‘abuse’ of the rights of individuals. This particular conception of the restricted role of the state discloses an implicit assumption of antagonism and contestation between individuals and the state, with the privileged former guarding the rights they have gained over time against the encroachment of the latter (Chua, 1992a).

Within the conceptual space of a liberalism where the social is conceived negatively, it is difficult to develop concepts of ‘collective interest’ and ‘collective responsibility’ in the social and political spheres. In practice, the moral injunction against jeopardising the interests of others, while in pursuit of self-interest, often goes unheeded. The privileging of individualism has been blamed by neo-conservatives for spawning many of the social and cultural problems in Western advanced capitalist nations. The charges are: (1) it has given rise to a hyper-subjectivity constantly in search of self-realisation through unrestrained consumption and gratification; (2) the emphasis on individual rights has produced a society in which private disadvantages can be translated into claims on the government, resulting in rapid expansion of welfarism, leading to fiscal crisis for the state (Bell, 1976); and (3) with the entrenchment of rights, the so-called ‘civil society’ is no longer constituted on a moral basis, instead it has been reduced in effect to one which is defined and determined by competition between rights of individuals, settled only by litigation. This neo-conservative sentiment has been appropriated by the PAP for its own contention that absence of social responsibility accounts for the current state of

declining civility and economic health in public and private spheres of Western liberal democracies.[1]

The conceptual and substantive criticisms constitute the ideological grounds for the PAP to simultaneously reject liberalism and create room to insert a different set of values that is to be 'recovered' from so-called Asian traditions. Ideological barricades have been erected against the globalised Western culture. The ideological confrontation is drawn between supposedly corrupting/individualistic/Western influence and wholesome/communitarian/Eastern traditions. Against the centrality of the individual and individualism is placed the centrality of the 'collective' well-being and 'communitarianism'. In privileging the collective, the tables are turned, so to speak, on individuals to defend their own actions, demanding of them to demonstrate the absence of malice against the collective and/or conversely, the presence of self-sacrifice for the same collective.

The immediate empirical issue is who represents the collective and who defines its interests. On the grounds of technical difficulties in arriving at a discursive consensus in which all interested individuals have the opportunity to partake in its formulation, the elected individuals invariably constitute themselves as representing the collective and its interests. There is a conflation of state/society through the concept of collective or national interest; the role of the state is 'to define community needs and to insure that they are implemented', furthermore, 'it needs to be efficient and authoritative, capable of making the difficult and subtle trade-offs' (Lodge and Vogel, 1987:20). Instead of a minimal and neutral state of liberalism, the conflation of state/society justifies state interventions in all spheres of social life, rationalised as pre-emptive interventions which 'ensure' the collective well-being, as measures of good government rather than abuses of individuals' rights.

ON POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

In an anti-liberal, communitarian state economic issues tend to have practical priority over others, such as political institution-building, because material improvements are the most tangible index of 'taking care of collective good'; this accounts for the shallowness of political institutions (Scalapino, 1992:165). The push to enhance material life often leads to suspension and abuse of what may be constituted as individual rights in a liberal democracy. Successful

economic strategies not onlyjustify but contribute to the electorate's voluntaristic tolerance of the violations as acceptable forms of social control and repressive coercion (Marcuse 1966).

Parenthetically, as the degree of civil liberty necessarily varies across time and contextual exigencies, the acceptability or otherwise of a particular constraint is intelligible only within a particular ideological context. Its acceptability depends on whether it can be ideologically, i.e. normatively, rationalised ans hence justified. The rationalisation in turn is dependent upon the 'cunning of reason' of the ruling government's ideologues and the conceptual elasticity of the ideological value system in place. Consequently, substantial energy of the ruling government is continuously expended on institutionalising a normative value system that is supportive of its actions; one in which its interventions can be publicly rationalised and debated, without threatening its legitimate claims to the right to govern (Habermas 1975).

As suggested earlier, emphasis on improvement of the material life generates its own criteria for justification. State interventions, rationalised in terms of their necessity for economic growth, are justified by their very success; the legitimacy of the ruling government is gained and reinforced. If growth did not materialise, then there is warrant for the government to be criticised. This logic constitutes the 'performance' criterion by which the ruling government's legitimacy is judged. Satisfying the criterion by 'delivering the goods' constitutes for some political leaders and their sympathetic analysts the defining character of 'good government'. There is a theoretical tendency to assume that so-defined 'good government' is essential to economic growth (Lee, 1992; Chan, 1992). However, it should be noted that economic growth does not in itself require good government as a necessary condition but commonly issues from governments rent with corruption.

ON DEMOCRACY

Procedurally, a democracy is constituted by the following conditions: as a government by the people there should be participation by the people in managing the nation. However, as the population size of a modern state exceeds the possibility of direct participation, participation can be achieved only through representation. Consequently, a basic necessary condition of democracy is the free and open competition for leadership, conventionally through

elections that are free of tampering by interested parties. The right to govern is granted to the ruling party as a 'contingent consent' (Schmitter and Karl, 1991:82), thus committing the elected to be responsible and responsive to the electorate, alleviating the chances of the abuse of power. Such procedural conditions of democracy are not antithetical to an anti-liberal polity. Indeed they could, and should, be met by such a polity in order to provide legitimacy for the ruling party to govern and to distinguish its interventions from illegitimate naked coercion.

However, there may be significant differences in the interpretations of the meaning of elections. In a liberal state, the elected may see themselves as the voice of the represented and diligently seek their opinions on different issues. The result is often a slow process of opinion-gathering and consultation before taking a decision, which will hopefully satisfy most of the represented. On the other hand, a non-liberal leader may interpret his or her election as being bestowed with the electorate's trust and therefore the mandate to decide on the latter's best interest. The expectations of the electorates may also correspondingly differ. In a liberal state, the electorate may accept tardiness in decision-making, even lament the inaction of the elected; in the non-liberal state, it will likely expect the elected to act on issues judiciously but with speed, according to the performance criterion.

THE NON-LIBERAL PAP GOVERNMENT

Many of the features of a non-liberal state explicated above correspond with the PAP government's self-understanding of its ideology and practices. At the very outset of its rule, it had managed to capture the difficult historical circumstances of political independence and ideologically turned it into an issue of 'national survival'. This constitutes a resource from which a discourse of 'national interests' may be perpetually generated within emergent circumstances. Since then, the national interest has been defined as the need for economic development and the improvement of material life of the population. To ensure their realisation, the surrounding social, cultural and political terrain is secured through an extensive network of disciplining processes and strategies. The extensive control is not only justified but constitutes the basis of 'good government' as growth ensues. Within this logic, the PAP considers itself to have disposed of its duty to Singaporeans more than adequately.

This self-assessment is shared by the governed, who have consistently supported the PAP in elections since 1959, even if electoral competitions have not always been conducted on an entirely level playing field between the PAP and opposition parties. This has rendered to the PAP government a high degree of political legitimacy as a 'democratic' government with an impressive majority, thus reinforcing its perception of having done the right thing by the people, regardless of how harsh its policies may have been.

However, declining electoral support in the 1980s has been symptomatic of the electorate's increasing discomfort with extensive state interventions in their daily life and a desire to push back the limits of government so as to establish greater space in the personal, cultural and political spheres simultaneously. They also indicated the weakening ideological purchases of 'survivalist' and 'developmentalist' rationalisations of public policies, as Singaporeans become less anxious about an economy which is globally integrated and appears healthy for the foreseeable future. Consequently, the idea of the 'national interest' is now often blurred by competing conceptions of different voluntary associations and class segments (Rodan, 1993a). Furthermore, the unilateral top-down decision-making process is no longer unquestioningly accepted, edging the new generation of PAP leadership towards seeking new ideological connections with the electorate.

Changes undertaken by the political leadership include increasing public consultation in policy-making, greater preparation of public receptiveness of policy through floating of White Papers for public debate ahead of legislation and implementation, introduction of different voices in Parliament through different MP schemes, and building of new political institutions as safeguards for political stability by channelling politics into the middle ground. Ideologically, 'pragmatism' and 'developmentalism' continue to be operational strategies but are no longer thematised, in part because they not only do not discourage individualism but often encourage it. Instead there is an explicit promotion of a 'communitarian' ideology, as enshrined in the so-called Shared Values.

The future shape of the PAP government will, therefore, likely contain the following features: collective interests will remain broadly indexed by the most tangible features of society, namely, the mutually reinforcing political stability and economic development; the government will delegate to itself the role of the promoter and vigilant guardian of these collective interests, although with greater

public input through increasing channels of consultation with interested parties; it will continue to be an interventionist state in the name of the need to maintain political and social stability to ensure economic growth, but with greater accountability and sensitivity to public reactions; finally, in spite of nagging discomfort, it will continue to uphold the democratic electoral process.

As the PAP continues to be elected to govern, its conception of the shape of the polity must have positive resonance in the popular political consciousness; there remains a significant level of ideological consensus between the two. However, declining popular electoral support suggests that this consensus is more contingent than it used to be and further changes in the political sphere are expected by the electorate. It is, therefore, necessary to clarify the limits of possible changes within the given conception of government and politics.

CONSEQUENCES OF ADOPTING COMMUMTARIANISM

Central to communitarianism is the idea that collective interests are placed above individual ones. Logically, what constitute the collective interests should be based on 'consensus'. However, as suggested earlier, the technical difficulties of soliciting opinions from every interested and affected party tends to be resolved, in practice, by a conflation of state/society, in which the elected political leadership assumes the position of defining both the consensus and the national interests by *fiat*. This of course has serious political implications.

Communitarianism in itself does not prejudge the form of government that embodies it as the dominant ideology; the form depends on the political history and culture of the nation in question. However, the conflation of state/society not only, as argued, legitimises an interventionist state but also enables the guardians of the state to slip easily into authoritarianism, either because of a genuine belief that they are acting for the collective welfare or simply by this using it as a self-serving excuse. This is why, while not logically favouring one particular form of government, communitarianism often spawns authoritarianism in practice. For the same reason, authoritarian regimes are more inclined than liberalism to promote communitarianism because it enables the rationalisation and preservation of an entrenched centralised power, as in the case of Indonesia (Robison, 1990).

At present, in spite of its overwhelming elected majority in Parliament, the PAP government appears to be responding to the pressure from the ground and moving towards greater consultation and participation in the formation of national consensus and national interests. However, given its history, the possible imposition of authoritarianism in the future cannot be dismissed entirely. The question that faces Singapore's political development under a single party dominant government with a communitarian ideology is, therefore, one of how to keep authoritarianism at bay. What, if any, political institutions can be put in place to hold off the imposition of authoritarianism? Some institutionalised mechanisms are already in place but we shall begin with mechanisms that are not likely to contribute to greater democratisation.

LOGIC OF PRAGMATISM

As argued in earlier chapters, the concept of 'pragmatism' as the embodiment of economic instrumentality operates entirely by contextual rationality. Government intervention in all spheres of social life is rationalised in terms of the contingencies of a particular situation rather than on the basis of any relatively inviolate principle. Since it admits no inviolate principles, pragmatism as the basis for government will not contribute to democratisation. Instead it may stand in its way because, for democracy to be established, certain principles must be maintained regardless of contingent societal conditions; exceptions are kept to a minimum and extensive evidence of their necessity is demanded.

Although unlikely to be discarded completely, pragmatism as an ideology is, nevertheless, losing its ideological hold on the population. It may not cause negative reactions when applied to policies with tangible material consequences, as in economic policies. However, when applied to other areas of social life, the policies may either simply be neglected or face overt objections from the population. In its relative ideological retreat, there is more room, in principle, for arguments in the political sphere which may act to prevent hasty state interventions.

RULE OF LAW

Conventionally, it is argued that the rule of law is a necessary condition for democracy as a safeguard against arbitrary exercise of power by the

state (Lev, 1990). This only holds if laws are understood to be the embodiment of a concept of transcendental natural law or a contract between individuals with mutual, enforceable obligations; the rule of law is then an instrument of protection of the individuals and civil society against the state. None of these precepts of law are within the idea of pragmatism or the legal concepts of Confucianism, in which the idea of the law is the regulation of rewards and punishments, maintained by the ruler's power (Wang, 1980:10; Jones, 1993).

Under the PAP government, the legal system is infused with the ethos of pragmatism, as such it is an instrument of social control and of rectification of social behaviour, tailored to the needs of the issues at hand by the legislative Parliament, the sole authority in law-making. Instances abound in which laws are changed and invoked retroactively to punish violators; statutes are changed to better suit enforcement immediately after they were successfully contested by litigants, such as the removal of the Internal Security Act from judicial review after one of the government's indictments was reversed in the Supreme Court; and finally, constitutional changes are undertaken with speed because of the absolute majority of the PAP. The last has led a legal scholar to claim that in practice there is no Constitution, in spite of its material presence. Given the way laws are made and implemented as an instrument of maintaining social order, the government governs through the law rather than by the law, as understood in Western traditions of government. The rule of law makes little contribution to possible democratisation in Singapore.

Let us turn now to the features that may render the government more responsive to the public sentiments, including but also beyond the strictly formal procedure of elections. Among these, the first is the Confucianist self-image of the PAP leadership.

CONFUCIAN LEADERSHIP

As suggested earlier, the PAP leadership has not succeeded in inscribing Confucianism into the ideological system of Singapore. However, it may be said to have 'Confucianised' itself by prescribing for itself a code of ethics, that of the *jin tze* or honourable individual. They have set themselves up as the model of a moral leadership which governs in the interest of the people rather than through self-interest. There have been instances, including instances of financial corruption, of Ministers and other political

office-bearers who have been found morally wanting and have been dealt with severely. On the whole, however, its track record may be said to be exemplary. This 'self-Confucianisation' does not mean that the PAP leadership will not behave like other politicians in their desire to win votes and stay in power. This desire is, however, rationalised in terms of the public interest which provides the warrant for their actions. Indeed, having claimed the moral high ground and regarding themselves as having fulfilled their mission creditably, they are often puzzled by the level of anti-PAP votes in general elections of the 1980s.

ELECTIONS

The most obvious and perhaps the most significant of potential contributions to democratisation is, of course, the institutionalisation of elections as the means of selecting political leadership within a multi-party political system; without it any mention of democracy will be fatuous. Because of the history of uneven contests, ironically, it has taken the emergence of declining electoral support and the PAP's attempts to stop this erosion to convince sceptics that elections in Singapore are more than a veil for authoritarianism (Rodan, 1992). Foreign observers have marvelled at how seriously the PAP takes every percentage point lost in electoral support, especially when the losses did not translate into proportional representation of opposition members in Parliament. The 60 per cent majority vote and seventy-seven out of a Parliament of eighty-one MPs garnered in the last election in 1991 would be considered a 'landslide' victory in mature Western democracies. Yet, the PAP responded as if it had been beaten badly (Singh, 1992). This reaction to every small shift of electoral sentiments is in part a result of the leadership's communitarian ideology.

As oppositional votes constitute protests against the PAP, their increasing volume stands as a concrete indictment of the 'absence' of consensus, thus weakening the PAP's claim to be the embodiment of the 'collective interests'. Furthermore, the PAP's attribution of communitarianism as the 'Asian' ethos of Singaporeans is placed in doubt. Electoral support is not, therefore, about how well the opposition parties do but rather how united is the nation behind the PAP leadership and the party's self-conception as a 'people's movement'. The problem faced by the PAP appears to be generic to all potential communitarian states.

Indeed, it has been suggested that because of the fear of exposing this absence of consensus, the Indonesian military authoritarian regime which espouses a communitarian ideology, Pancasila, is adverse to voting altogether in an already government-packed ‘Parliament’ (Djiwandono, 1989). Consequently, as evidence that the PAP is successful in inculcating communitarianism as an ideology in Singapore, it must win overwhelmingly in the general elections, not just by a simple majority. However, to acheive this it will have to be more responsive to popular sentiments and more persuasive, that is, more democratic rather than repressive in its governance.

RIGHTS TO CONSULTATION

As suggested, within the communitarian ideology, there is little space for the conceptualisation of individual rights. Any analysis of a random selection of political speeches will discover a very developed vocabulary on responsibility and an underdeveloped one of rights within the Singaporean political discourse; everyone is responsible to the collective but there is little room to question what are the rights of membership. In this Singapore is no exception among nations which emphasise the collective interest, especially under conditions where the ‘survival’ of the nation is in doubt (Wang, 1980); hence the desirability to preserve the survivalist myth in Singapore (Devan and Heng, 1992). However, there appears to be the beginning of the institutionalisation of the ‘right’ to be consulted, especially for interest groups.

In spite of the anti-liberal atmosphere, several notable interest groups around clearly identifiable issues or constituencies have emerged; the most prominent ones are women’s groups, such as the Association of Women in Action and Research (AWARE) and the Singapore Association of Women Lawyers, the Singapore Nature Society, an environmental group and, the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP). These organisations have had some successes in achieving their goals. For example, one of the past presidents of AWARE was a Nominated MP for 1992–1994. The environmental impact study of the Nature Society has brought to public attention the environmental costs—cutting down 40,000 mature trees which house a significant bio-diversity of insects and birds—of the planned development of a golf course by the Public Works Department. The golf course is now unlikely to be constructed.

The most politically minded of the organisations was the AMP. It was founded by Malay professionals who were unhappy with the domination of Malay PAP MPs in Malay community affairs because the latter have to abide first by the interests of the Party/government before considering those of the community. Its founders sought to detach community organisations from the PAP, especially MENDAKI, a government-sponsored organisation charged with improving the academic achievements of Malays (Mutalib, 1992:84– 87). The attempt was foiled by the government, which turned around and offered the AMP a similar level of public funding arrangements to run its own community programmes (Chua, 1991a:261–262). The result is that it has become the second community group to serve the Muslims and is in 'friendly' competition with the larger Mendaki.

As Rodan points out, none of these organisations 'appear in any way to facilitate the growth of oppositional politics—either in the sense of adopting a confrontational posture or in the sense of providing avenues for members of opposition political parties to advance their cause. On the contrary, to some extent these organisations provide feedback for the government which its own party structure is unable to deliver' (Rodan, 1992:17). There are two reasons for this state of affairs. First, institutionally the PAP has amended the society registration legislation to proscribe any organisation which is not a political party from making statements on issues outside the specific purview of its declared functions and constituencies. This amendment followed the instance in which the Law Society publicly criticised the government's amendment of the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act, in 1986, which empowered the Minister of Communication and Information to impose sanctions on any foreign publications deemed to be engaging in the domestic politics of Singapore (Rodan, 1992:15). The amendment to the society registration legislation effectively prevents interest groups from forming coalitions on public issues, thus radically reducing their political space.

Second, ideologically all voluntary associations are constrained by the communitarian ideology. They need to abide by a 'national interest' which denies any assertion of self-interest as a group in its own right. As an ideological concept, the 'national interest' is an empty category, the better to accommodate contingent substance. This substantive openness is a resource that can be exploited by both the government and the contesting organisations. For example,

the government's position that Singaporeans are entitled to golf courses for recreation is countered by the Nature Society's assertion that Singaporeans are entitled to nature for the same purpose; the environment does not have its own rights to be preserved, nor do the trees, birds or the insects.

Curiously, conceptually a political party is in a strict sense just another interest group whose interest is politics. This is indeed the way the PAP new leadership has viewed opposition parties, as representatives of sectarian interests to be tolerated within the PAP's single party dominance, which in contrast they perceive as the 'mainstream'. Without the ability to unseat the PAP as the government, opposition parties have in fact to campaign primarily on issues with identifiable constituencies, such as the poor, rather than with the generalised interests of seizing state power; thus lending some validity to the PAP's position. In sum, the voluntary associations are forced by the existing legal and political constraints to play only a reformist role.

However, as communitarianism requires broadly defined 'consensus', legitimate interest groups have the right to be heard and to contribute to consensus formation.[2] This right differs in significant ways from the liberal conceptualisation of rights of individual. The latter are constituted as transcendent natural rights to be protected against infringement by the society and the state. With communitarianism, constrained within the ideological/conceptual space of national interests, no individual or group can assert its own right as a basic condition of existence lest the assertion be read as unacceptable self-interest, potentially detrimental to the whole. The right to be consulted must therefore be constituted without reference to 'nature' but sociologically, on grounds that a broadly defined consensus can only emerge when all interested parties are consulted and their differences accommodated or rationalised. Although derived from different premises, in practice communitarianism like liberal democracy requires that the rights to interest group formation and representation in consensus formation be institutionalised.

As the explicit thematisation of communitarianism and consensus in Singapore is a late 1980s event, the right to be consulted is yet to be firmly institutionalised. However, it is probably a step from which the government is unable to retreat without substantial political costs. Failure to consult obvious group of people on actions that are

prejudicial to them will likely lead to a further erosion of popular electoral support, if the actions are not satisfactorily normatively justified. On the part of the population, more interest groups with clear constituencies should be encouraged, including those which are promoted by the government itself, in order to reflect the complexity of interests in contemporary Singapore.

A 'FREE' PRESS

The conventional understanding that democracy is safeguarded by the presence of a 'free' press, disseminating the greatest possible information so as to enable citizens to make informed judgements for themselves, is categorically rejected by the PAP government. Like other instances of rejection of liberal democratic concepts, the independent press of the West is subjected to substantive criticisms for being not 'truly' free but subject to hidden influences and pressures from different interest groups. It is also criticised for its ideological effect of causing confusion in the minds of the public, undermining the authority of the elected leaders and leading to a destruction of the unity of national purpose.

Consistent with its conceptualisation that the elected government occupies the position and voice of the national interests, Lee Kuan Yew states categorically, 'Freedom of the press…must be subordinated to the overriding needs of the integrity of Singapore, and to the primacy of purpose of an elected government' (*Straits Times,* 22 May, 1987). Not surprisingly, the history of the PAP government and the press is paved with instances of emasculation, culminating in the present situation of first, a government-encouraged monopolisation of the national print media by a conglomerate which publishes the national newspapers in English, Chinese and Malay, second, a national journalist body which is unapologetically pro-government especially in the senior editors' ranks (George, 1989); and finally, a Press Act that empowers the Minister of Communication to control ownership of domestic press and imposes restricted circulation of foreign publications on grounds of interference in domestic affairs. Yet, within the terms of a communitarian ideology, the issue is whether a highly restrained pro-government press serves well the process of the formation of consensus and collective interests of the nation.

Let us begin with the unapologetic pro-government stance of the journalists. Whatever may be their misgivings in private, editors of

the national press publicly proclaim that they are pro-government in editorials and coverage of news items. This self-disclosure apparently justifies the political bias in their professional duties: readers are forewarned and must decide for themselves at their own peril. This may be sufficient defence if there were contesting national papers which took different political slants to provide some balance. Alas, such is not the case in Singapore and the editors' self-defence is disingenuous. Given the absence of influential alternatives, the pro-government stance of the only national press is potentially counter to the national interests for the following reasons.

First, substantively being pro-government is not synonymous with being pro-consensus and pro the national interests. That the leadership may be more interested in self-preservation in the seat of power than in furthering the national interest is an ever-present likelihood. This is why the constitutional changes aimed at safeguarding the national reserve and ensuring minority representation in Parliament are put in place by the PAP itself, previous clean leadership notwithstanding.

Second, failure of the only national newspaper to provide room for a wide spectrum of public opinions is ultimately counter-productive to its support of the ruling government. Concerned readers are likely to read it as a government 'bulletin' and, beyond the substantive portion of a news item to discount the rest, which is often crucial to public opinion formation. Instead, they seek verification in the foreign press, often giving the latter an undeserved privileged place in commentary and editorials on domestic affairs. Arguably, it is precisely because such a process had set in that the PAP government decided, in 1986, to legislate against alleged interventions in domestic affairs by foreign press.

Third, contrary opinions do not disappear by their absence in print in the national press. Instead, they bide their time for the opportunity to exercise their effects, such as during elections. In this way, the ruling government's lack of published information about contrary opinions renders it unable to respond to opposition, even to the extent of diffusing such opinions, until their effects are manifest and felt. For example, in 1991, the failure of the national press compounded the failure of the other feedback mechanisms to give the PAP an accurate assessment of sentiments among the electorate. This led to a mistaken call for a snap election that resulted in a further slide in the popular support base of the PAP government (Singh, 1992).

The realised and potential negative consequences listed above

demonstrate that an unquestioningly pro-government press, without any competition, constitutes with the government itself a monologue about national interests, rather than a conversation in which opinions are exchanged and debated in order to arrive at a broad consensus on national interests. Thus, again, communitarianism like liberalism needs the independent forum of the press for contending opinions to be debated, so that consensus can emerge and national purpose be pursued with unity.

The practical requirement of establishing a communitarian-value-based government is apparently not dissimilar to those required by liberal democracy, namely, the extensive establishment of networks of voluntary associations and the presence of an unencumbered press, both of which are constitutive elements of a strong civil society. These requirements must be factored into the future development of politics in contemporary Singapore.

A COMMUNITARIAN DEMOCRACY FOR SINGAPORE

Singapore's economic achievement owes much to the ideological consensus between the PAP government and the people; together they have suppressed individual differences for a unity of purpose to develop the economy and improve the material well-being of the nation as a whole. These collective interests have kept the nation united. However, capitalist growth has brought with it unavoidable differentiation among the population along different cross-cutting dimensions, with attendant pluralism in world views, lifestyles and preferences. The PAP government and some segments of the population view this proliferation of differences apprehensively as symptomatic of the insidious creeping in of individualism and 'Western' liberalism which threaten the unity of purpose. Consequently, instead of waiting for this unwitting ideological invasion to 'ravage' the social body, the PAP government is fighting it with explicit articulation, promotion and institutionalisation of a version of communitarian ideology, which it believes to inhere in the Singaporean population as part of their 'Asian' heritage. It is seeking to develop what it could call a communitarian democracy.

However, the promoters of such a possibility, inside Singapore and abroad, have yet to work out just what a communitarian democracy looks like. They appear to assume that the necessary conditions for democracy would be essentially different between liberalism and communitarianism; where and how and with what

consequences remain unknown. Indeed, privileging of individual rights or the rights of the collective does produce significant differences in government decisions on the national level. For example, in a communitarian ideology, the need to provide housing for the nation overrides the conventional rights of property ownership, leading to low compensation for land acquired and construction of low-cost housing; conversely, the protection of property rights under individualism will require market value compensation resulting in high cost of land which is prohibitive to public housing construction.

As the arguments in this chapter show, the requisite conditions for a communitarian democracy are surprisingly similar to those of a liberal democratic state. First, to be a democracy at all, the free and clean, 'one person, one vote' electoral process must be institutionalised or, as the saying goes, one is not even in the ball park. Second, to arrive at a broad national consensus, a defining characteristic of communitarianism, the rights to interest group formation and the presence of a relatively independent press must also be institutionalised. Without these two institutions, any proclamation of the presence of a 'consensus' regarding 'national interests' is necessarily logically and substantively wanting; similarly for the 'national interest'. The three institutions listed above are also sacrosanct to liberal democracy; however, the philosophical grounds for their justification are different for liberal democracy and the PAP version of communitarian democracy.

In contemporary Singapore, existing constraints on interest groups restrict them to narrowly defined constituencies without room for sympathetic support of each other on general issues that face society as a whole. Existing constraints on the press have led to the declining credibility of the national press among its discerning readers (Kuo *et al.,* 1993). This has led not only to active seeking out of foreign press reports on local news, but politically more importantly, to an alienation from active interests in the nation's business. On both counts—of the presence of strong voluntary associations and an independent press—the PAP government in Singapore is still far short of meeting the necessary conditions for a communitarian democracy to which it allegedly aspires. To that extent, Singapore politics must be said to be in transition to a communitarian democracy (Scalapino, 1992:165). It is most certainly not one that has already arrived, as it is increasing assumed to be in some less critical quarters.

NOTES

1 There are, of course, other ways of reading the linkages between individuals and community within a liberal framework, for example see Kymlicka (1989). To the extent that this is so, the PAP's reading of liberal democracy is unavoidably an ideologically interested one; one which is produced to maximise its differences with PAP's own vision of an anti-liberal polity.
2 By 'broadly defined consensus', it is recognised that 'total consensus' among all interest groups and individuals is not possible. Rather, with an eye on collective interests, differences will be negotiated and rationalised. Stringent believers in individual rights are likely to believe that such accommodation of differences is unlikely.

Conclusion

In terms of the current discursive wisdom regarding the linkage between economic development and political democratisation in developing countries, Singapore is a frustrating case. Three decades of rapid economic growth have transformed Singapore into the second highest income country in Asia, a distant second to Japan. By the logic of prevailing wisdom, Singapore should be leading the rest of Southeast Asian developing nations towards greater democracy. Yet, its single party dominant government of the PAP is not democratising at a rate to satisfy its critics, at home or abroad.

Conceptual and substantive difficulties in placing Singapore in the debate on democratisation arise from its political stability which is characterised by the presence of a popularly elected PAP government, hence the unquestionable presence of formal democracy, and the tendency of the government to impose, through due Parliamentary process, substantively highly anti-democratic laws and administrative regulations in the social and political sphere. The difficulties are compounded by the apparently ambivalent responses of an electorate which is increasingly willing to voice its dissatisfaction with unacceptable state interventions without any apparent desire for a change of government or even to overt support the development of strong opposition parties. This steady state has resulted in analysts, especially those outside Singapore, continuing to characterise the PAP as an authoritarian regime and to label the Singaporean electorate with various negative terms.

CONTRADICTIONS OF THE PAP GOVERNMENT

The fundamental basis of the PAP's claim to being a democratic government is that it has always captured state power through an

untampered with popular electoral process, never otherwise; although like some democratic governments, election regulations are sometimes manipulated to its own advantage. That it is popularly elected, that it is financially non-corrupt, that it manages the economy well for the betterment of the people, that it governs transparently through due Parliamentary process, all with a dash of self-sacrifice on the part of some of its leaders and members, add up to a very powerful set of legitimising elements for the PAP regime and are commonly accepted by Singaporeans. The same elements constitute, for the PAP, the character of 'good' government and provide justifications of its right to continue its governance. This is reflected in the recent self-characterisation of its leaders as Confucian *'jintzu',* loosely translated as 'moral individuals'. The PAP has thus appropriated for itself the moral high ground and established the ideological hegemonic terms of political discourse in Singapore, beyond direct intervention and legislation.

In spite of its commendable features, the PAP government nevertheless continues to be considered an 'authoritarian' regime. A most obvious contributing factor to this characterisation is the political history of Singapore, which is synonymous with the rise of the PAP. In its drive for absolute dominance, many less than democratic tactics had been used to suppress dissent. These abuses are well documented (Bloodworth, 1986) and are not denied by the PAP. It considers the subsequent economic success as ample justification for the anti-democratic interventions. A second factor is the 'style' of government which was, and largely still is, top-down and based almost exclusively on hyper-technical rationality, with little participation from the population who have to live with its decisions and policies. The pervasive strategy of rendering all government decisions as 'technical' problems, to be solved only by experts, reduces the space for political practice because the electorate as lay individuals do not possess the requisite knowledge to be trusted with making informed decisions. This style of government is therefore often one of imposing a decision on the people by a 'father knows best' leadership, hence it is authoritarian in nature. The ability to adopt such a style is obviously greatly facilitated by the absolute majority of the PAP in Parliament.

Beyond history and style, there is seriously anti-democratic legislation in place that greatly constrains the political sphere. In addition to the Internal Security Act, there is the Societies Act that delimits 'political' activities narrowly to the purview of political

parties. Civic voluntary associations, quintessential institutions of civil society, are barred by the Act from making political statements beyond the interests of their respectively defined constituencies, under threat of being deregistered. The Act effectively suppresses the commonplace activity of a civil society in which voluntary associations establish their solidarity by publicly sympathising with each other's causes. The anti-democratic legislations, of which the above are but two examples, compound each other to cast long repressive shadows on Singaporean civil society and suppress public criticisms of the government. As long as they are in place, and to the extent their presence reinforces the entrenchment of the PAP in the seat of power, the PAP's claim to be a democratic government will always be problematic, the commendable features of the regime notwithstanding.

The question of further democratisation is, therefore, to be posed in the interstices of the two sets of extant features of the Singapore polity. In the presence of the positive qualities of the PAP regime, further democratisation will take place along different lines from that of other Asian nations which have recently gained the rights to clean elections after explosive struggles, such as South Korea and Taiwan. In contrast to explosive spectacles of democratisation, political changes should take unspectacular forms without disrupting social stability.

MATURING POLITY/EMERGING CIVIL SOCIETY

Singaporeans are well aware of the interventionist character of the PAP government, while appreciative of its technical and bureaucratic efficacy in improving their material life. The trade-off for the majority is: improved material life for some losses in civil and political liberties. The interventions are therefore borne within this compromise, but they are never forgotten. With the 1984 watershed election, the vestiges of fear of voting against the PAP evaporated, a decline in popular vote continued in subsequent elections, eroding the support for the PAP to slightly above 60 per cent in the most recent elections in 1991. Party leaders now concede that a greater opposition presence in the Parliament may be in the national interest.

Equally significant are the different constituencies that have cast anti-PAP votes. In the 1984 election, it was attributed to the younger and middle-class voters; in 1988 to the Malay voters who in previous years had faced 'regular and open badgering by the

government' regarding their 'loyalty' to the nation and their economic underachievement (Mutalib, 1992:87); in 1991 to lower-income Chinese in the public housing estates who have faced mounting difficulties keeping up with increased standards and costs of living, and to better-educated Chinese who finally broke their reticence to register their alienation and dissatisfaction with a growing economy that privileges the English-educated and leaves them much to their own devices.[1]

The shifts in protesting constituencies indicate two developments under apparent political inactivity. First, they show that social differentiation in the population along income, education and ethnic lines has reached such a point of complexity that one administrative policy for the entire population, hitherto the apparent successful formulae of the PAP government, is no longer viable. Government will have to recognise the presence of the differences and, if it be impossible to satisfy them simultaneously, then some political costs will have to be accepted for every one of its policies. Second, after years of practice, Singaporeans are quite sophisticated in using the ballot box to pressure the government, to the point of 'brinksmanship', according to Lee Kuan Yew. In spite of continuing majority support, the PAP has had to be more responsive to popular demands.

Substantively, for example, in spite of its vehemently anti-welfare ideological stance, the government has come to recognise the presence of an estimated 10 per cent of the population living in poverty and some direct fund transfers to this group have been instituted; after the 1991 election the government absorbed the monthly conservancy charges of all HDB rental households for the month of December. Politically, new institutions aimed at moderating the effects of race, welfarism and contrary opinions have been instituted, such as the Group Representative Constituency, the elected Presidency and the nominated MP and non-constituency MP schemes, respectively. More use has also been made of Parliamentary select committees to solicit opinions. The overall strategy is for more public consultation without abdicating the responsibility to govern. Since 'feedback' is as much about explaining policies as soliciting critical inputs, the device is double-edged. If participants became convinced that the process is but a charade of openness and their presence but a means to lend the government legitimacy, they would be soon alienated from both, which would in turn reaffirm their negative impressions of the

government. The package of government responses are read in this book as steps towards greater democratisation. Beyond these, further democratisation is likely to be an uphill struggle at both the individual and group levels.

In the meantime, other regions of social life are also undergoing changes. In spite of legal restrictions, perhaps encouraged by changes in the electoral politics, several voluntary associations have emerged to voice the concerns of their respective constituencies. Among these are the Association of Women for Research and Action (AWARE), the Association for Muslim Professionals (AMP) and the Nature Society. Each has a very definite constituency and each has had some success in engaging relevant government agencies in public debate. There are thus observable movements in civil society activities and, as discussed in the next section, the government has responded to these activities in ways that it hopes will reinforce its continuing legitimacy.

THE CITIZENS' DILEMMA

For the individual, being politically oppositional can be a perilous activity, to be taken on only after serious considerations of the existential conditions of living in a very small island city-state, where the state is pervasive in every sphere of social life. First, one's livelihood is directly or indirectly tied to some part of the functions of state agencies. Directly, one may be in the employ of either the civil service or one of the many large government-linked enterprises. Indirectly, as the private sector economy is highly regulated by licensing and other administrative processes, it is believed that one's professional practices may be jeopardised by difficulties in running the gauntlet of bureaucratic processes. The tendency is to avoid offending the political regime.

Second, the PAP in its determination to stay in power is unrelenting in keeping a close watch on the activities and words of oppositional individuals. Recent political history contains several instances of members of opposition parties being either prosecuted for violating civil laws or sued by PAP leaders for defamation/libel and in most cases losing the ensuing legal battles to the latter. Such instances are psychologically traumatic not only for the individuals involved but also for others within the close-knit extended family on the small island. In the strict sense, these instances are neither undemocratic nor illegal; it can be argued that members of political

parties, whether of or against the ruling party, are not privileged beyond the bounds of the law and should, therefore, face the same consequences as every citizen when they fall foul of the law. Nevertheless, these instances are often read as excessive 'persecution' of individuals who hold opinions contrary to the regime by political observers.

Third, the potential personal costs must also be weighed against the relatively good material life that Singaporeans have been and are enjoying under the PAP regime's efficacious management of the economy. Appreciative of its development efforts, Singaporeans have high regard for the government; thus reducing their willingness to confront it openly. This is especially so for the middle class, whose very existence is in part the result of the successful economic policies. Thus, in spite of the existing theoretical assumption that as the economy develops the middle class will embody the progressive tendency towards democracy, the Singaporean middle class is in the end likely to be more co-operative with the regime than against it (Rodan, 1993).

Alternatively, sensing that the government tends to disregard one's view, combined with the desire not to jeopardise one's own economic interests, middle-class individuals are inclined to cultivate their own private interests, leaving the government to institute rules and policies which either do not affect them personally or can be borne without financial difficulties. This 'privatisation' process is reflected in the PAP's lament that 'highly qualified' individuals are unwilling to join its ranks (Ong, 1992). Its youth wing is also facing decreasing membership of the well educated; efforts to recruit potential members include promises for greater consultation and the right to hold opinions different from the main party!

Parallel strategic difficulties face the voluntary associations. As mentioned earlier, they are prohibited from engaging in 'political' activities. Ironically, such associations cannot avoid 'political' issues when speaking for their respective constituencies. For example, the demand of women's associations that female civil servants be granted fringe benefit plans similar to those of their male counterparts is a direct demand on the state and is thus unavoidably political. Such demands, however, do not challenge the fundamental premise of the regime although they do bring out anomalies in existing state practices. As such they are reformist in character and if the government accedes to the suggested changes, it stands to gain legitimacy.

In the interest of gaining incremental concrete benefits for its constituency, an association is constrained to promote such reformist causes that are circumscribed by the discourse and practices of the existing ideological framework. Consequently, once certain levels of acceptability to the government and effectiveness are established, an association becomes reluctant to risk deregistration and lose the possibility of making incremental gains, instead they will operate within the agenda set by the government. This is precisely what is envisaged by the PAP; more room for civic associations will be created but only under the umbrella of a strong state that charts the unified direction for the society as a whole (Yeo, 1991).

The parallel dilemma of the individual and voluntary associations appear to become conjoined and embodied in the institution of the Nominated MPs (NMPs). The initial motivation for the government to promote this scheme was to introduce individuals with recognised abilities into Parliament to act as independent voices in a house packed with PAP legislators, so as to alleviate the popular demand for opposition voices. This mechanism appears to have been captured by interest groups in the selection for the 1991 Parliament. Of the six NMPs, four are identified with specific constituencies with very identifiable voluntary associations, namely, a woman surgeon who at the point of appointment was the president of AWARE, a leader in the telecommunications worker' union, the chairman of the Singapore Manufacturer's Association and finally, an entrepreneur who successfully sold his garment business to a public listed multinational firm.

Significantly, while the four NMPs have very clearly identifiable constituencies, they speak in Parliament strictly as individuals and not as representatives of the constituencies in whose interests they are obviously expected to act. As if to reaffirm publicly the absence of any linkages, these NMPs do in fact speak on issues which go beyond the interests of their constituencies. Such symbolic veils, however transparent, are necessary in order to keep the initial motivation of the NMP scheme intact and also not to violate overtly the Societies Act. Specific interest groups gain their voices in Parliament through indirect representation, while the regime remains unchanged, but is helped by the NMPs to access information and better management of dissatisfactions.

A NEW IDEOLOGICAL FRAME: COMMUNITARIANISM

Hoping to prevent the demands of a higher-educated population with corresponding economic means to engage in individualised choices of ideas and lifestyles from becoming full-blown 'individualism' with its attendant 'liberalism', the PAP government has moved to denounce these developments as 'corrupting' influences of the West. In addition, it seeks to develop an alternative ideology as the basis for macro organisation of the Singapore society. This counter ideology, supposedly 'distilled' from 'Asian' traditions, is communitarianism. Politically, this communitarianism makes it ideologically possible to rationalise the conflation of state/government/society, which in turn justifies state interventions in social life as pre-emptive measures for 'ensuring' the collective well-being; thus, as measures of 'good government' rather than abuses of individual rights. The closed ideological logic of communitarianism makes it difficult to think beyond it; consequently, even members of the opposition parties have difficulty constructing alternative scenarios to the PAP's ideological constructions of the 'national interests' of the whole society. The interventionist PAP government has thus arrived at a new ideological threshold, beyond survivalism and pragmatism.

Contemporary politics in Singapore appears to have arrived at a steady state: on the one hand, an ideologically self-conscious interventionist but popularly elected government which maintains a tight reign over freedom in civil society, while simultaneously continuing to produce a better material life for the population as a whole. On the other, an electorate which is appreciative of the government's efficacy in economic matters but is, nevertheless, uncomfortable with all its interventions and seeks to have a greater say in the formulation of national interests and to have more opposition voices in Parliament to check the easy slippage into arrogance of power and of authoritarianism of an absolutely dominant PAP government, but without removing it. Movement out of this steady state will take fresh initiatives for which there are several windows of opportunity.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER DEMOCRATISATION

First, the PAP itself appears to be concerned about middle-class disinterest in politics which is affecting its own ability to recruit desirable members. Consequently, it has been suggested that it is now

interested in 're-politicising' the citizenry (Chan, 1989). If so, it can neither afford to further alienate the interested few nor continue to persecute individuals who hold contrary views thereby driving concerned individuals further into their private sphere. Some additional room for difference/dissent may be made available through political necessity. However, good intentions generated by political necessity notwithstanding, given its wont of acting unilaterally, the PAP is likely to move slowly in opening up the political sphere, in a process of stops and starts.

Second, the drive towards a 'communitarian democracy' may itself generate a need for greater democratisation in spite of its ideological tendency to restrain dissent. Within the contemporary context, the formulation of collective values and interests, upon which a communitarian democracy is premised, is achieved through a combination of broad agreements or loose consensus as well as through the leadership of the political elite. This means that new mechanisms for consensus-formation must be developed. Two essential mechanisms are increased formation of voluntary associations with identifiable constituencies and an independent press.

In communitarianism, legitimate interest groups have the right to be consulted and to contribute to consensus-formation. Lest this right be misinterpreted, it is not conceived as a 'natural' right. It is based on the substantive ground that a broad consensus can only emerge when all interested parties are consulted and their differences considered. There is, theoretically, greater scope for interest group development, which is central to the emergent constitution of a civil society that protects itself from the state.

Concerning an independent press, it should be noted that a pro-government press is potentially counter to the national interest for several reasons. The most obvious is that pro-government is not synonymous with pro-nation. The failure of the national mass media to provide room for a broad spectrum of public opinions is ultimately counter-productive to its support of the regime; it drives readers/audiences to seek other, particularly foreign, sources for information. Censorship of these alternative sources is also counter-productive because it merely confirms to those who avail themselves of it that the foreign press must be saying something right. Finally, if denied airing on the public media, contrary opinions will seek alternative opportunities to register themselves and exercise their effects, such as in the ballot box, leading to

potentially more serious consequences. For these and other reasons, it is clear that an independent forum is needed for contending opinions to be debated so that consensus, the *sine qua non* of communitarianism, can emerge and national purpose can be pursued with unity.

Third, the inequalities of capitalism are already having an effect on the polity. This will only intensify, making it difficult for the single party dominant government to contain all the differences within all its activities. The inequalities will force the regime to focus its attentions towards greater social equity and social justice, that is, towards greater substantive democracy beyond formal procedures.

Finally, the electorate for their part know that they have a government which will continue to manage the economy to their benefit; consequently, while desiring more Parliamentary opposition, they will not vote for the opposition just for this reason. Given the widespread ideological acceptance of the PAP's definition of what constitute the necessary qualifications for politicians in terms of academic qualifications, professional achievements and moral character, the electorate is likely to demand the same from opposition candidates. Here is the dilemma: if the PAP is having difficulties in attracting the 'right' candidates, why would a potential qualified candidate join the opposition parties and take on the previously mentioned hardships? So, while the last three elections showed that Singaporeans are willing to vote against the PAP, further democratisation will depend significantly on opposition's ability to field 'credible' candidates to provide positive identifications for what remain as protest votes.

The apparent 'steady state' of the contemporary Singapore polity, therefore, holds several opportunities for further democratisation, some of which are made available by taking seriously the PAP government's own desire to develop a 'communitarian democracy', in spite of the current absence of strong opposition parties. However, there is no inevitability to the realisation of these opportunities. Furthermore, if changes towards their realisation do take place, these are likely to develop quietly without social ruptures because Singaporeans are not in a hurry to change a government with a most impressive economic track record that has translated into improved standards of living. It is still too early to ask 'whither the PAP dominance' or to enjoin 'wither the PAP dominance'!

NOTES

1` For details of the 1988and the 1991 elections see, Lew (1990) andSingh (1992), respectively. For the PAP's analysis of the 1984 and 1991 election results see the speeches of the Deputy Prime Minister, Ong Teng Cheong (1992).

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