

**POWER AND THE PEOPLE'S ACTION  
PARTY: A STUDY OF TWO PARLIAMENTARY  
SCHEMES**

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# DECLARATION

This thesis is the original conceptual work and research of the author, Mark Desira. This thesis has not been previously submitted for academic accreditation. Other research, theoretical construction, and critical views drawn upon in this body of work have been duly referenced along with other academic and scholarly texts which have influenced the author in the course of writing this thesis.

Mark Desira.

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# SYNOPSIS

This thesis is intended to contribute to the understanding of how the People's Action Party (PAP) has been able to maintain political power in Singapore since before the nation became independent in 1965. Steven Lukes' framework of understanding how power operates from his 1974 book *Power: A Radical View* will be employed. This thesis will deal with two Parliamentary schemes introduced by the PAP. The Non-Constituency Member of Parliament (NCMP) scheme was intended to raise the number of Opposition members in the unicameral Parliament which was dominated by the PAP. The Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) scheme was intended to bring non-partisan individuals with alternative ideas into Parliament.

The intention of this thesis is to illustrate that the real motivation behind these schemes was to maintain the PAP's political power in Singapore. It will argue that the schemes were intended to 'informally' co-opt individuals. This thesis will examine the success of the schemes' real motivation and also examine the possibility that they could actually work towards weakening the PAP's political power.

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# INTRODUCTION

In August this year, as Singapore celebrated the 39<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its becoming an independent nation, for only the second time in the country's 45-year history of self-rule the Head of Government stood down. Like the first such event which occurred in 1990 (when Lee Kuan Yew, founding father of the ruling People's Action Party or PAP, stood down) there were no real surprises. This time around Goh Chock Tong had stated before the 2001 general election that he was intending to stand down and there was no doubting who would succeed him. Lee Hsien Loong - Lee Kuan Yew's son and long time First Deputy Prime Minister – was the obvious choice. The international markets need not worry, nor should any Singaporeans 'fear' invasion from Indonesia or Malaysia, things will remain the same in Singapore for at least 10-to-20 years down the track: in short, when Singapore experiences its third change in political leadership, again, nothing will change.

Cynical though it may seem, if the above paragraph was written thirteen years ago, after the first general election in 1991 with Goh leading the PAP, it would have probably suggested that Singapore was entering its political renaissance, or at least a time of political change, as several scholars did at the time. The 1991 general election witnessed the most successful result for Opposition parties in Singapore since 1963. Chiam See Tong, then leader of the Singapore Democratic Party was named unofficial leader of the Opposition as he and two other individuals from his party entered Parliament. Low Thia Khiang also entered Parliament under the Workers' Party Banner. The 1980s saw steady growth in voter support for the Opposition climaxing around the 40 percent mark in 1991. As a result of this, the thirteen years of an entirely PAP Parliament which finally ended in 1981 seemed to be only a distant memory. Today however, although both Chiam and Low still remain in Parliament, the electoral fortunes of Opposition parties in Singapore have gone the other way. Unlike thirteen years ago when the Opposition

seemed strong, the parties are now plagued with infighting which has seen the SDP reduced to minor player.

The discussion in this thesis will be cast against this period which has seen the political fortunes of Opposition parties come down almost as quickly as they went up. This thesis will take as its case studies the Non-Constituency Member of Parliament Scheme and the Nominated Member of Parliament Scheme introduced in 1984 and 1989/90 respectively. The thesis will attempt to further scholarly understanding of how the PAP has been able to maintain power in Singapore for as long as it has. This thesis is not intended to reveal new dimensions of Singapore politics, rather it is meant as a contribution to the knowledge on politics in Singapore, particularly regarding the relationship between the PAP and the co-optation/marginalisation of the Opposition as a factor in Singapore politics. It examines this relationship from a theoretical perspective hitherto unused in the Singapore case. Steven Lukes' *Radical View of Power* will be the central theoretical thrust of this thesis, in particular his pivotal argument that power can be seen to be operating when *A* attempts to manipulate the interests of *B*.

The first chapter sets out the frameworks which will inform this study. Here, the terms 'manifest' and 'latent' rationales will be developed. These terms refer to the PAP's justifications for introducing policies and other initiatives, in particular of course, the NCMP and NMP schemes. 'Manifest' refers to the stated objective by the PAP, whereas 'latent' refers to the unannounced motivation which lies at the heart of the objectives for these schemes being introduced. These concepts will be informed by the work of Robert K. Merton and Edward Said. The chapter will also define the terms 'mitigated critics' and 'regime critics'. These terms refer to Opposition figures in Singapore more so than another other group. The former are figures who are generally more accepted by the PAP as credible Opposition members, whilst the latter refers to those that the ruling party completely rejects. Lukes' radical view of power will be further elaborated on to develop an understanding of ideas concerning the manipulation of interests. Also, more relevant to the final chapter will be the discussion about 'relative autonomy' and 'democratic participation' which Lukes envisages as essential elements if a society is to move out of



his relationship of power. Several criticisms of Lukes' work will be discussed towards the end of this thesis. Also, the concept of 'informal' co-optation will be described as it applies to the NCMP and NMPs.

The second chapter which will review (using largely secondary sources) the ways the PAP has attempted to manipulate the interests of Singaporeans in order to sustain itself as the ruling party for 45-years. This chapter will show how the ruling party has 'depoliticised' Singapore and deliberately blurred the political lines between 'PAP', 'Government', 'regime' and 'state' to sustain the party as the centre-piece of Singapore politics. It will go on to show how the PAP has projected itself as the 'national movement' identifying itself with the nation at large, resulting in any significant criticism of the PAP being seen as criticism of Singapore as a whole. The chapter will also show how resistance to depoliticisation emerged in the 1980s and how the PAP responded.

The schemes discussed in this thesis were initiated by the PAP as a response to popularity shifts away from the ruling party through the 1980s. The third chapter will show how the Non-Constituency MP scheme was intended to 'informally' co-opt Opposition electoral candidates in an effort to draw electoral support away from the Opposition. It will also show how the scheme has been intended to de-legitimise the Opposition as a viable political player in Singapore.

The fourth chapter will illustrate how the Nominated MP scheme was used as yet another PAP initiative to informally co-opt individuals. Its intention was to again de-legitimise the Opposition whilst at the same time legitimising the ruling party.

The final chapter will argue that as a result of the success of the NMP scheme, and the independence of the individuals who participated within it, it is well placed to advance 'relative autonomy' and 'democratic participation' as envisaged by Lukes. It will show that by the mid-1990s NMPs were starting to make political commentary which did not necessarily concur with PAP ideology. Because the NMP, unlike Opposition figures, are seen as 'non-partisan' and because the media in Singapore are quite supportive of them, it

will be argued that they are the best placed group in Singapore to make such advances and possibly bring Singapore out of a situation where  $A$  continually manipulates the interests of  $B$  in a closed system of power.

It is important to note two things before moving into the body of work. As noted above, Lee Hsien Loong has recently become Singapore's Prime Minister. Nevertheless, because this thesis only deals with the time frame when Lee Kuan Yew and then Goh Chok Tong were Prime Ministers, it will not consider the recent change. Also, the terms 'Government', 'PAP', 'ruling party' and 'ruling elite' will be used interchangeably through the thesis to refer to the Central Executive Committee of the PAP which is in reality the real power holder in Singapore.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE FRAMEWORK

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the theoretical concepts central to this thesis and briefly outlines their relevance to Singapore politics. The chapter is divided into three sections, coinciding with the three major theoretical themes running through the work. The first theme to be examined is concerned with the concepts of 'manifest rationale' and 'latent rationale'; these refer directly to the justification for People's Action Party (PAP hereafter) policies and initiatives. The former refers to the publicised reason, and the latter, that which is an undisclosed objective. The second pair of concepts to be explicated is 'mitigated critics' and 'regime critics'. These are used to characterise Opposition figures in Singapore, referring to figures who do not criticise the ideological foundations of the regime, and those who do, respectively. The final theoretical concept discussed is Steven Lukes' theory of Power, presented in his short book *Power: A Radical View*<sup>1</sup> which forms the basic theoretical framework employed in this thesis.

### 1.2 THE MANIFEST AND LATENT RATIONALES

'Manifest' and 'Latent' Rationales will be a re-occurring framework of this thesis. They are not new themes in the social sciences; the works of Robert Merton and Edward Said are two cases in point. Each has used the terms 'manifest' and 'latent' at a theoretical level. Merton listed several scholars who used the terms and attempted to define them.<sup>2</sup> In his own functionalist approach to sociological explanation, Merton argued that rain

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1968 [third edition, first published in 1949]), pp. 114-8.

dances of Hopi Indians comprise both manifest and latent functions. The dances are intended to bring rain; this is the manifest function. At a latent level, they function to increase social integration of a dispersed group. Hence, the dances cannot be dismissed simply for failing to meet their manifest function, rather they have 'functions which are non-purposed or latent'.<sup>3</sup> Merton pointed out that manifest functions '... are intended and recognised by participants in the system', whilst latent functions '... are neither intended nor recognised'.<sup>4</sup>

In *Orientalism*,<sup>5</sup> Said made a distinction between 'latent orientalism' and 'manifest orientalism'. Manifest orientalism is illustrated in the works of nineteenth-century writers in the differences between their ideas surrounding the Orient. These are confined to differences in form and personal style, but rarely in basic content. At the latent level, each writer maintained the 'separateness' of the Orient; its eccentricity, its backwardness, its salient differences and its feminine penetrability. They all viewed the Orient as a locale requiring Western attention.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that although both Merton and Said used and construed the terms to fit their own studies, the fundamental understandings of each term remained. Firstly, manifest is something apparent, something that is clearly discernible and visible. It is something that definitely operates at a conscious level. Latent, on the other hand, is the opposite: it is something that remains concealed, something that is present but hidden or not apparent. Depending on whether one fathoms the term as used by the above mentioned scholars, latent might be deduced as existing in the 'unconscious', but this is not necessary to defining latency. This thesis will construe its own interpretations of the terms to meet its own needs, whilst relying on their basic definitions. The terms will be given a political overtone, and will not stress 'unconscious' dimensions of latency. They will be applied to the analysis of PAP initiatives, particularly the case studies of this thesis; the Non-Constituency Member of Parliament scheme (NCMP) and Nominated

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of The Orient* (London: Penguin, 1978).

Member of Parliament scheme (NMP). Therefore, in terms of my argument, the 'manifest rationale' of a PAP initiative is the publicised and explicitly stated justification for introducing a particular initiative. This is not difficult to identify. It is required of the PAP when introducing initiatives in Parliament during the second reading of the relevant bill to illustrate the principles behind the legislation; in other words, why they are introducing it. The latent rationale refers to that which is not revealed by the PAP, but nonetheless, is in actuality a key motivation for introducing a particular initiative. The latent rationale, however, is more difficult to identify, and will rely far more on interpretation informed by scholarly models concerning the operation of power in Singapore politics and society and by Opposition politicians in Singapore. With reference to the latent level of policy introduction, the thesis will be concerned with PAP initiatives to maintain political power in Singapore and curtail the Opposition.

The PAP government has been known to present major policies with manifest intent, whilst maintaining latent agendas. This is a point well illustrated by Christopher Tremewan.<sup>7</sup> In analysing the PAP introduction of Group Representative Constituencies (GRC), Tremewan - without using the terminology - clearly distinguished between its manifest and latent rationales. Thirteen GRCs were introduced for the 1988 General Election. A GRC is created by merging three adjacent Single Member Constituencies (SMC) together.<sup>8</sup> Only a team of three candidates (usually from a single political party, but not necessarily) can stand in a GRC, and their prospects are therefore dependent on each other. The first-past-the-post system applies with the highest scoring team taking all seats. Tremewan showed that the manifest rationale was presented to the public in two phases. Firstly, the PAP argued that GRCs would have the same boundaries as the then proposed Town Councils. However, this received strong public criticism as its punitive implications for the Opposition were all too evident (beginning to reveal its true latent rationale). The PAP then decided to justify the scheme in terms of ensuring representation for racial minorities in Parliament by stipulating that a GRC team have one

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.206.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994)

<sup>8</sup> This was increased to between five and six SMCs per GRC by the 1997 General Election.

minority member (for instance, either a citizen with an Indian or Malay background).<sup>9</sup> The party did not state this initially, it argued, because it did not want to stir up 'racial tensions'. The PAP 'went to considerable lengths to convince the electorate of its sincerity in this'.<sup>10</sup> In doing so it released cabinet papers dating back to 1982 and allowed the Parliamentary Select Committee hearings on the bill to be televised. Lee Kuan Yew even put his case across on television.

Tremewan also illustrated what would be considered as the PAP's latent rationale for this scheme, one which approximated to gerrymandering. According to Tremewan, the GRC scheme was designed to raise the threshold of votes required by the Opposition to gain seats in Parliament.<sup>11</sup> It was intended to prevent future swings away from the PAP flowing through into an increased Opposition presence in Parliament. When the scheme was implemented in 1988, eight of the ten most marginal PAP seats from the 1984 General Election were placed in GRCs alongside safe PAP seats.<sup>12</sup> The introduction of GRCs was detrimental to the Opposition's prospects because they required more financial and human resources to succeed, resources which Opposition parties in Singapore lack.

In this thesis, the ideas of manifest and latent rationales will be applied and examined in relation to the NCMP and NMP schemes. The NCMP scheme's manifest rationale was three-fold. As presented by Lee Kuan Yew in 1984 it was introduced in order to:

1. Provide younger PAP MPs with 'sparring partners' as the government was in the process of a generational change among its members.
2. Provide credibility to the PAP.
3. Educate (younger) voters on the role of an 'Opposition'. (He appeared to regard this last measure as most important when giving the second reading of the Bill)

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<sup>9</sup> The major minority racial groups being Malay, Indian and Eurasian.

<sup>10</sup> Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control*, p. 167.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 166-7.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

The latent rationale begins to reveal itself through the third justification. It was intended to maintain PAP predominance in the political arena.

The NMP scheme's manifest rationale, as presented by then Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in 1989 was to introduce 'alternative' and 'non-partisan' views into the legislative process. Its latent rationale can be seen as co-opting individuals of high merit into the legislative process, which would provide the PAP with credibility as a Government. It was also intended to draw emphasis away from the elected Opposition by providing a third voice in Parliament.<sup>13</sup>

### **1.3 MITIGATED CRITICS AND REGIME CRITICS**

'Mitigated critics' and 'regime critics' are terms which I develop and apply directly to Opposition figures, and indirectly to non-PAP political figures (of which NMPs are of central importance). The terms are used to interpret the simple dichotomy projected by the PAP towards Opposition figures as either acceptable or unacceptable members of an 'opposition' respectively. In parlance more common to the PAP and Singapore politics, mitigated critics are portrayed as 'constructive' individuals, whereas regime critics are denigrated and seen as 'opposition for opposition sakes' or as 'gangsters' and 'thugs'. The use of this specific terminology is designed to enhance analysis of the PAP's discursive control over this moral/political divide. However, this fissure is important as it has a direct bearing on how Opposition figures (candidates, MPs and NCMPs) are 'treated' by the PAP.<sup>14</sup>

The regime critics among opposition politicians (labelled 'irresponsible' by the PAP) aim to drastically alter or completely change the political regime in Singapore through non-revolutionary tactics. This is because it was the PAP which created the regime in

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<sup>13</sup> More on the manifest and latent rationales for the NCMP and NMP schemes will ensue in chapters three and four respectively.

<sup>14</sup> 'Treated' refers both to the language used by the PAP when denouncing these critics – usually far more milder towards mitigated critics – and how far the PAP is willing to go to prevent an individual from participating in politics. The central method used in this regard is to bankrupt, or at least financially cripple an individual most commonly through the use of liable suits.

Singapore as it has been in government since self-rule in 1959.<sup>15</sup> The methods used by these individuals often breach what is acceptable political discourse for the PAP. The PAP attempts - usually with success - to prevent them entering the political system or gaining popularity in the public arena. Its methods include the use of smear campaigns and libel suits from individuals within the PAP. These tactics make political existence difficult for such individuals. Singapore voters have shied away from regime critics such as Chee Soon Juan.<sup>16</sup> Libel suits initiated by PAP MPs and ministers, often amounting to hundreds-of-thousands of dollars, have bankrupted regime critics, such as J.B. Jeyaretnam, leaving them ineligible to sit in Parliament or partake in elections.

The second group, the 'mitigated critics', still oppose PAP rule, but their criticism is far less severe. They understand that to have any influence, as little as it may be, they must work within the boundaries constructed by the PAP. It is these individuals who are looked upon more favourably and do not encounter the difficulties of the former group. However, there is a trade-off. These Opposition figures are seen, at least ostensibly, to accept the system and regime, which is directly linked to the PAP, therefore legitimising it through their participation. More on this point will be discussed in the case study chapters.

## **1.4 'A RADICAL VIEW OF POWER'**

We come now to the central theoretical theme of this work which is concerned with power. The nature of power structures in 'modern societies' was a much debated topic amongst social scientists, particularly from the 1950s through the 1970s.<sup>17</sup> Two schools of thought dominated this debate. First were 'stratification' theorists or 'elite' theorists. This group was dominated by sociologists with their interests in issues related to class.

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<sup>15</sup> This is a topic to be discussed further in the following chapter.

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Chee Soon Juan is a former lecturer in neurophysiology at the National University of Singapore and Secretary-General of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP). He has failed to be elected to Parliament in the three times he has stood. Another regime critic, J.B. Jeyaretnam, has through his popularity better-negotiated smear campaigns. Jeyaretnam was the Secretary-General of the Workers' Party from 1971 until 2001. In 1981, he became the first Opposition Member of Parliament since the Barisan Sosialis boycott in 1966.

<sup>17</sup> The 'modern societies' these social scientists concerned themselves with were western societies.



They argued that political life in these communities could be 'correctly described as being one in which governance proceeds through a relatively coherent "elite"'.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, 'pluralists', who tended to be political scientists, maintained that power is more widely dispersed amongst several competing and countervailing groups.

These two groups have brought various types of evidence to support their competing views of power. Elite theorists favoured a 'reputational' model first used in the mid-1950s. It consisted of surveying individuals designated as 'judges' who were considered 'well informed' and asking them to compile a list of the most influential people in their respective communities. Those individuals whose names appeared with the most recurrence were deemed to be the most powerful. Pluralists by contrast, tended to study 'key' decisions on some criteria in a number of pre-selected issue areas. Those individuals - or groups - who successfully initiated or opposed decisions were seen as the most powerful in that community.<sup>19</sup>

Steven Lukes', in his *Power: A Radical View*, has challenged previous approaches to the study of power holders, in particularly those of the pluralists. His central criticism of the pluralist approach - or what he called the 'one-dimensional view' - is that their analysis is too behaviourist:

[The] one-dimensional view of power involves a focus on *behaviour* in the making of *decisions* on *issues* over which there is an observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*, seen as express policy preferences, revealed by political participation.<sup>20</sup>

Lukes' central argument is that power does not always necessarily operate through 'conflict', a view which the pluralists maintained. Often, power is not observable, and people are at times unaware that their interests have been affected. Lukes also contests a criticism of pluralists which had been advanced by Peter Bachard and Morton S. Baratz.

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<sup>18</sup> Stewart Clegg, *The Theory of Power and Organisation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979). p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 46. For a prominent study applying the pluralist approach, see Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

<sup>20</sup> Lukes, *A Radical View*, p. 15. Emphasis in original.

This he labelled the 'two-dimensional View' of power. Bachard and Baratz argued that power could be seen to operate in 'non-decision making'. Hence, a particular party can be excluded from a decision making process. For them, a non-decision is:

a decision that results in suppression or thwarting of a latent or manifest challenge to the values or interests of the decision-maker... nondecision-making is a means by which demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges in the community can be suffocated before they are even voiced; or kept covert; or killed before they gain access to the relevant decision-making arena; or, failing all these things, maimed or destroyed in the decision-implementing stage of the policy process.<sup>21</sup>

Again in their own words:

Stated differently, can the researcher overlook the chance that some person or association could limit decision-making to relatively noncontroversial [*sic*] matters, by influencing community values and political procedures and rituals, notwithstanding that there are in the community serious but latent power conflicts?<sup>22</sup>

To Lukes, although this is a progressive step from the one-dimensional view, it remains inadequate. The problem remains in the fact that Bachard and Baratz, like pluralists, emphasise actual and observable conflict, be it overt or covert.

Lukes then presents his 'three-dimensional view' of power. He argues that

... the bias of the system is not sustained simply by a series of individually chosen acts, but also, most importantly, by the socially structured and culturally patterned

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Bachrach & Morton S. Baratz. *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). p. 44.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

behaviour of groups, and practices of institutions, which may indeed be manifested by individuals' *inaction*.<sup>23</sup>

For Lukes, power does not necessarily need conflict to exist. *A* wants to influence, shape and determine the wants of *B*.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have – that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?<sup>25</sup>

This can be evident in the control of information, through mass media and processes of socialisation and education. Referring to the dominant emphasis of pluralists that conflict was a major expression of power and its exercise, Lukes argues 'but this is to ignore the crucial point that the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place.'<sup>26</sup>

Lukes also makes use of the terms 'manifest' and 'latent'. In his radical view of power what was presented is *latent conflict*

which consists in a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the *real interests* of those they exclude ... The latter may not express or even be conscious of their interests, but, ... the identification of those interests ultimately always rests on empirically supportable and refutable hypotheses.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Lukes, *A Radical View*, pp. 21-2. Emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup> The use of 'A' and 'B' in this sense refers to agents (be they individuals or groups) which participate in the political arena (to a varying extent) and either vie for direct power or compete over particular decisions. *A* however, is seen to have the advantage in this power relationship. This topic shall be discussed below.

<sup>25</sup> Lukes, *A Radical View*, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 25. A necessary caveat: It should be clear from that quote, that his construction of latent and manifest have not informed this study. His claim that the 'identification of those interests ultimately always rests on empirically supportable and refutable hypotheses' is of central importance to some of his criticisms which will be discussed below.

For Lukes the relationship between power and interests is central. He states that 'I have defined the concept of power by saying that *A* exercises power over *B* when *A* affects *B* in a manner contrary to *B*'s interest'.<sup>28</sup> Hence, someone's wants may be the product of the system that works against their real interests. When there is no conflict of interests, or in a situation where what he calls 'consensual authority' exists, then power is not seen to operate.<sup>29</sup> Lukes is concerned with situations where *A* manipulates *B* to do something *B* would not otherwise *do*. Lukes uses the term "do" in a very wide sense, to include "think", "want", "feel" etc'.<sup>30</sup>

Importantly for this thesis and specifically for chapter five is the *identification* of *B*'s *real interests*, which Lukes casts within a brief discussion about the possibility of *A* exercising power over *B* in *B*'s real interests. Lukes envisages this scenario where a conflict of interests between both parties exists, but where *B* harbours observable 'subjective interests' and that *A*'s preferences are in *B*'s real interests.<sup>31</sup> He then constructs two responses to this quandary. First is the allowance for *A* to exercise 'short-term power' over *B*, yet once *B* realises its real interests, this power relationship ceases. The second is more dismissive of any such relationship, in that all or most forms of control by *A* over *B* when *B* objects or resists are in 'violation of *B*'s autonomy'.<sup>32</sup> Lukes suggests that both are flawed as the former can provide a 'paternalistic licence for tyranny', whilst the latter may descend into 'anarchy'. Whilst attracted to the second, he admits his inclination to adopt the first but cautions that *B*'s real interests must be identified on an 'empirical basis'. For this he insists that this identification would not be the task of *A*, but must be the duty of *B*, and that only *B* could properly identify them by

exercising choice under conditions of *relative autonomy* and, in particular, independently of *A*'s power - e.g. through *democratic participation*.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 33. Emphasis added.

In the case of Singapore, it will be argued that the PAP has maintained power through this Lukesean framework of manipulating the interests of Singaporeans, and averting conflict in decision making to achieve these ends. Hence 'relative autonomy' and 'democratic participation' are not present in Singapore under these conditions. I will go on to discuss how the NCMP and NMP schemes fit into this maintenance of power. The final chapter shall be concerned with how the NMP scheme may be a starting point to introduce 'relative autonomy' and 'democratic participation'.

#### 1.4.1 PRIMARY CRITICISMS OF LUKES' RADICAL VIEW OF POWER

It is necessary to deal with some of the central criticisms against Lukes' radical view of power, one of which surrounds the concept of power being 'essentially contested'. T. Benton<sup>34</sup> challenged Lukes on the status of the three views of power:

Lukes argues that *each*, including his own, is susceptible of empirical application, verification and falsification, but yet is 'ineradicably evaluative' and in consequences, 'essentially contested'.<sup>35</sup>

The actual section paraphrased by Benton above reads:

*I shall argue for a view of power* (that is a way of identifying it) which is radical in both the theoretical and political senses (and I take these senses in this context to be intimately related). *The view I shall defend is*, I shall suggest, ineradicably evaluative and 'essentially contested' on the one hand; and empirically applicable on the other.<sup>36</sup>

No mention of the other views of power being 'essentially contested' is therefore made here. Further in his work, however, Lukes did point out however, that 'the concept of

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<sup>34</sup> T. Benton, "'Objective' Interests and the Sociology of Power", In *Sociology* (Vol. 15, 1981).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 163-4. Emphasis added.

<sup>36</sup> Lukes, *A Radical View*, p. 9. Emphasis added.

power is ... what has been called an "essentially contested concept".<sup>37</sup> But he is referring to the concept of power, not the views. Nevertheless, Lukes' contention around the idea about power being 'essentially contested' is somewhat confusing. This was pointed out by Stewart Clegg<sup>38</sup> who interpreted 'essentially contested' - from Gallie<sup>39</sup> - as referring to one original exemplar, which authoritatively defines a concept, in this case, power. For Lukes, this exemplar is the oft-repeated line that 'A in some way affects B',<sup>40</sup> which Clegg pointed out stems from what Robert A. Dahl assumed to be 'original'.<sup>41</sup> Clegg suggested that Lukes went on to reject the idea that power, as an essentially contested concept, was once authoritatively defined. Clegg cited Lukes' explication of Talcott Parsons and Hannah Arendt's conceptualisations of power as contrary 'exemplars' to Dahl. However, Clegg here misconstrued Lukes who actually argued that both Parsons and Arendt's 'similar definitions of power' were

out of line with the central meanings of 'power' as traditionally understood and with the concerns that have always centrally preoccupied students of power. They focus on the locution 'power to', ignoring 'power over'. Thus power indicates a 'capacity', a 'facility', an 'ability', not a relationship. Accordingly, the conflictual aspect of power - the fact that it is exercised *over* people - disappears altogether from view.<sup>42</sup>

For Lukes, then, the important point (and that which Clegg failed to recognise) was that both authors defined the '(central) aspects of power' out of existence. In the case of Arendt, it seemed that she was concerned with the concepts of 'authority' and 'legitimacy',

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> Clegg, *Power and Organisation*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>39</sup> The notion of 'essentially contested' concepts derives from W. B. Gallie. One defining characteristic of an essentially contested concept being that it derives 'from an original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users of the concept'. Cited in Clegg, *Power and Organisation*, p. 4. Lukes uses Gallie as his foundation for understanding essentially contested, and comments in his annotated bibliography that Gallie '[e]xpounds the idea of there being concepts whose application is inherently a matter of dispute'. Lukes, *A Radical View*, p. 61.

<sup>40</sup> Lukes, *A Radical View*, p. 26.

<sup>41</sup> Clegg, *Power and Organisation*, p. 4. However, it should be noted that Weber variously defined power as 'the probability that an actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests'. Cited in Steven Lukes, 'Introduction' in Steven Lukes (Ed), *Power* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). p. 2. Hence, Weber focused on the 'power over' element which is the essence of exemplar used by Lukes but further particularised by Dahl.

<sup>42</sup> Lukes, *A Radical View*, p. 31. Emphasis in original.

not of 'power'. She constructed definitions of 'power', 'authority', 'strength', 'force' and 'violence' arguing that political science had neglected to distinguish these terms.<sup>43</sup> Arendt, Lukes argued, intentionally drew the concept of power away from both 'power over' and in particular its close - even indistinguishable - relationship with 'violence'. She therefore bifurcated both, arguing that violence is not power at all, that in fact, the act of violence signifies the loss or end of power; they are, for Arendt therefore, opposites. In claiming that 'violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it'<sup>44</sup> she suggested therefore that 'power needs no justification, being inherent in the very existence of political communities; what it does need is legitimacy.'<sup>45</sup> Power is not something an individual can possess. To be 'in power' refers to be 'empowered' by a certain number of individuals to act in their name. Arendt constructed a definition of 'power' which, taken *prima facie*, resembles authority, but then went on to define 'authority' in a different way in an attempt to avoid confusion.<sup>46</sup>

The problem here is that she drew power too far away from the essence of its more common everyday definition, creating something almost unrecognisable unless exchanged with the rubric *authority*. Arendt did not so much present a contrary exemplar to that adopted above, but rather something to circumscribe it by directing the concept of power down a theoretical impasse.

Parsons, who presented a similar definition of power, saw it as 'the *means* of acquiring control of the factors in effectiveness; it is not itself one of these factors.'<sup>47</sup> He went on to equate power with money in an economic system; that although both are highly valued, they serve only as a means to an ends. Power, for Parsons, must be 'legitimised' in terms

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<sup>43</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'Communicative Power' in Lukes (Ed) *Power*, p. 63. (chapter originally from Arendt's book *On Violence* first published in 1969).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-5. 'Authority', according to Arendt, is something that *can* be invested in individuals. 'Its hallmark is unquestioned recognition by those who are asked to obey; neither coercion nor persuasion is needed'. p. 65.

<sup>47</sup> Talcott Parsons, 'Power and the Social Systems' in Lukes (Ed) *Power*, p. 98. (originally from Parsons' piece 'On the Concept of Political Power' first published in 1963 in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, pp. 232-62).

of 'collective goals' so as to ensure that obligations are binding. Parsons did draw his discussion into the theme of '*A* may have power over *B*'<sup>48</sup> but only in the sense that it is binding, and that it only occurs by means of the exercise of authority. Hence, without authority, power loses its symbolic nature. As with Arendt, Parsons created a definition of power which is too closely drawn to authority. To adopt the original exemplar of power presented in Lukes, as this thesis does, is to see power in terms of *A* having power over *B*, or in some way affecting *B*, or - in a more specific way, doing so in a manner contrary to *B*'s real interests. Once the concept of authority is introduced, the discussion is drawn away from power.

As noted above, central to Lukes' theory is the notion of *interests*, and how the interests of *B* are manipulated by *A*. Hence overt conflict can be downplayed or avoided, but power nonetheless still exists and is exercised by *A*. A level of controversy has surrounded this issue of 'interests'. Clegg, in his criticism of Lukes'<sup>49</sup> third-dimension of power, pointed directly to what he believed was Lukes' insufficient explanation of interests. He argued that the foundation of substantiating what 'real interests' would be was not firmly established. He further asserted that Lukes' framework of power would have been strengthened had he adopted the 'ideal speech situation' of Habermas.<sup>50</sup> For Habermas, social action is explicable primarily through language. Only in a situation where language and communication are uninhibited can one see the unconstrained realisation of human interest in achieving rational truth and enlightenment. However, Clegg did concede that

Lukes, although he could have grounded his radical third dimension case more adequately in this way, would at the same time have emptied it of empirical applicability in all but the most open, communal and committed situations. It is precisely the absence of these conditions which is at issue.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>49</sup> Stewart R. Clegg, *Frameworks of Power* (London: Sage, 1989).

<sup>50</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 92-5.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 94.



The identification of real interests may also be inhibited - according to Benton - by the 'paradox of emancipation'.<sup>52</sup> According to Benton, identifying real interests is too difficult because Lukes argued that they are 'self-ascribed'. Hence the agents themselves are the arbiters of their own interests. Many conceivable problems can emerge according to Benton. Related to this is how individuals will be influenced by conditions to which they are subjected. Wall<sup>53</sup> pointed out that the choices made by someone addicted to heroin might not coincide with their real interests. However, this criticism must concede the fact that 'real interests' *are not* expressed by an individual addicted to heroin. Lukes does open the possibility of such a case when - as illustrated above - he recognised the likelihood of *A* exercising power over *B* in a manner not contrary to *B*'s interests, when *B* does not realise its real interests.<sup>54</sup>

Robert A. Dahl<sup>55</sup> has also criticised the relevance of interests in Lukes' radical view of power. He suggested that many cases where power is exercised are excluded by Lukes because they do not follow that '*A* affects *B* in a manner contrary to *B*'s interests'.<sup>56</sup> Here Dahl used the example of a responsible father not allowing his rambunctious son to play in the front yard, thus preventing the possibility of him running into the busy street. From Dahl's misinterpretation of Lukes, this does not involve power because the father *is* working in the son's interests. As stated above, Lukes does allow the possibility of power operating in the interests of *B*, when *B* does not realise his/her own real interests; for this suggests the possibility of 'short-term power' on behalf of *A*.<sup>57</sup> Dahl also criticised Lukes on the identification of interests:

The difficulty with deciding what constitutes *B*'s interests is that *our* judgement would be heavily dependent on *our* implicit or explicit theory of interests.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Benton, 'The Sociology of Power'.

<sup>53</sup> Cited in Clegg, *Frameworks of Power*, p. 95.

<sup>54</sup> Lukes, *A Radical View*, p. 33.

<sup>55</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall: 1991 [fifth edition, first published in 1963]).

<sup>56</sup> Lukes cited in *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>57</sup> Lukes, *A Radical View*, p. 33.

<sup>58</sup> Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, p. 30.

The problem with this criticism is that Lukes continued to maintain that the interests of *B* can only be determined by *B*.<sup>59</sup> Here though, Lukes did open his radical view of power to a 'moral relativism' for which both Benton<sup>60</sup> and Clegg<sup>61</sup> has both denounced him for. However, in such a debate, it would seem reasonable that if Lukes had in fact established a theoretical bases or set of value judgements associated with identifying real interests he would have than been criticised for being a 'universalist'.

Lukes advanced the dictum that real interests can emerge with *B* 'exercising choice under conditions of relative autonomy and, in particular, independently of *A*'s power - e.g. through democratic participation'.<sup>62</sup> Alan Bradshaw<sup>63</sup> outlined several problems with the above statement. He stated that under relative autonomy and in conditions of participatory democracy, 'such a procedure will lead to the crystallisation of *different preferences* (perhaps), but not necessarily to the revelation of "real interests"'.<sup>64</sup> The pivotal word here appears in parenthesis. Bradshaw cannot make this claim with any more certainty than the claim he is debunking. However, it is certain that real interests will more likely emerge under relative autonomy than under a relationship of power as Lukes envisages. In fact, at the very least, as Lukes<sup>65</sup> pointed out, Bradshaw conceded that even if the influence of *A* is removed, then other sources of power inimical to *B*, for instance *C*, could also exercise power over *B*. Lukes then suggests:

far from refuting my three-dimensional view of power, this argument actually *employs* it, since it postulates that other sources of (three-dimensional) power than *A* may shape *B*'s preferences, in a manner inimical to *B*.<sup>66</sup>

Benton questioned how much relative autonomy from *A* would be sufficient. He suggests that another source, for instance *C*, influences *B*.<sup>67</sup> Within any social system, the number

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<sup>59</sup> Lukes, *A Radical View*, p. 33.

<sup>60</sup> Benton, *The Sociology of Power*, p. 168.

<sup>61</sup> Clegg, *Frameworks of Power*, p. 86.

<sup>62</sup> Lukes, *A Radical View*, p. 33.

<sup>63</sup> Allan Bradshaw, 'A Critique of Steven Lukes' "Power: A Radical View"', in *Sociology* (Vol. 10, 1976).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121. Emphasis in original.

<sup>65</sup> Steven Lukes, 'Reply to Bradshaw'. In *Sociology* (Vol. 10: 1976).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129. Emphasis in original.

of groups who may have influence will be sizeable. Notwithstanding, these issues are relevant to the notion of interests in Lukes. However, to a certain extent, they are over emphasised. What must remain central is to understand that *A* influences the interests of *B*. Under this circumstance, a relationship of power operates. The radical view of power is therefore concerned with the manipulation of interests. 'Relative autonomy' and 'democratic participation' therefore become central in contesting such manipulation.

Bradshaw has advanced two further comments. Firstly, like Benton he argues that relative autonomy does not preclude interference from a third source of influence. This is a self-evident point, and is a necessary difficulty when dealing with real societies, as Lukes attempts to do. Nonetheless, it is not mandatory that a third source will intervene and even so, it cannot be determined - at a theoretical level - what this interference will achieve in relation to the realisation of interests. This is an issue that researchers will have to deal with in specific case studies considering the various social, economic, religious influences affecting particular societies. Secondly, Bradshaw points out that

... we cannot envisage a scenario in which any actor is somehow liberated from all structural conditions, and hence able to correctly identify what his real interests would be in the best of all possible worlds. Of course, Lukes is not suggesting that we can. But we take his method of exclusion of power subjects to an *absurd* length in order demonstrate that, if we cannot agree that the removal of *A* constitutes 'relative autonomy' for *B*, the removal of subsequent power subjects would bring us ever closer to a ridiculously barren, asocial arena.<sup>68</sup>

Here, Bradshaw is stretching a possible argument, which, he conceded, Lukes is not a party to in the first place. As acknowledged by Clegg, Lukes did not search for real interests in a 'ridiculously barren, asocial arena'.<sup>69</sup> Clegg pointed out that this is possibly

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<sup>67</sup> This is a point also made by Bradshaw, 'A Critique of Steven Lukes', p. 121.

<sup>68</sup> Bradshaw, 'A Critique of Steven Lukes', pp. 121-2. Emphasis added.

<sup>69</sup> Clegg, *Frameworks of Power*, p. 94.

why he ignored suggesting an 'ideal speech situation'. In his reply to Bradshaw, Lukes did point out that he 'nowhere speak[s] of absolute autonomy'.<sup>70</sup>

Lukes' work is concerned with finding an empirical basis for identifying real interests. Again, dealing with specific case studies will introduce such quandaries for the researcher, but here Bradshaw's only achievement was to further cloud a simple difficulty, not to reveal a central flaw.

The final area of criticism to examine is that revolving around 'structure' and 'agency'. The preceding discussion was intended to point out that the search for 'real interests' under a situation of 'relative autonomy' and 'democratic participation' is not clear cut and has been criticised. Notwithstanding, it should not be seen as a cul-de-sac for this line of inquiry. What should remain central is that under a relationship of power as Lukes postulates in *Power: A Radical View*, real interests are subjected to manipulation by the power holder. Lukes therefore suggests that in empirical situations, real interests can be identified under relative autonomy and democratic participation. Entering this situation is therefore central and dealt with in Chapter five. Chapter five will focus on the possibility that the NMP scheme, or more specifically the individuals within it, are beginning to push the PAP into developing politics in Singapore towards more relative autonomy and democratic participation.

## 1.5 THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE THREE

The theoretical themes and concepts presented above are connected through the final and central theme. Primarily, a connection can be clearly drawn between the first (that of manifest and latent rationales) and the last (the radical view of power). It is necessary for the power holder, in this case the People's Action Party, in the task of manipulating interests, to conceal how it goes about manipulating political power in Singapore, while simultaneously maintaining 'legitimacy' through the appearance of procedural parliamentary democracy. In the case of my identification of mitigated critics and regime

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<sup>70</sup> Lukes, 'Reply to Bradshaw', p. 129.

critics and the relationship of these concepts with the radical view of power, we can note in the case of Singapore that it is fundamental for the power holder (the PAP) not to allow alternative ideas of political action and discourse to become valid. If this is permitted, then its manipulation of interests becomes threatened because the PAP's centrality in defining the nature of politics and the foundations of the one-party regime will be eroded. This is only a basic sketch of the relationship between the three, however, this relationship will be developed through the next four chapters.

Before moving on it is also important to foreground an understanding of 'informal' co-optation. Bertocchi and Spagat<sup>71</sup> focused on opposition to the State in post-Soviet Russia, where the main concern with the opposition is to lead a revolution. The theory of co-optation concerns the ruling elite co-opting from a group which threatens creating a third group which has something to lose in an upheaval. Bertocchi and Spagat argued that 'a common response of governments that face such threats is to co-opt the potential opposition.'<sup>72</sup> For the purposes of this thesis and in relation to Singapore informal co-optation is a term reserved for mitigated critics. The PAP only intends to informally co-opt individuals who are considered mitigated critics, this will be discussed in later chapters. It is 'informal' because it is an unofficial arrangement, which, in reality, the co-opted individual would deny. However, by simply participating in the system within the boundaries set by the ruling elite, they appear to legitimise it. More about this topic will be discussed in the following chapters.

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<sup>71</sup> Graziella Bertocchi, & Michael Spagat, 'The Politics of Co-optation'. In *Journal of Comparative Economics*. (Vol. 29. Iss. 4. Dec, 2001).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 592

# CHAPTER TWO

## Depoliticisation and the PAP

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter, drawing on the theoretical introduction in the previous chapter, will attempt to cast the discussion of Singapore politics within a Lukesean framework of power. It is informed by the argument of Chan Heng Chee that:

one of the most significant developments in Singapore politics in the last decade [beginning with the merger in 1963] has been the steady and systematic *depoliticisation* of a politically active and aggressive citizenry.<sup>1</sup>

As Chan suggests, Singapore has become depoliticised. In support of this view, she offers a working definition of politics:

In this context, politics refers to the phenomenon of democratic politics where groups of people unite behind different leaderships to compete, bargain and negotiate in the shaping of political power and to influence or control policy directions. This view of politics sees politics as a legitimate continuous activity throughout the year rather than a sporadic concentration of activity once every five years at election time.<sup>2</sup>

Her argument is that the People's Action Party (PAP) had intentionally drawn politics away from the general public arena. It is the bureaucratic arena where true political vying occurs. This chapter will attempt to illustrate that the depoliticisation process in

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<sup>1</sup> Chee Heng Chee, 'Politics in an Administrative State: Where has the Politics gone'. In Ong Jin Hui, et. Al (Eds), *Understanding Singapore Society* (Singapore: Times Academic Press 1997). p. 294. Emphasis added. (Chapter originally appeared in *Trends in Singapore* published in 1975. pp. 51-68).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

Singapore can be interpreted through Lukes' radical view of power. Simply put, in a situation where (to paraphrase Lukes) *A* manipulates the interests of *B*, it is impossible for 'groups of people unite behind different leaderships to compete, bargain and negotiate in the shaping of political power and to influence or control policy directions'.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Singapore, as Chan suggested, since 1963, there has developed a situation where there is no continuous competition between groups to shape political power and influence policy direction. In establishing this, she examines three likely 'arenas' where political competition is significant. The first is the 'general arena'. This is the public arena, the arena where political discussion and competition should occur if a society is not to be depoliticised. Chan points out<sup>4</sup> that the political space in Singapore had become very narrow, dominated by newspaper columns and 'rumour-mongering'.<sup>5</sup> The second arena she identifies, the 'party arena' (specifically referring to the PAP), has seen no real vying for political power since the party split in 1961. It was the political infighting between the two factions within the party which led to the victorious faction under Lee Kuan Yew controlling the party from the top, in effect depoliticising it by excluding alternative views within the party.

It is relevant to the discussion to outline briefly the emergence of the PAP in the mid-1950s. After returning from his studies in England, Lee Kuan Yew gained prominence in Singapore by representing a postal union. Through this, he became associated with the left in Singapore, who were unfairly labelled as 'communists'. This group had been made up of the more recent Chinese immigrants to Singapore, those who had not been greatly exposed to the British or the English language, a group of which Lee Kuan Yew was not a member. This 'Chinese educated' group established its own schools, and very much lived in a world apart from the English educated, English speaking group.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>4</sup> At the time of writing in 1975 of course.

<sup>5</sup> Chee, 'Politics in an Administrative state', pp. 296-9.

<sup>6</sup> For what follows, two factions within the PAP will be of discussion, the first shall be labelled the 'English educated faction' which was headed by Lee Kuan Yew, and includes others such prominent figures as Goh Keng Swee. This was a group of Chinese who were very exposed to the British and the English language. The other, the 'Chinese educated' faction, includes individuals such as Fong Swee Suan and Chan Chiaw Thor.

Eventually, Lee Kuan Yew and his cohorts invited the Chinese educated faction to join with them form the PAP under the common banner of anti-colonialism.<sup>7</sup> This marriage of convenience was realised because both groups needed each other politically. The English educated faction presented the other faction with a respectable face, one which its British colonisers could accept. Without this, the Chinese educated faction would have found their political task more difficult. For the English educated faction, the Chinese educated faction represented a group, which could help the party draw mass support from the majority Chinese population.<sup>8</sup>

Major differences in approach emerged between the factions, particularly in terms of Singapore's relations with Malaya after self-rule was achieved in Singapore in 1959. The English educated faction could not recognise independence without merger with Malaysia, which the Chinese educated faction clearly opposed. However, the split occurred because the Chinese educated faction could not gain control of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the PAP, which is the organ with control over PAP policy direction.<sup>9</sup> Whilst the Chinese educated faction commanded mass support for the PAP in its early period, the English educated faction controlled the CEC. In 1958, the English educated faction restructured the electoral procedure for the CEC. Lee Kuan Yew admitted in his memoirs that he altered the system to resemble that of the selection of the Pope. In his own words:

The amended [PAP] constitution established two classes of party membership: ordinary members ... and cadre members, a select few hundred who would be

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<sup>7</sup> Beng-Huat Chua, *Communitarian Ideology in Singapore* (London: Routledge: 1995). pp. 11.

<sup>8</sup> This point is made by several scholars including: Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy*, p. 11-2; Michael D. Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Beliefs Behind the Man* (Surrey: Curzon Press: 2000). pp. 20-1; Garry Rodan, *The Political Economy of Singapore's Industrialisation: National State and International Capital* (Basingstoke : Macmillan, 1989). p. 57; &, Christopher Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994). p. 19. It must be noted however, that the English Educated and Chinese Educated factions are somewhat simplistic, Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 21, argued that indeed it was three groups: 1) Chinese-educated communists, 2) English-educated communists and left-wingers, and 3) English-educated anti-communists. Lee Kuan Yew himself argued though that another group could be included, the Malay blue- and white-collar workers. For which see Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Vol. One). (Singapore: Simon & Schuster under Prentice Hall, 1998). p. 113.

<sup>9</sup> Its membership is small and largely coincides with cabinet membership.



approved by the central executive committee. Only cadres who had been chosen by the CEC could in turn vote for candidates to the CEC, just as only cardinals nominated by a Pope could elect the Pope. This closed the circuit, and since the CEC controlled the core of the party, the party could not now be captured.<sup>10</sup>

So successful was this restructure by Lee Kuan Yew that the PAP has been firmly controlled by a key group of party cadres ever since.. This in effect depoliticised the PAP: it is a party where decisions are made at the top.

The final arena Chan identifies is the 'bureaucratic arena'. She argues that the most 'meaningful politics' in Singapore occurs at this level. The bureaucracy in Singapore plays a more pre-eminent role in Government than generally seen around the world.<sup>11</sup> This is due in large manner to 'the vast deployment of governmental development activities in non-conventional areas'.<sup>12</sup> What is important to note is that politics has been removed from the general public arena of debate and contestation, and what follows is an examination of this process and its connection to the argument of this thesis.

## **2.2 DEPOLITICISING SINGAPORE POLITICS**

The remainder of this chapter shall be concerned with establishing how the PAP has created a situation resembling that as outlined by Lukes in his radical view of power. Some consideration will be given to the actual methods used by the PAP to 'depoliticise' Singapore, including the circumscribing of the Opposition, and the PAP's relationship with trade unions and the media. However, it will not go into great depth on these issues as they have been outlined in great detail by scholars of the Singapore state. More time will be spent establishing the ideological framework that the PAP has imposed on its citizenry, one which establishes the PAP as the only viable government for Singapore.

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<sup>10</sup> Lee, *The Singapore Story*, p. 287.

<sup>11</sup> Chee, 'Politics in an Administrative State', pp. 301-2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

### 2.2.1 METHODS OF DEPOLITICISATION

The PAP began to control the election process from early in its existence as a government. The primary method in the early 1960s was the use of the Internal Security Act (ISA). The most insidious use of the ISA in Singapore came in February 1963 when the PAP detained 111 Opposition leaders in 'Operation Coldstore'. This virtually crippled the chances of the Opposition in the ensuing election that year. Also reinforcing this measure was the manipulation of the electoral system in the lead up to that election. The electoral campaign period was reduced to the constitutional minimum of nine days.<sup>13</sup> This in reality only applied to the Opposition as Lee Kuan Yew began touring all constituencies almost one year prior to election day. Through 'state festivities' proclaiming the creation of Malaysia during that election, the PAP received maximum publicity. The PAP hindered the Opposition's ability to access printing facilities immediately after calling the election and pressured the official printer of the *Barisan Sosialis*<sup>14</sup> publication to cease publication. It also obstructed the booking of public places for Opposition rallies. In addition it froze the bank accounts of the three largest *Barisan*-linked unions three days before nomination day.<sup>15</sup>

These were some of the initial moves by the PAP which ultimately created a situation in Singapore where *A* (the PAP) manipulated the interests of *B*.<sup>16</sup> To quote Lukes again:

Indeed, is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have – that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Which has largely remained the same in the nine following General Elections.

<sup>14</sup> The *Barisan Sosialis*, or 'Socialist Front' was the party created from the Chinese Educated faction which split from the PAP in 1961.

<sup>15</sup> Tremewan, *The Political Economy*, pp. 153-4.

<sup>16</sup> Through a reading of Lukes and even his critics, it can be envisaged that *B* refers to both the populace at large and, more specifically though, the Opposition.

<sup>17</sup> Lukes, *A Radical View*, p. 23.

Significant in developing this situation is the veiling of alternative platforms, which may cause *B* to become aware of his/her real interests.<sup>18</sup> Once in government the PAP began to extend the reach of its control. It began to manipulate two critical institutions that had the potential to provide an alternative view of politics for Singaporeans: trade unions, and the media.

Due to industrial strife in the lead up to self-government during the 1950s which presented major difficulties to both the Marshall and Lim administrations, the PAP was aware of how damaging such events could be. In 1964 trade unions were brought into the fold of the PAP-backed National Trade Union Congress (NTUC). The NTUC moved unions in Singapore away from their 'confrontational' relationship with employers and replaced it with 'mutual trust and co-operation'. The 1968 Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act prohibited strike action and lock-outs.<sup>19</sup> The concept of 'tripartitism' emerged, where Government, Business and Labour worked together for stability and economic progress. This however was a way for the PAP to contain trade unions. The NTUC also initiated the breakdown of large unions into smaller 'house unions'.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to note that there exists a close relationship between the NTUC and the PAP. The Secretary-General of the NTUC is a PAP cabinet member. Lee Kuan Yew once even said that:

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.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> They may also expose *B* to other interests which are not necessarily real interests. This point was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, pertaining to the possible influence of *C* over *B*. Notwithstanding, it is central for *A* that *B*'s interests are manipulated in a direction concurrent with its own, hence the elimination of other likely influences is of major consideration. This is indeed what the PAP started to do in that election and continued to do as shall follow.

<sup>19</sup> Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy*, p. 61.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61.

<sup>21</sup> A cited in *ibid.*, p. 61.

The PAP has maintained that through having non-confrontational trade unions, Singapore is able to position itself well to attract foreign investment, and to keep both employment and economic growth healthy. Yet, the PAP has realised that trade unions could influence Singaporeans and serve as a major moral and financial supporter to opposition parties, as it had done with the *Barisan Sosilas*. Hence, it created such a close relationship with the only legally permitted trade union body.

The media are another, in particular the print media, is another institution in Singapore which the PAP has controlled in an effort to manipulate the interests of *B*. The PAP passed laws in 1974 ordering newspapers to provide a percentage of shares to Singapore citizens or government approved organisations. Through acquiring control over shares in newspapers, the PAP was able to develop an influence over administrative and editing staff. The PAP also prohibited newspapers receiving foreign funds without government approval. The PAP also obtained management shares in the Straits Times Group and Chinese papers, enabling it as the government to place nominees on company and editorial boards. By the beginning of the 1980s, Lee Kuan Yew wanted to see more competition in the newspaper industry. However, the election of J. B. Jeyaretnam in 1981<sup>22</sup> saw Lee Kuan Yew change his mind. By the end of the 1980s Singapore Press Holdings<sup>23</sup> held a major monopoly.<sup>24</sup> In lieu of critical analysis of government policy, what tends to be produced in the media is simple reporting of the events in Parliament and statements made by cabinet members. The media are to be 'pro-government' in order to 'advance public interests', 'as defined by the PAP'.<sup>25</sup> This point was re-enforced by Carolyn Choo who suggested that the media in Singapore was forced to fall behind the PAP government's 'nation-building' policies.<sup>26</sup> Diane K. Mauzy and R. S. Milne have pointed out that although the PAP argues that it does not have control over the editorial

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<sup>22</sup> The first Opposition member returned since independence.

<sup>23</sup> Singapore Press Holdings is a state company which in the past has been chaired by former PAP ministers such as Lim Kim San.

<sup>24</sup> Derek Davis, 'The Press', In Michael Haas (Ed), *The Singapore Puzzle* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999). pp. 82-91.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph B. Tamney, *The Struggle over Singapore's Soul: Western Modernisation and Asian Culture* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1996). p. 61.

<sup>26</sup> Carolyn Choo, *Singapore: The PAP & the Problem of Political Succession* (Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 1985). p. 38-47.

policy of newspapers, it will censure them if their editorials are 'inappropriate' and not in the 'national interests'.<sup>27</sup> Or, in the words of *Straits Times* journalist Cherian George:

In liberal democracies, it is all about freedom of the press from government; in Singapore, it is about the government's freedom from the press... The PAP therefore maintains that the press should be independent, but subordinate to an elected government... The government continues to assert that only it can be in charge of the national agenda; and that the press must never confuse Singaporeans or the world outside as to what that national agenda is.<sup>28</sup>

Local radio and television in Singapore were fully controlled until recently by the Singapore Broadcasting Company.<sup>29</sup>

The late 1990s saw the PAP allow further competition in both the television and newspaper industries. However, this has not led to a shift in editorial stance. The basic premise of the PAP that media remain 'pro-government' in order to 'advance public interest' has not changed.

This has been a brief sketch of some of the methods used by the PAP to construct a situation where the interests of B are manipulated in order to depoliticise the 'general arena'. What follows, which is more central to this thesis, is the ideology that the PAP has constructed and disseminated to support this.

### **2.2.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEPOLITICISATION**

Two methods used by the PAP shall be examined here. Firstly, from early after Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia, the PAP constructed an image of itself as the only

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<sup>27</sup> Diane K. Mauzy, & R. S. Milne, *Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party* (London: Routledge, 2002). p. 138.

<sup>28</sup> Cherian George, *Singapore: The Air-Conditioned Nation* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 2000). p. 69-70.

<sup>29</sup> Tamney, *The Struggle over Singapore's Soul*, p. 61.

possible Government capable of leading Singapore forward, particularly in an economic sense. It was able to do this because Singapore was only just emerging from a tumultuous period of racial rioting, industrial strife and political unrest; and of course, Singapore's chances of survival at the time were bleak on account of its small size and population. A clear sense of anxiety amongst Singaporeans emerged, especially because the PAP had always emphasised that Singapore could not survive alone, and that merger with Malaysia was its only option. Capitalising on this anxiety, the PAP presented itself as the only Government capable of doing what was necessary to ensure Singapore would survive, through this the PAP gained wide support. Hence, the PAP had the possibility to enmesh itself with the state, and construct its own regime. By tying itself to the regime, the PAP could challenge any individual who threatened the party and articulated its policies as an opponent of the regime, the state, and ultimately the country.

Secondly, during the 1980s, the PAP became aware that electoral support was starting to wane. Since the *Barisan* boycott after separation, no Opposition member had sat in Parliament. But during the 1980s voter support for the Opposition in percentage terms increased along with Opposition presence in Parliament.<sup>30</sup> One of the methods used by the PAP to reverse this trend, and to maintain its position, was to use a cultural argument to justify its why its authority should be 'secure'.

Michael Leifer, in his succinct analysis of Singapore's foreign policy, pointed out that the 'vulnerability' resulting from separation in 1965 on Singapore saw the PAP push the notion of 'survival' in its foreign policy.<sup>31</sup> Leifer went on to say:

An idiom of survival, with attendant assertive prescriptions, was transmitted to the body politic at large to become the dominant theme of public life. It served a domestic function in seeking to demonstrate that the PAP government had not lost its political will despite the trauma of separation. The mobilisation of Singapore's

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<sup>30</sup> Electoral support for the Opposition increased over the 1984, 1988 and 1991 General Elections, the trend was reversed in the following two elections in 1997 and 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Leifer, *Singapore's Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability* (London: Routledge, 2000). p. 56.

public through such an ideology was deemed to be necessary in the light of the radical change of political circumstances...<sup>32</sup>

The point here to note is that although separation from Malaysia presented numerous quandaries for the PAP, it also provided the party with an opportunity to galvanise public support behind it, because, without stable, effective government, Singapore would not 'survive'. This is a point supported by Cho-Oon Khong who, in his analysis of political legitimacy through the 'management of conformity' in Singapore argues that 'recognition of its [the PAP's] claim to power was based originally on a shared perception of external threat'.<sup>33</sup> Khong's study, partially informed by Chee's argument discussed above, illustrates how the PAP projected itself after independence. Lee Kuan Yew used the promise of economic performance to 'legitimate his rule' during the early stages of independence. To do so he required efficient administration, hence Lee and his small coterie forged a 'tactical alliance' with certain social groups, including the civil service, military, local business, trade unions and intelligentsia. By doing so the PAP was able to 'insulate itself from society'.<sup>34</sup>

The most notable tactical alliance was that forged with the civil service:

This group, in particular, comprised technocrats who had little sympathy for *political conflict* and viewed the *bargaining* and *competition* of the earlier democratic process as *irrelevant distractions*, potentially destabilising for the process of economic growth.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>33</sup> Cho-Oon Khong, 'Singapore: Political Legitimacy Through Managing Conformity', in Muthiah Alagappa (Ed), *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority* (California: Stanford University Press, 1995). p. 109.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 112. Emphasis added. Later, Khong even pointed out that the party itself had taken a subordinate role to that of top political leadership which increasingly draws its members from the bureaucracy. This should not be surprising because, as expounded above, Lee Kuan Yew established the CEC to be insulated from the party, and as Choo pointed out above, the 'party arena' had become depoliticised.

This type of attitude fostered disdain for varied opinions (or interests) running through society; such differences led to negative consequences, including ‘political conflict’, ‘bargaining’, ‘competition’, or issues deemed to be ‘irrelevant distractions’ from the main task of administering an efficient state. Khong asserts that the ‘style of political rule’ may be characterised as a kind of ‘predestined determinism’.<sup>36</sup> Hence, the ‘ruling elite’ set the goals for Singapore and how they were to be pursued. In so doing the ruling elite eliminated ‘freedom of choice’ for individuals in the economic, social and political arenas, hence generating a process of ‘systematic depoliticisation’.<sup>37</sup> Khong follows with a salient point that a hallmark of ‘pluralist liberal democracy’ is ‘open negotiation between competing groups’, something Singapore lacks. Whilst he dismisses ‘alienation’ and ‘thorough repression’, he does later admit in his discussion that the ‘political culture’ in Singapore

is essentially dependent and derivative, unable to formulate or express coherent alternatives of its own to set against the official truth. Instead of expressing alternatives, the culture results in the making of demands on the ruling elite. To the extent that these demands are satisfied, further demands are then made on the leadership. Indeed, the concern of the elite is that these demands can grow quite insatiable through feeding on themselves.<sup>38</sup>

Hence, choice being removed from *B* is a crucial element in affecting and channeling interests. As briefly demonstrated above, through manipulating the electoral system, trade unions and the media, the PAP has been able to achieve this.

Additionally, the circumstances surrounding independence provided the PAP leadership with the opportunity to design a ‘political regime’ to fit its ‘desired image’, one which could withstand and deflect any concerted challenge.<sup>39</sup> The result has been the creation in Singapore of a political landscape where there is an atypically close connection between

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<sup>36</sup> Khong, ‘Singapore’, p. 114.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 115.



regime and government and where the political institutions are crafted by a particular ruling group to serve its interests. Here, the crux of the argument emerges, that ‘any challenge to the legitimacy of the government therefore becomes inevitably a challenge to the nature of the political regime’.<sup>40</sup> It is also important to realise the relationship between the political leadership of the PAP and the Government which are projected as virtually indistinguishable. This is noted by Bilveer Singh who points out that ‘all key offices in the Party are held by ministers in the Government and this mainly ensured the close identification of the Party with the Government’.<sup>41</sup> Mauzy and Milne also argue that the longer the PAP stays in Government, the harder it will be to distinguish the two.<sup>42</sup> In 1982, Lee Kuan Yew went so far as to admit this in his remarks: ‘[t]he PAP is at the heart of this nation ... I make no apologies that the PAP is the government and the government is the PAP’.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, the exercise of distinguishing between the regime and government on the one hand, and nation-state on the other, is a task with added difficulties in the case of Singapore. This is because the ‘state’ itself was the construction of the current political leadership, and that through the circumstances of Singapore having ‘independence thrust upon it’,<sup>44</sup> the creation of the nation followed the creation of the state. Hence:

[i]nsofar as the state was the creation of a particular political leadership, questions of legitimacy directed towards the government and impinging on the political regime may possibly extend even further to the nation-state itself.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>41</sup> Bilveer Singh, *Whither PAP's Dominance?: An Analysis of Singapore's 1991 General Election* (Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 1992). p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Mauzy & Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> Cited in Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 47.

<sup>44</sup> Lee, *The Singapore Story*, p. 22.

<sup>45</sup> Khong, ‘Singapore’, p. 116. Khong also illustrated that during the 1984 General Election, Lee Kuan Yew characterised support for the Opposition as irresponsible, p. 132. This, and the more so the discussion of the connection between government/regime/nation-state, touches on the distinction between Opposition figures as ‘mitigated critics’ or ‘regime critics’ explicated in the first chapter for use in the case study chapters. Regime critics receive heavy treatment from the PAP, because unlike mitigated critics, there criticisms of the PAP manifest (intentionally or not) as criticisms of the regime and/or nation-state. More on this will followed up in the next chapter.

Soon after J. B. Jeyaretnam's election in 1981, Lee Kuan Yew tried to redefine the People's Action Party as a 'national movement' rather than as a mere political party. Hence, the PAP tried to mould itself in a similar vein to Indonesia's Golkar under Soeharto.<sup>46</sup> The PAP even amended its party constitution to update and redefine its objectives. The amended preamble stated that the PAP 'shall be a national movement dedicated to the service of our nation and to the advancement of the well-being of our people'.<sup>47</sup> The double-reading in this, on the one hand, presents the PAP as a caring party working for Singapore; and on the other hand, it projects itself as the only party to do so.

It is interesting that the party tried to project itself as a national movement, when in fact the party is simply a veneer which screens a small group which really governs.<sup>48</sup> Mauzy and Milne have argued that the move away from the party started early after the party split in 1961 which saw the PAP lose a large number of branches to the *Barisan*. Consequently, the PAP leadership became wary of branch organisations and party activities.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, they argued, the PAP tends to utilise government para-political organisations for functions commonly associated with party branches. Branches are not involved with selection of candidates – not surprisingly done by the CEC – nor are they associated with policy formation.<sup>50</sup> Even as early as 1969, CEC member S. Rajaratnam suggested that the party no longer played a major role in political life.<sup>51</sup> Hence, when PAP leaders talk about the 'PAP' they are not referring to the party, because power is confined to the CEC, and in fact, when party leaders talk about the PAP, they are talking about the government, Mauzy and Milne make this point well:

Indeed, the PAP leaders view the party as a key 'national institution' holding the country together, and not just an ordinary political party. There are other important

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<sup>46</sup> Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 32. This is when Lee Kuan Yew remarked that the Government and PAP were the same.

<sup>47</sup> As cited in Bilveer, *Whither PAP's Dominance?*, p. 38.

<sup>48</sup> This point has been made above pertaining to the CEC/cadre system, that the members in the CEC and cabinet are the same and that power has shifted away from the party towards the bureaucracy.

<sup>49</sup> Mauzy & Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 43.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43. Also, Mauzy and Milne note that party workers are not considered for candidacy, this is also not surprising as the leadership is overly concerned with having talented individuals stand.

<sup>51</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 49.

institutions, they admit, but these are not designed to govern the state. Only the PAP can do this; there is *no alternative*. In fact, when they talk about the PAP, generally, they mean the government.<sup>52</sup>

### 2.2.3 SIGNS OF RESISTANCE TO DEPOLITICISATION AND THE PAP RESPONSE

As noted earlier, the 1980s saw voter support for the Opposition increase, concurrently with a rise in Opposition numbers in Parliament.<sup>53</sup> One of the reasons behind this was simply generational change in Singapore. Most Singapore voters up until 1980 could still remember societal problems experienced in the 1950s and 1960s. This was a major justification for PAP domination of politics, that an unstable liberal democratic system could not prevent social dislocation and division. However, beginning into the 1980s, the voter demographic began to see an increase in the number of Singaporeans who did not experience Singapore in this way. This slide in support for the PAP could, if left unchecked, manifest itself in an erosion of its power. A descending level of deference for the PAP, coupled with an ascending level of Opposition influence in society would be detrimental for the PAP. This is because it would have a negative impact on *A*'s ability to manipulate the interests of *B*. Therefore, it became necessary for the PAP to respond in order to maintain its political power.

One such move by the PAP beginning in the late 1980s/early 1990s was to attempt to push Asian cultural traditions, particularly Chinese, to the forefront, arguing how central general customs and traditions are to Asia. Notions of deference and filial piety were propelled and given added significance. This direction taken by the PAP falls in line with the 'Asian values' debate of the 1990s. Asian values is a notion rejecting the principles within liberal democracy, and finds value in the 'community' and 'group' questioning the 'West's',<sup>54</sup> obsession with individualism. Proponents of Asian values draw much from

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 50. Emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup> The high point for the Opposition since independence came in the 1991 General Election with the PAP acquiring only 61 percent of votes cast and three seats going to the Singapore Democratic Party with one to Workers' Party.

<sup>54</sup> Here the West refers to Western Europe, and the North American, but particularly the United States.

‘cultural relativism’, which asserts that constructing rules about morality must be a contextual exercise due to cultural differences.<sup>55</sup>

In 1998, Wang Gungwu argued that the Asian values debate began in Singapore in the 1980s. The PAP decided to introduce a course on Confucian ethics in Singapore’s secondary school system. It was introduced to complement ethics based courses on religious teaching including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. However, the proposal was criticised by the region’s press as an attempt by Lee Kuan Yew to justify authoritarianism.<sup>56</sup> Tamney described this move by the PAP as the ‘Religious Studies Experiment’.<sup>57</sup> Tamney points out that ‘the RK [Religious Knowledge] program was undermined by the inconsistency between the commitment to rational education and the desire to indoctrinate’.<sup>58</sup>

In an interview in 1994, Lee Kuan Yew argued that certain facets of Western (Particularly US) culture are virtuous, yet there are

... parts of it [which are] totally unacceptable: guns, drugs, violent crime, vagrancy, unbecoming behaviour in public - in sum the breakdown of civil society. The expansion of the right of the individual to behave or misbehave as he pleases has come at the expense of orderly society.<sup>59</sup>

As pointed out by Fareed in his concluding remarks, ‘[t]he dominant theme throughout our conversation was culture’.<sup>60</sup> The interviewer probed issues concerning culture as a stabilising and progressive force for economic growth, but did not explore the issue of culture dictating the political system. Nevertheless, the reader does catch a glimpse of this rationale. Referring to East Asia, Lee Kuan Yew argued that the individual exists

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<sup>55</sup> R. J. Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations* (New York: Cambridge, 1986). P. 37.

<sup>56</sup> Minh Bui, ‘Asian Roadrage’, In *AQ: Journal of Contemporary Analysis*. (Vol 71, Issue 6 November-December, 1999). p. 33.

<sup>57</sup> Tamney, *The Struggle over Singapore’s Soul*, chapter two.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Fareed Zakaria, ‘Culture is Destiny: A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew’, in *Foreign Affairs* (73.2, 1994). p. 111.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

within the family, and would not consider themselves 'pristine' or 'separate'.<sup>61</sup> He later referred to notions such as 'strict discipline' and 'deference'. Lee has also been quoted as saying: 'It is not a tradition with the Malays nor the Chinese to count heads; their custom has always been to listen to the dictum of the elder'.<sup>62</sup>

This political system in Singapore, which the PAP has recently argued is influenced by its 'Asian' culture, has been established in order to create a stable and minimal democratic system. Bilveer Singh defines it as a predominant party system, whereby other political parties are allowed to exist and contest regular elections, but where the PAP indubitably triumphs.<sup>63</sup> The relationship between culture, politics and the state was best expressed in the government's White Paper on *Shared Values* presented to Singapore in 1990, which are as follows:

- Nation before community and society above the self
- Family as the basic unit of society
- Regard and community respect for the individual
- Consensus instead of contention
- Racial and religious harmony.<sup>64</sup>

This White Paper attracted considerable scholarly attention and criticism.<sup>65</sup> It is useful to highlight some of the themes which run through the 'cultural' debate in Singapore. To begin with, John Clammer has aptly dissected the White Paper.<sup>66</sup> Like many PAP initiatives, latent and manifest rationales can be discerned. For the former, the

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<sup>61</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Nick Knight, *Thinking about Asia: An Australian Introduction to East and Southeast Asia* (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2000). p. 226.

<sup>63</sup> Bilveer, *Wither PAP's Dominance*, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> White Paper. (1991). *Shared Values*. Singapore National Printers: Singapore. p. 10. It was tabled in Parliament in January 1991.

<sup>65</sup> A survey of texts which discuss the White Paper and its implications include: Khong, 'Singapore', pp. 123-7; Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy*, pp. 31-5, &; John Clammer, 'Deconstructing Values: The Establishment of a National Ideology and its Implications for Singapore's Political Future', in Gary Rodan (Ed), *Singapore Changes Guard: Social, Political and Economic Directions in the 1990s* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993). Although this approach from the PAP was largely ineffective, Khong, 'Singapore', p. 124, suggested that it does provide insight into the political mindset of the PAP leadership, and indeed, that is what is critical here.

construction of a National Ideology is of central importance, because the concern is that economic growth has engendered apathy on the part of Singaporeans. At the latent level though, direct political concerns for the PAP are evident. Clammer's analysis of the White Paper draws on the idea that they are statist and represent the notion of 'consensus' to exist only within a prism constructed by the PAP.<sup>67</sup> Khong has made similar criticisms. He argued that the PAP's motivation behind such a move is in an effort 'to preserve its control over political discourse through ideological hegemony'.<sup>68</sup> The White Paper thus served a political end. Khong noted that these *Shared Values* emphasis 'unity', assisting the PAP to 'identify its policies with the nation at large'.<sup>69</sup> Khong went on to make some relevant comments associating *Shared Values* with Lukes' radical view of power; stemming from the previous quotation:

Opposition to these policies is by definition partisan, for it involves going against the nation as a single entity. The ruling elite is at one with the nation; opposition only represents particular interests at best and is antinational at worst.<sup>70</sup>

The PAP is 'convinced that it knows the best *interests* of its subjects'.<sup>71</sup> He went on to argue that

an emphasis on commonality also sets the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate thought and action. In using commonality to identify itself with a unitary national interest, the leadership raises an ideological umbrella over itself, the state apparatus, the regime it has created and the nation. The possibility is thus open for any political outside this umbrella to be regarded as illegitimate – especially if that activity is critical of any part of the expressed common national will.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Clammer, 'Deconstructing Values'.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 37-40.

<sup>68</sup> Khong, 'Singapore', p. 124.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126. Emphasis added.

Hence, Shared Values was an attempt to reinforce a power relationship which was starting to deteriorate with time. However, it failed to secure any lasting influence. Michael Hill and Lian Kwen Fee argued that because of possible unintended consequences - stemming from the experience around the Religious Studies experiment - 'the White Paper on Shared Values has been left quietly to lie on the table' soon after it was tabled in Parliament.<sup>73</sup> Khong made the simple but salient point that most values introduced from above tend to strike little resonance with the people they are directed at.<sup>74</sup> It was however, not the only time the PAP has tried to instil values. In 1999 it presented the 'Singapore 21' report to Parliament which was intended to identify 'what Singaporeans want for the future of our nation' and to 'strengthen the "heartware" of Singapore in the 21<sup>st</sup> century'.<sup>75</sup> Although thousands of Singaporeans were consulted by the five subject Committees, J. B. Jeyaretnam pointed out in Parliament that eight of ten co-chairs of the Committees were PAP Members of Parliament.<sup>76</sup>

## 2.3 CONCLUSION

The PAP perceives itself to be the only choice Singapore has, and that it knows best for its people. This is epitomised by a *Straits Times* editorial from 1989, which stated that the Government was committed to a Confucian political system revolving around the filial ideal of 'sons obeying the orders of a stern but responsible father'.<sup>77</sup> It has even reached the level where 'it is the people who are judged by their leaders and the people who are therefore required to adapt by yielding to the dictates of their leaders'.<sup>78</sup>

Through depoliticising the 'general arena', through manipulating relevant institutions such as trade unions and the media, and through manufacturing such a close relationship

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>73</sup> Micheal Hill & Lian Kwen Fee, *The Politics of Nation Building and Citizenship in Singapore* (London: Routledge, 1995). p. 219.

<sup>74</sup> Khong, 'Singapore', p. 124.

<sup>75</sup> The Government of Singapore, *Singapore 21: Together we make a Difference* (Singapore: Singapore 21 Committee c/o Prime Minister's Office [public Service Division], 1999). p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore: Official Report*. Vol. 70. No. 13. Column 1489.

<sup>77</sup> Cited in Tamney, *The Struggle over Singapore's Soul*, p. 57.

<sup>78</sup> Khong, 'Singapore', p. 122-3.

between 'government', 'regime' and 'nation' that at times these elements appear indistinguishable, the political leadership has developed a power relationship in Singapore where *A* clearly attempts to manipulate the interests of *B*. It is by no means a clear success; there is always a considerable number of Singaporeans who will never vote PAP in elections in protest, not enough to vote out a PAP MP but always present. Therefore, although its power relationship is not a complete success, the PAP has been able to maneuver in different directions to ensure its virtual domination over the political scene. As noted above, one such method has been for the PAP to manipulate the electoral system in various ways to ensure that the Opposition is curtailed. In the 1990s it was able to reverse the descending electoral support of the 1980s, through the use of ruthless incentives such as the vote-for-upgrades scheme.<sup>79</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that the PAP can maintain its political power with such methods says something in itself. In its 39 years in Government, the PAP has never closed Parliament or turned Singapore officially into a one-party state. It has always upheld the country's constitution, parliamentary and electoral laws.<sup>80</sup> The fact that the PAP has not resorted to such extreme measures is symptomatic of three things. Firstly, it does not want to tarnish its own international image. Secondly, the subtle manipulation of the electoral system and constitution *inter alia* has been successful, because, thirdly, and more importantly, its endeavours to manipulate interests has met with considerable success. In the words of Khong again:

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<sup>79</sup> This scheme was effective in the 1997 general election, where the PAP had prior to nomination day decided to upgrade HDB flats (of which some 90 percent of all Singaporeans live) but warned the electorate that those constituencies which did not vote for the PAP would have to wait at the end of the line for their upgrades. This, dovetailed with the decentralisation of counting stations that election, making it easier to identify what areas voted for who, would have clearly had an impact on the electorate.

<sup>80</sup> Of course this is not clear cut. Firstly, it does bend these rules and sometimes quite far. For instance, as noted above, when Lee Kuan Yew started to tour all constituencies almost a year before the 1963 election, whilst Opposition parties were not permitted to do so until the campaign. A more recent case occurred in the 1997 General Election where Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong was found to be inside a polling station on election day when candidates not permitted to be anywhere near a station. Jeyaretnam questioned the Government on where he was in the wrong and what the consequence should have been. The government response was that the law only forbade a candidate from being 'outside' a station, not 'inside' that he was found not to be in the wrong. *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 67. No. 14. Column 1340-5 & 1417-24. How he arrived in the station would have been an interesting supplementary question. And what must never



The implication must follow that the public's compliance, even complacency, with the leadership and its political regime is not based on a deep-rooted recognition of the legitimacy of the civil procedures and institutions of the regime. What now appears to be social consensus reflects instead the capacity of the ruling elite to neutralise conflicting interests in society and to nurture a broad-based recognition that politics is the business of the government, not of the people.<sup>81</sup>

The case studies of this thesis will analyse two schemes introduced by the PAP in an effort to deal with the changing complexion of the Singapore demographic recognised in the 1980s, and continuing until the present. It will suggest that both have been introduced not to alter the power relationship, but rather, perpetuate it. However, the final chapter will consider whether unintended consequences may have the reverse affect.

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be forgotten is that a government will find it easier to do as it pleases if the laws permit it to do so. The PAP has simply changed the constitution and electoral laws to suit it.

<sup>81</sup> Khong, 'Singapore', p. 133.

# CHAPTER THREE

## THE OPPOSITION AND THE NON-CONSTITUENCY MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT SCHEME

### 3.1 SINGAPORE'S DEMOCRACY

Before analysing the Opposition in Singapore, it is important to demonstrate why the People's Action Party (PAP) has continued to allow the Opposition to exist, continued to hold General Elections and continued to rule through the constitution. The reasons behind this can also answer the question left at the end of the last chapter. It is because 'power' in the Singapore context is not enough, the PAP also needs 'legitimacy'.

Internationally, Singapore must project itself as a functioning democracy, at least at a procedural level. This is necessary for at least two reasons. Due to its small size and small population, the PAP has declared Singapore a vulnerable state.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the PAP must project the regime and government as legitimate.<sup>2</sup> Leifer noted that the PAP started to realise the importance of being recognised by international and regional bodies as significant for its survival as an independent nation from early in its independence. Singapore hosted the first Commonwealth meeting outside of England, the first World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting in 1996 and first Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in 1992.<sup>3</sup> Recently, Singapore was a member of the United Nations Security Council. During the late 1970s, Singapore started to play an active role in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). If Singapore is not accepted in organisations such as the WTO or UN, it runs the risk of isolating itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Leifer, *Singapore's Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> The PAP's sense of vulnerability, which dictates a foreign policy based on 'survival' can be negated when viewing Singapore's history since independence. Leifer, *Singapore's Foreign Policy*, pp. 1-4 elucidated that Singapore has not been challenged militarily or diplomatically in any serious sense since merger with Malaysia. Hence this continued preoccupation with vulnerability may be a corollary of the PAP's protracted period in office. It was the PAP that experienced the traumatic events during merger.

<sup>3</sup> Leifer, *Singapore's Foreign Policy*, pp. 11-2.

At another level, Singapore's economic viability depends on the global economy and its standing in the world capitalist market place. As noted in the previous chapter, its own economy has been in large measure dependent on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Christopher Tremewan has argued that the PAP has maintained power in Singapore in alliance with foreign capital.<sup>4</sup> The foundation of Singapore's economy, since independence, has also been strongly integrated into the global economy. Soon after independence Singapore adopted a policy of Export-Orientated Industrialisation, founded on manufacturing.<sup>5</sup> After the economic recession in the mid-1980s, the economy was re-directed, this time towards investment in production in emerging economies. Government owned companies began investing in countries including Indonesia, Malaysia and China. The Government also heavily promoted service delivery and by 1990, both manufacturing and financial and business services dominated Singapore's GDP.<sup>6</sup> Finally, over the last twenty years, the government has implemented a deliberate policy of attracting foreign professionals into the advanced service industry because its own selection pool is quite small.

It is therefore argued that due to Singapore's perceived sense of vulnerability, and economic trajectory, the PAP has been forced to present the regime and government as democratically legitimate. The PAP has therefore maintained Singapore as a functioning democracy on the procedural level. It would have been difficult for the party to revert the Island to a one-party state as Singapore had a multi-party system with regular elections for some time leading up to independence. If the PAP had taken this course, it would have risked its political and economic survival. Hence, the PAP has maintained procedural elements relevant to being considered a democracy.<sup>7</sup> It has allowed political parties to exist and contest regular elections, thus giving them the opportunity to participate in the legislature and vie for government. It has never suspended Parliament or

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 1994). pp. 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-5.

<sup>6</sup> Cheah Hock Beng, 'Responding to Global Challenges: The Changing Nature of Singapore's Incorporation into the International Economy', in Gary Rodan (Ed), *Singapore Changes Guard: Social, Political and Economic Directions in the 1990s* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993). pp. 104-5.

<sup>7</sup> Beng-Huat Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* (London: Routledge, 1995). pp. 127.

the constitution and has always amended both through the proper procedures. Nonetheless, of central importance to this is the fact that since the late 1960s, its dominance of the Government has never been challenged democratically.<sup>8</sup> It did not need to attack the legislature or judiciary because they never seriously threatened the party by virtue of the fact that the PAP dominated both. It can allow parties to exist and contest because through various other means it has stifled the emergence of a strong Opposition. Although Singapore's current economy is in no means precarious as in the mid-1960s, and the notion of vulnerability is apparently less relevant, the PAP will not revert to a one-party system because its position is not threatened at this point and these procedural elements of democracy are accepted by the population.

## 3.2 THE OPPOSITION

### 3.2.1 THE POSITION OF THE OPPOSITION

Several Academics have already discussed the numerous restrictions that the PAP has placed on Opposition parties in order to prevent them from emerging as serious political contenders.<sup>9</sup> Extensive elaboration here is thus needless. However, it is relevant to discuss how Opposition figures are treated within the political system in Singapore. Derek da Cunha, in his analysis of the 1997 Singapore general election has discussed the fortunes of three Opposition figures including: Low Thia Khiang from the Workers' Party (WP); Chiam See Tong from the Singapore People's Party (SPP); and Chee Soon

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, see Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control*, chapter six; Christopher Lingle, *Singapore's Authoritarian Capitalism: Asian Values, Free Market Illusions and Political Dependency*, (Barcelona: Edicions Sirocco, 1996) chapter four; Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy*, p. 121-4; Gordon P. Means, 'Soft Authoritarianism in Malaysia and Singapore', in Larry Diamond & Marc F. Plattner (Eds), *Democracy in East Asia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998); Heng Hiang Khng, 'Economic Development and Political Change: The Democratization Process in Singapore', in Anek Laothamatas (Ed), *Democratization in Southeast and East Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997). pp. 126-9; Joseph B. Tamney, *The Struggle over Singapore's Soul: Western Modernisation and Asian Culture*. (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1996). chapter three; &, Hussin Mutalib, 'Illiberal Democracy and the Future of Opposition in Singapore', in *Third World Quarterly* (Vol. 21. Issue 2, 2000). These texts provide discussions of direct restrictions placed on Opposition parties, and how the PAP castrates political space more generally.

Juan from the Singapore Democratic Party<sup>10</sup> (SDP).<sup>11</sup> He concluded that Low and Chiam have seen success at the polls due in large measure to their personalities, which electors in their constituencies have admired. On the other hand, Chee has failed to enter Parliament because he has been too outlandish, and has picked his battles with the ruling party poorly. da Cunha also makes a relevant comment towards the end of the chapter:

Infused with a strong dose of reality, both Low Thia Khian and Chiam See Tong have worked within the ground rules for political debate and activity set down by the ruling party ... As for Dr Chee, his is not a happy story ... support for him appeared to erode ... as a result of a series of mistakes. His political inexperience showed.<sup>12</sup>

The plight of Opposition candidates since the Anson by-election in 1981<sup>13</sup> has painted a clear picture as to whom is more acceptable as a credible Opposition figure. A dichotomy exists in Singapore politics in this regard. On the one hand, there are 'mitigated critics' (including both Low Thia Khian and Chiam See Tong) who challenge the government within 'out-of-bounds' markers ostensibly set by the PAP.<sup>14</sup> It is these mitigated critics who possess staying power within the political scene. On the other hand, 'regime critics' (such as JB Jeyaretnam and Chee Soon Juan) have seen their political careers suffer as a result of stepping outside these markers.

This section will now compare the fortunes of Chee Soon Juan against those of Chiam See Tong. In this case a clear distinction can be made between mitigated critic and regime critic. Chiam See Tong has been involved in Singapore politics since the mid-

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<sup>10</sup> Chiam was the Secretary-General of the SDP until he was ousted by Chee in 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Derek da Cunha, *The Price of Victory: The 1997 Singapore General Election and Beyond* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997). pp. 69-82.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-2.

<sup>13</sup> In that by-election, the victory of JB Jeyaretnam ended the 15 year period of a one-party Parliament. Jeyaretnam was the Secretary-General of the WP until he was ousted by Low in 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Out-of-bound markers are metaphoric posts in which the limits of public discussion are set. These markers refer more to activity within civil society, and what individuals can and cannot publicly say which may or may not breach 'constructive' criticism. For a short discussion on these markers, see Simon S. C. Tay, 'The Future of Civil Society: What next?', in Derek da Cunha (Ed), *Singapore in the New Millennium: Challenges Facing the City-State* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002). 90, & 94-5).

1970s and has portrayed himself and the SDP he created in the early 1980s as constructive. For instance, after the 1991 general election, in which the SDP took three seats, Chiam argued that his party would 'not oppose for the sake of opposition'.<sup>15</sup> Chiam See Tong has the ominous title of longest serving Opposition MP. During his five terms he has not suffered financially from libel suits from PAP MPs, nor has he been charged with abusing his parliamentary privileges.<sup>16</sup> Notwithstanding, the government has placed several barriers before him, including the fact that it has been a PAP member who has been chairman of the Potong Pasir Community Development Council whilst Chiam has been its MP. After the 1991 general election, the government decided to cease allowing MPs to use office space in the void decks of Housing Board and Development (HDB) blocks.<sup>17</sup> This disadvantages Opposition MPs because it was another financial difficulty placed upon them.

Chee Soon Juan entered the SDP in the Group Representation Constituency (GRC) Marine Parade by-election in 1992, and since then his political career has been a roller-coaster ride. He has always opted for the more melodramatic style of opposition politics which regularly hits the headlines. Chee's political moves include conducting public speeches of a political nature without consent from the police. Also he went on a hunger strike in protest against his dismissal from the National University of Singapore and attended a panel discussion at Williams College in Massachusetts, United States in September 1995.<sup>18</sup> This panel discussion was organised by academics opposed to the College conferring an honorary doctorate on Prime Minister, and alumni, Goh Chock Tong. At this discussion, Francis T. Seow and Christopher Lingle<sup>19</sup> both criticised the independence of the Judiciary in Singapore, alleging a common claim that it is corrupted

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<sup>15</sup> Anonymous, 'Chiam Promises Loyal, Constructive Opposition', in *Straits Times* (2 September 1991). p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> This has been something more common to the likes of Jeyaretnam.

<sup>17</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore: Official Report*. Vol. 59. No. 2. Col. 79-83

<sup>18</sup> da Cunha, *The Price of Victory*. pp. 78-9.

<sup>19</sup> Seow and Lingle are two individuals who are seen as dissidents in Singapore for their views on the Judiciary. For their sides of their stories see Francis T. Seow, *To Catch a Tartar: A Dissident in Lee Kuan Yew's Prison* (Yale University Southeast Asian Studies: Connecticut, 1994) and Christopher Lingle, *Singapore's Authoritarian Capitalism: Asian Values, Free Market Illusions and Political Dependency* (Barcelona: Edicions Sirocco, 1996)..

and in the hands of Lee Kuan Yew. Chee followed these speakers and opened by saying 'I do agree very much with many things that Mr Seow and Dr Lingle have said ...'.<sup>20</sup> The PAP therefore accused Chee of supporting the critical views of Seow and Lingle regarding the Judiciary. This led the PAP to challenge the SDP in Parliament, calling on them to make their stand known about the Judiciary. What followed was a grilling of SDP MP and the party's new leader in the House, Ling How Doong, about whether Chee's comments were indeed critical of the Judiciary.<sup>21</sup>

Incidentally, this issue highlighted the value that the PAP places on the apparent independence of the Judiciary and the importance of protecting its status and image.<sup>22</sup> A telling speech on the issues was given by Chiam, who by this stage had been ousted as SDP Secretary-General in place of Chee and therefore harboured strong feelings towards him. Chiam's criticism of Chee stood out in the debate. Chiam stated that

[i]t saddens me that the SDP is now run by megalomaniacs ... And it is the duty of loyal Opposition to defend Singapore.<sup>23</sup>

Later he said

I am against those who are now in charge of the SDP. They are turning the SDP upside down and making it beyond recognition. When I first started politics in 1976, I said that I would be a constructive, honest and sincere Opposition [*sic*], and I have not, for the last 19 years, deviated from that philosophy.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*: Vol. 65. No. 2. Col. 217.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 59. No. 2.

<sup>22</sup> This is for two central reasons. Firstly, since independence the government has actively encouraged foreign companies to do business in Singapore and more recently to set up their businesses in Singapore. If the state of the Judiciary is in question, this would pose a major challenge. Seow (who was a former Solicitor-General) has even pointed out that when the government is not concerned, 'Singapore Judges are free to deliver judgments in accordance with the facts and the justice of the case' see Francis T Seow, 'The Judiciary' in Michael Haas, (Ed) *The Singapore Puzzle* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999). p. 121. Secondly, because PAP MPs have been so successful in libel suits against Opposition figures, the Judiciary cannot be seen as manipulated by the government.

<sup>23</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 65. No. 3. Col. 280.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 282.

Throughout his speech, and as recorded in Hansard, the chant of 'Hear, Hear' was shouted on more than one occasion. Chiam's speech was made on 3 November 1995. Six months later, on the debate pertaining to Lee Kuan Yew and Lee Hsien Loong's property dealings, Lee Kuan Yew said of Chiam that

You are an honest man. I hope you will be re-elected. Because at the end of the day, you are basically an honest man.<sup>25</sup>

Later, he followed by saying

I hope he [Chiam] wins the next elections. I think he has done on the whole good for the House. I was wrong when I thought he was not going to do much good, but in his somewhat honest, bumbling way, he has been a voice of sanity, unlike his fellow MP, Mr Cheo. He knows what is right.<sup>26</sup>

From this, it is clear that the PAP will only accept Opposition that is 'constructive'. The distinction in their political styles was clearly outlined in mid-1994. After Chiam was ousted as SDP Secretary-General, a breakaway faction loyal to Chiam created the Singapore People's Party as a 'moderate version of the SDP' that would not oppose for the sake of opposing.<sup>27</sup>

The 2001 general election again illustrates how both figures project themselves differently to Singaporeans and how the PAP's reaction was a determining factor. A central theme through the 2001 general election (apart from the economic crisis which had befallen the Republic that year) was Chee's 'gangster-like' behaviour. Chee made the allegation that large sums of moneys were given by Singapore to the Seoharto Government without accountability.<sup>28</sup> On 29 October, during the election rally, Chee,

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Vol. 66. No. 2. Col. 228.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Col. 236.

<sup>27</sup> Jimmy Yap, 'Breakaway SDP group registering new Party', in *Straits Times* (6 September 1994). p. 3. Chiam joined the SPP prior to the 1997 general election and became its Secretary-General.

<sup>28</sup> Chee Soon Juan, 'Pressing for Openness in Singapore', in *Journal of Democracy* (April. Vol. 12. No. 2, 2001).



SDP candidates for Jurong GRC, as well as their supporters 'confronted' Goh during his walkabout in Jurong East. Using a 'loud-hailer' Chee repeated his allegations of 'S\$17 billion' being lent to Seoharto and led a chant of 'where is the money?'. Goh ignored Chee who 'demanded' Goh 'come over' and answer the questions saying he could run but not hide.<sup>29</sup> In a press conference which followed, Goh labelled Chee a 'dangerous man' and 'incurable liar'. The previous day, Chiam made the call to Singaporeans to give the PAP 'the shock of its life' by voting in all 29 Opposition candidates. This drew a strong reaction from PAP ministers, including Lee Hsien Loong, who criticised him for suggesting that Singaporeans vote for Chee after his politically foolish actions on the 29<sup>th</sup>.<sup>30</sup>

During the rest of the election rally, continuous speculation about the possibility of libel suits being served against Chee took place, and they did eventuate.<sup>31</sup> Chiam withdraw his call to have all Opposition candidates elected.<sup>32</sup> Although he stated that he did not want to produce division in the Opposition ranks, the highly confrontational nature of Chee's actions, and the heavy response by the Government forced him into a corner. Particularly after Chee's actions, the PAP began to push the idea of accepting 'constructive' Opposition candidates (those that resemble mitigated critics). Throughout the campaign, PAP Ministers would tell voters that they were very opposed to seeing Chee enter Parliament, even as a Non-Constituency MP (NCMP). Goh even talked up the prospects of a mitigated critic, Steve Chia,<sup>33</sup> in an effort to push his votes up and thus keep Chee out.<sup>34</sup> In two instances during the campaign Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chock Tong pointed out who they accepted as constructive Opposition. After Chee's actions, Lee attacked him, calling his style of opposition 'political gangsterism.' The *Straits Times* reported what he had said:

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<sup>29</sup> Susan Long, 'PM Waves aside "Tailgating" SDP team', in *Straits Times* (29 October 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Anonymous, 'Chiam's Voting call Viewed as a Surprise by PAP', in *Straits Times* (29 October 2001).

<sup>31</sup> Zuraidah Ibrahim, 'High Drama as Lawyer's Letters are Served on Chee', in *Straits Times* (31 October 2001).

<sup>32</sup> Anonymous, 'SDA Distances itself from Chee's Behaviour', in *Straits Times* (1 November 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Anonymous, 'No PAP Hidden Agenda to stop Chee', in *Straits Times* (31 October 2001).

<sup>34</sup> This apparently worked as Chia (Secretary-General of the National Solidarity Party) became an NCMP, Chee's GRC team lost. The issue of manipulating the NCMP scheme will be discussed later in this chapter.

SM Lee [Kuan Yew] drew a clear distinction between constructive opposition politicians, such as Workers' Party chief Low Thia Kiang and Singapore Democratic Alliance leader Chiam See Tong, and Dr Chee and Mr J.B. Jeyaretnam, who were out to down Singapore internationally.<sup>35</sup>

Goh made similar remarks at a rally in Jalan Besar GRC. He claimed that the mild-mannered Chiam and the sporting Low possessed gentlemanly behaviour. On the other hand, the feisty Chee acted like a thug.<sup>36</sup> Goh recounted his experience crossing paths with Low on the campaign trail. He recalled that Low acknowledged him as PM and shook his hand, then both went 'campaigning together – to the same hawker'. Goh believed that that 'is the way to fight an election'.

### 3.2.2 INFORMAL CO-OPTATION OF THE OPPOSITION

Co-optation is about turning opponents into supporters. A similar practice is exercised by the PAP in relation to the Opposition and particularly since Jeyaretnam entered parliament in 1981. Opposition politicians, such as Chiam and Low, although not turned into 'supporters' of the PAP, have at least been co-opted to the extent where they fully accept the political boundaries placed before them by the PAP and thus confirm to behaviour which the PAP deems normative. These are the Opposition figures who come under the term 'mitigated critics' (explained in the first chapter). They will only oppose the government within the boundaries it sets. Both understand the value placed on the Judiciary by the Government (as outlined above) and during the debate on Chee's comments at William College, Chiam defended the Judiciary (as outlined above), and Low criticised Seow's remarks.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand a regime critic, such as Jeyaratnam, after re-entering the House in 1997, raised numerous motions on issues related to the

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<sup>35</sup> Lydia Lim, 'Expose those who "Down" Singapore: SM', in *Straits Times* (30 October 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Anonymous, 'Two Opposing Opposition Styles', in *Straits Times* (30 October 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Anonymous, 'Chiam Attacks SDP Leadership for Sending Team to Williams', in *Straits Times* (4 November 1995), p. 28. Seow stood for the WP in the 1988 general election.

Judiciary and the Rule of Law, which were of a critical nature.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, mitigated critics unintentionally send a message that they accept the system as defined by the PAP.

This form of co-optation can be labelled 'informal', because it is not official or contractual, nor is it even a tacit agreement between individuals on opposite sides of political spectrum. It is not the result of an effort of the PAP to co-opt all Opposition parties or candidates, but rather to accept those who are willing to exist within the boundaries so that served to highlight the differences between them and the 'regime critics'. This type of division within the Opposition ranks has been discernable since soon after independence. When the Opposition does unify, as in the 1991 general election to opt for the by-election strategy, this is when they are able to make some – minor – progress away from a one-party dominant Parliament. It was the conflict between Chee and Chiam which dissipated the SDP as a political force. After the 1991 general election, the SDP held three Parliamentary seats (with Chiam as 'unofficial leader of the Opposition') but this representation was reduced to zero by 1997.

The method of informal co-optation used against the Opposition in Singapore is in an effort to maintain the position of the PAP. Regime critics, such as Jeyaretnam, see mitigated critics like Chiam as not tackling the real issues.<sup>39</sup> They are of the opinion that within the boundaries little can be done on the issues of social justice, equality and democracy. On the other hand, regime critics have a difficult and often short political life, and in the case of Chee, they may be too 'feisty' to command any level of mass support. Such figures find existence difficult because of the PAP's depoliticisation of Singapore discussed in the previous chapter.

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<sup>38</sup> Joshua Benjamin Jeyaretnam, *Make it Right for Singapore: Speeches in Parliament 1997-1999*. (Singapore: Jeya Publishing, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> Private Interview: 23-04-2002.

### 3.3 THE NON-CONSTITUENCY MP SCHEME

#### 3.3.1 THE PAP'S CHANGING VIEW OF THE OPPOSITION

The PAP's expectation that an Opposition should be constructive was manifested largely in what the 'Old Guard' saw in the 1960s from the Opposition.<sup>40</sup> The view that developed, and that which has been maintained by the PAP since, is that an Opposition is not needed for its own sake. The view held by those such as former Minister for Foreign Affairs, S. Rajaratnam, is that

[t]he function of opposition parties generally would be to make more certain there is bad government ... But if on the other hand you are convinced that the government is good, that it is doing its utmost for the welfare of the people, then it is illogical to set up opposition to check the government.<sup>41</sup>

However, this perception of the Opposition was forced to change. With a rising cost of living, a burgeoning middle-class and with a new generation of voters emerging, the vote for the PAP began to decline. The fifteen-year period of a one-party Parliament came to an end in 1981 and voter support for the Opposition began to grow. Even Rajaratnam changed his tune:

We are thinking that maybe the time has now come when we need to move away from one-party parliament. It has been all right while we have been ruling because we have not abused the one-party parliament. But in the future if the leadership becomes feeble and corrupt, It could easily take advantage of the system to entrench itself and establish arbitrary rule.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For an account from Lee Kuan Yew, see Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*. (Vol. One) (Singapore: Simon & Schuster under Prentice Hall, 1998). Particularly chapters 16, 20 and 24.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Chan Heng Chee & Obaid ul Haq (Ed.). *S. Rajaratnam: The Prophetic and the Political* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987). pp. 160-1

<sup>42</sup> Cited in Raj Vasil, *Governing Singapore: National Development and Democracy* (Second Edition) (New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2000). p. 132.

As a result of this change in the electorate, which was apparent by the early 1980s, the Government introduced a scheme to permit a minimal number of Opposition candidates to sit and participate in Parliament. The 'Non-Constituency Member of Parliament' (NCMP) Scheme allowed up to six (depending on the President's wishes) unsuccessful Opposition candidates to enter the House after an election. Initially the government set the mark at three.<sup>43</sup> Importantly, NCMPs would only be appointed in the event that fewer than three Opposition candidates were elected, in other words, they would fill the shortfall. NCMPs would be selected on the basis of how highly they polled, hence if two Opposition candidates were elected; the highest polling loser would be offered an NCMP seat, as long as that candidate gained over fifteen percent of the vote. The other notable provision of the scheme is that although NCMPs can partake in all debates in the House, their voting rights are curtailed. They are precluded from voting on matters pertaining to fiscal management, alterations to the constitution, motions of no confidence in the government – and after the introduction of the elected Head of State – Presidential impeachment.

The Bill was introduced in two parts in 1984 by then Prime Minister Lee, first, as an amendment to the constitution, and secondly, as an amendment to the parliamentary elections act. The bill drew attention in the media, opinion pieces and letters considered the scheme, and other suggestions, such as proportional representation were considered.<sup>44</sup> Within the PAP ranks opposition to the scheme existed since there had been no Opposition in the House between 1966-81. Several PAP backbenchers had filled the role of a surrogate Opposition during this time. Also, by this stage it was blatantly apparent that the Jeyaretnam form of Opposition was seen by large sections of the PAP as 'opposition for the sake of opposition'. Therefore, Lee decided to have a one-hour-and-fifteen-minute closed door discussion with PAP backbenchers to convince them of the merits of the bill.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> This was increased to four for the 1991 general election, but has since sat at three.

<sup>44</sup> Lee Boon Hiok, 'Non-Constituency MPs – A place for the Opposition in Singapore?' *In The Parliamentarian: Journal of the Parliaments of the Commonwealth* ( July. LXVI. 3, 1985). pp. 122-3.

<sup>45</sup> Anonymous, 'PM meets on Seats for Opposition', in *Straits Times* (18 July 1984). p. 1.

### 3.3.2 THE MANIFEST AND LATENT RATIONALES

The ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’<sup>46</sup> rationales behind introducing such a scheme are important considerations, and soon after the scheme was mooted, both sides of the political spectrum became proponents for each.

The manifest rationale was tripartite and clearly explicated by Lee Kuan Yew during the Second reading of the bill on 24 July.<sup>47</sup> Firstly, Lee argued that as the PAP was going through a generation change in its MPs and Ministers, they had little exposure to Opposition in the House, and their debating skills suffered as a result. Therefore, bringing an Opposition into the House, Lee argued, would help the development of those skills. Secondly, the scheme was intended to be used as a method to teach people the values of an Opposition in the House. The bill made no provision for accepting independent candidates as NCMPs. And thirdly, NCMPs may become individuals whom Singaporeans could approach to vent allegations about possible cases of corruption.<sup>48</sup>

The second rationale stood out as a key consideration, and Lee Kuan Yew spent considerable time discussing how a new generation of voters, those who would not remember the 1960s, were becoming a dominant group in the electorate. This group of electors had not witnessed the racial riots and social problems of the late 1950s and 1960s. Therefore, as Lee argued, they did not recognise how destructive an Opposition could be. Hopefully, this scheme would dissuade them from the notion that the Opposition was able to solve any problems in Singapore.

Lee Kuan Yew totally rejected other alternatives, some of which were being printed in the *Straits Times*. He argued that if Singapore headed down the Proportional Representation road, this would permit individuals to be elected on racial, linguistic,

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<sup>46</sup> Refer to chapter one for a definition on manifest and latent rationales.

<sup>47</sup> Also see Lee ‘Non-Constituency MPs’, p. 122; &, Thio Li-ann, ‘Choosing Representatives: Singapore does it her own way’, in Graham Hassall, & Cheryl Saunders, *The People’s Representatives: Electoral Systems in the Asia-Pacific Region* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1997). p. 44 for their accounts of Lee Kuan Yew’s rationale.

<sup>48</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore* Vol. 43. No. 16. Col. 1726.

cultural and chauvinist lines, something the PAP had tried to prevent since forming Government. He also rejected the creation of a second chamber of Parliament, using the analogy of an old pair of shoes (for the constitution), that it is comfortable and can be modified slightly, as the government was doing with the NCMP bill. But the creation of another chamber would be too large a task.<sup>49</sup>

Interestingly, from Lee Kuan Yew's speech we also see a discussion of 'mitigated critic' vs. 'regime critic' NCMPs. Whilst he discussed how the scheme could demonstrate to younger voters that the Opposition was of little value, he also suggested that some 'serious-minded Opposition MPs with serious ideas and practical policies can get in' and that this was a risk the PAP was willing to take.<sup>50</sup> Hence he implied that NCMPs would be subjected to the same form of 'informal co-optation' described above, which Opposition candidates are already subjected to. From this, which will be discussed shortly, the latent rationale of the scheme can be now discussed. In the words of Singapore Sociologist Chua Beng-Huat, the NCMP scheme was:

clearly aimed at reducing the clamour for non-PAP voices in parliament, and stymie the development of multi-party politics beyond elections themselves by partially admitting non-PAP voices.<sup>51</sup>

The Opposition's reaction was largely expected. Jeyaretnam's criticism stood out for the obvious reason that he was the only Opposition MP at the time, and that he also fell into the 'regime critic' category. Jeyaretnam strongly opposed the scheme. A large part of his criticism attacked the PAP for the way it had treated the Opposition since coming to power, and he suggested other measures which would be more useful to the growth of an Opposition presence in Parliament. These other measures included: allowing Opposition

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., col. 1735-6.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., col. 1731

<sup>51</sup> Chua Beng-Huat, 'Still Awaiting New Initiatives: Democratisation in Singapore', in *Asian Studies Review* (November. Vol. 21. Nos. 2-3, 1997). p. 129. Rodan suggests two reasons for its introduction. Firstly, public sympathy for Jeyaretnam emerged due to the public attacks against him from the PAP. Secondly, the PAP came to the conclusion that it should examine was to 'institutionalise' Opposition in such a way as to influence the form and nature of it. In doing so, the PAP hoped to safeguard its political dominance (1989: 171).

parties to hold public rallies; more access to radio and television; removing the Internal Security Act and establishing an independent electoral commission.<sup>52</sup> He argued that the PAP's position on the Opposition had not changed, and that the NCMP scheme was a way for the government to try and prevent the electoral slide away from the PAP. He argued that this 'sham Bill' was a 'fraud on the electorate' and that they would be 'toothless'.<sup>53</sup> He went on to say that '[m]y party will have nothing to do with this Bill. We will not accept any seat in Parliament by grace of the government'.<sup>54</sup>

Chiam (then leader of the newly formed SDP) argued that the scheme was an election gimmick for the PAP to prevent its electoral slide.<sup>55</sup> He, like Jeyaretnam, affirmed that his party would reject any offer. The Barisan Socialis (BS) leader was less vehement in his response. Dr. Lee Siew-Choh<sup>56</sup> said that 'I would prefer to see proportional representation' and that the scheme was the equivalent of a 'special PAP concession'.<sup>57</sup> Some months latter, closer to the 1984 general election, two other parties, the Singapore Malay National Organisation (SMNO) and the United People's Front (UPF), also rejected the scheme.<sup>58</sup> However, it was Dr. Lee who said that he was not completely adverse to the idea, but added that he would follow suit if all the other parties boycotted the scheme.<sup>59</sup>

Hence, the latent rationales for the NCMP scheme can be identified for the PAP. Firstly it is used to dissuade the electorate from voting for Opposition candidates, because they will be provided anyway. Secondly, it draws voters' attention away from other more salient political issues. Also, the government was able to throw the cat in amongst the

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<sup>52</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore* Vol. 43. No. 16. Col. 1754-5.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 1754.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 1757

<sup>55</sup> Anonymous, 'Most People don't want "Second-Class MPs"', in *Straits Times* (30 June 1984). p. 14.

<sup>56</sup> The late Dr. Lee Siew-Choh, who was a PAP assemblyman before the party's split in 1961 and then BS Secretary-General until it merged with the Workers' Party prior to the 1988 general election shall be referred to in this thesis as Dr. Lee so as to not confuse him with Lee Kuan Yew.

<sup>57</sup> Anonymous, 'Most People don't want "Second-Class MPs"', p. 14.

<sup>58</sup> Anonymous, 'Four Parties Reject Non-Elected MPs plan two others say 'Maybe'', in *Straits Times* (22 September 1984). p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.



(Opposition) pigeons. It was Harbans Singh (the outspoken leader of the UPF) who criticised Dr. Lee for his stand, arguing that he had changed it from earlier in the year.<sup>60</sup>

Since the introduction of the scheme in 1984, only five NCMP seats have been offered. Of those five, four were accepted and only three were sworn in. After the 1984 general election, Jeyaretnam and Chiam were returned, and one NCMP seat was offered, firstly to M. P. D. Nair of the Workers' Party who with 48.8 percent of the vote in Jalan Kayu was the highest loser amongst Opposition candidates. After some deliberation, the party rejected the offer, arguing that the scheme cut at the root of Parliamentary Government, which requires a genuinely elected Opposition. The seat was then offered to the next best polling Opposition candidate, Tan Chee Kien – Chairman of the Singapore United Front (SUF) – who had earlier stated he was against the scheme. However, his party reconsidered the offer. The SUF Secretary-General, Seow Khee Leng, urged the party council to accept the seat for the exposure value and for Tan to gain insight into the workings of Parliament, but recognised the contradiction from their earlier stand. Tan did not accept the seat and no further offers were made.<sup>61</sup> The PAP maintained that under the bill, the returning officer was not obliged to make more than one offer, but under the circumstances decided to make two. In the 1988 general election (Jeyaretnam lost his Parliamentary seat in 1986) only Chiam was returned. The Eunos GRC WP team of Dr. Lee, Francis T. Seow and Mohamed Khalit Baboo were offered two seats, which were accepted by Dr. Lee and Seow. Seow did not take his seat as a result of being fined S\$19 000 for tax evasion in December of 1988.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, Seow was disqualified from taking his seat.<sup>63</sup> The bill did not oblige the government to fill the vacant seat, so Dr. Lee became the sole NCMP for the Seventh Parliament (1988-91). The WP and Dr. Lee in particular received criticism not only from the government but from within the Opposition ranks for changing their position. Chiam criticised the WP for compromising its principles, and argued that one could therefore see a clear distinction between the SDP

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> Lee, 'The Non-Constituency MPs', pp. 124-5.

<sup>62</sup> The maximum an MP could be fined at the time before losing his seat was S\$2 000.

<sup>63</sup> Anonymous, 'Siew Choh's query on Seow "Out of Order"', in *Straits Times* (17 January 1989). p. 2.

and WP.<sup>64</sup> This illustrates the latent divide-and-rule strategy of the PAP in introducing the NCMP scheme.

Leading up to the 1991 general election, the government decided to allow the President<sup>65</sup> to increase the number of NCMPs prior to each general election – between the dissolution of Parliament and nomination day – to a maximum of six. If the President failed to do so, it would remain at three.<sup>66</sup> For the 1991 general election, the government increased the number to four.<sup>67</sup> As four Opposition candidates sat during the Eighth Parliament, no NCMP seats were offered. In the 1997 general election, only Chiam and Low were returned, and an NCMP seat was offered to the Cheng San GRC WP team. Jeyaretnam accepted and became the second NCMP. He argued that although he was against the scheme, under the circumstances he felt he owed it the 45 percent of voters who supported him. The PAP was very critical of his turn around. Jeyaretnam lost his NCMP seat in 2001 after being declared bankrupt following numerous libel suits against him.<sup>68</sup> After the 2001 general election, when Chiam and Low were again returned, one NCMP seat was offered to Steve Chia of the NSP, which he accepted.

### 3.3.3 CO-OPTATION AND MANIPULATION

NCMPs can be categorised as ‘informally’ co-opted, and, are subjected to the same distinction between ‘mitigated critic’ and ‘regime critics’. The first two NCMP’s were both regime critics. This obviously disappointed the PAP. The other WP candidate to accept an NCMP seat after the 1988 general election, regime critic Francis T. Seow, Huxely argued was prevented from taking his seat.<sup>69</sup> Seow was seen as ‘dangerous’ because it was alleged that he made contact with an agent of a foreign power – a senior

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<sup>64</sup> Anonymous, ‘Workers’ Party Accepts offer of Two NCMP Seats’, in *Straits Times* (11 September 1988). p. 3

<sup>65</sup> Of course the President will only act on the advice of the Government.

<sup>66</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 58. No. 2. Col. 118.

<sup>67</sup> But has since then allowed it to remain at three.

<sup>68</sup> Ahmad Osman and Sivakkumaran, G, ‘JBJ loses appeal and NCMP seat’, in *The Straits Times* (24 July, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> Tim Huxely, ‘Singapore’s Politics in the 1980s and ‘90s’, in *Asian Affairs* (October. Vol. 23. Issue 3, 1992). p. 284.

American diplomat who was accused of ‘manipulating’ anti-PAP lawyers and was expelled.

However, they were optimistic with Dr. Lee; he recounts that after being sworn in, Lee Kuan Yew approached him and said ‘Siew Choh, let’s forget about the past and start over’.<sup>70</sup> When Dr. Lee gave his NCMP maiden speech, he began by saying that he wanted to be a constructive Opposition MP, this brought cheers from PAP ministers and backbenchers.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, Dr. Lee proved to be ‘fiesty’ and at times drew heavy criticism from the PAP.

In relation to co-optation of NCMPs, it has become apparent that the PAP has tried to manipulate those who enter Parliament through the scheme. In the 1991 general election, Prime Minister Goh Chock Tong came out attacking the ‘communal politics’ of individuals such as PKMS President Sahid Sahoooman and WP’s candidate Jufrie Mahmood who were bringing ‘religion into politics’. Goh argued that Singaporeans should deal these candidates a ‘knock-out blow’ in the effort to prevent them from entering the House as NCMPs and bringing their communal politics with them.<sup>72</sup>

Two more recent cases occurred during the 2001 general election. Eric Low, PAP candidate for Hougang, made a strange suggestion to voters. As the *Straits Times* headline described it: ‘Low on Low: Vote one, get one free’.<sup>73</sup> He urged constituents to vote for him, because as a PAP candidate, he had the resources to improve the ward. However, he knew that Low Thia Khiang had done a good job since being elected in 1991, and that many residents believed he had done a good job in Parliament. So Eric Low suggested that they could still have him in Parliament, speaking on their concerns,

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<sup>70</sup> Anonymous, ‘The Good Doctor Carries on’, in *Straits Times* (17 June 2001). This is in reference to the split in the PAP in 1961, Operation Cold Store and where the PAP used the Internal Security Act in 1963 to detain 111 Opposition leaders (Dr. Lee was not included because he was not considered a ‘communist’). Also, it was Dr. Lee who in 1965, as leader of the *Barisan Socialis*, led the boycott of both Parliament and the 1968 general election.

<sup>71</sup> Patrick Daniel, ‘History made, but it was Slogans of yesteryear once more’, in *Straits Times* (19 January 1989). p. 15.

<sup>72</sup> Bilveer Singh, *Whither PAP’s Dominance: An Analysis of Singapore’s 1991 General Election*, (Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 1992). p. 76.

<sup>73</sup> Anonymous, ‘Low on Low: Vote one, Get one free’, in *Straits Times* (28 October 2001).

as an NCMP. This view was endorsed by Goh, who, as described above, considered Low a respectable Opposition MP.<sup>74</sup>

The second case, which revolved around Chee Soon Juan, was similar to the instance in the 1991 general election, only conducted with more enthusiasm. After Chee had followed Goh around Jurong East, Goh said that:

If he happens to be best loser [*sic*], he may enter Parliament by default, which is why we must deny him that. Better to have anybody else than Chee Soon Juan.<sup>75</sup>

Goh continued with this theme throughout the campaign, and even went to the extent of talking up the prospects of a 'moderate' candidate, Steve Chia, in an effort to keep Chee down, although Goh did deny this. Goh described Chia as an 'eager young man' who 'tries to speak sensibly', and that therefore he could not put him down for no reason.<sup>76</sup> After the election, and when Chia was declared an NCMP, Lee Hsien Loong urged him to take the seat because he was well spoken.

Chua went on to note that it was also an issue during the 1988 general election, where the PAP leadership urged voters in Eunos to reject the WP team 'decisively'. Again in the 1997 general election, the leadership came out to pressure Tang Liang Hong. Tang was labelled a 'Chinese Chauvinist' by Goh, Lee Kuan Yew and the deputy PMs, Lee Hsien Loong and Tony Tan. Cheng San constituency, where Tang's WP GRC team stood, was looking to fall to the Opposition. Goh invested heavily, arguing that it was a contest between him and Tang. Goh urged voters to reject Tang's form of politics.<sup>77</sup> And on the last day of the campaign he told Cheng San voters that they could either win big, or lose big.<sup>78</sup> Although Goh did not actually mention the NCMP scheme, without doubt it did play on his mind.

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<sup>74</sup> Anonymous, 'No PAP Hidden Agenda to stop Chee'.

<sup>75</sup> Cited in Anonymous, 'Anyone else would be better than Chee as NCMP: PM Goh', in *Straits Times* (28 October 2001).

<sup>76</sup> Anonymous, 'No PAP Hidden Agenda to stop Chee'.

<sup>77</sup> Anonymous, 'SDP and NSP criticise PAP for Attacking Tang', in *Straits Times* (1 January 1997). p. 26.

<sup>78</sup> Sumiko Tan, 'Voters in GRC will either "Win Big or Lose Big"', in *Straits Times* (2 January 1997). p. 1.

### 3.3.4 LEGITIMACY DEFICIENCY

There are several supplementary issues, which have affected the three NCMPs and these issues shall be dealt with in this section. Both Dr. Lee and Jeyaretnam suffered a sense of legitimacy deficiency in Parliament by being NCMPs. Due to the fact that they were regime critics to begin with, they would have received poor treatment from the PAP anyway. But their status as NCMPs was used against them. For instance, the PAP in Parliament used the very title itself against them in the House. It was also claimed by Jeyaretnam in Parliament that the media referred to him in a negative light:

No doubt the ever faithful press will report of the NCMP wasting the time [*sic*] and I see that every time they refer to me, they say the NCMP.<sup>79</sup>

During his time as an NCMP, Dr. Lee was also described as an NCMP in the media. Notwithstanding this, it was his title. But the issue was far more relevant in Parliament. Throughout both of their terms in the House as NCMPs, the PAP often referred to both Dr. Lee and Jeyaretnam as NCMPs. The first instance where the title was used in a delegitimising fashion was by Minister of Law, Prof. Jayakumar. In several cases that followed, Dr. Lee was referred to as ‘the NCMP’ more so in seemingly heated exchanges.<sup>80</sup>

When Jeyaretnam became an NCMP, he also suffered from the same patronising attitude from the PAP, more so because of his strong rejection of the scheme during the 1980s.<sup>81</sup> Whilst he was moving a motion on ‘Representation on the Public Transport Council’ (he

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<sup>79</sup> Jeyaretnam, *Make it Right*, p. 28.

<sup>80</sup> For instance, see *Parliamentary Debates Singapore: Official Report*. Vol. 54. Iss. 6. Col. 564-5. During Dr. Lee’s term, four instances stand out directly. Lew Syn Pau said ‘and Dr. Lee Siew-Choh, the NCMP’ in *Parliamentary Debates* Vol. 56. Iss. 4. Col. 256; Mah Bow Tan said ‘respond to the NCMP, Dr. Lee’ in Vol. 56. Iss. 6. Col. 416; Ng Kah Ting stated ‘speech from the Non-Constituency Member, Dr. Lee’ in Vol. 56. Iss. 8. Col. 512; &, Lim Boon Heng said ‘The Non-Constituency Member should learn from the Opposition Member’ in Vol. 57. Iss. 3. Col. 174.

<sup>81</sup> Another two similar cases as with Dr. Lee. Ho Peng Kee said ‘the NCMP, Mr Jeyaretnam’ in *Parliamentary Debates* Vol. 67. Iss. 4. Col. 264; &, Sinnakaruppan said “The NCMP, J B Jeyaretnam” in Vol. 67. Iss. 4. Col. 317.

was urging the Government to appoint an Opposition MP to the Council) to laughter in gallery, an MP remarked: 'NCMP?'.<sup>82</sup> Another time Jeyaretnam raised a motion in Parliament Lee Yock Suan stated:

In fact, the Members of Parliament are being very patient with him. We have stayed back until almost 8.00 pm to listen to him for one hour, and he is not even an elected Member. He is an NCMP.<sup>83</sup>

A large measure of this attitude towards NCMPs stems from the Opposition's ambivalence towards the scheme itself. As illustrated above, this accords with a latent rationale for using the scheme to divide-and-rule. Much of this political ambivalence stems from the fact that the scheme is seen as a double-edged sword. For Chua argues that on the one hand, it opens opportunities for the Opposition to participate in politics, but on the other hand, it reduces the electoral chances of Opposition parties and may 'lead to greater social control through an extended network of state agencies'.<sup>84</sup> During the 1991 general election campaign, Lee Hsien Loong criticised the Opposition for not having a stand on the NCMP scheme. He argued that Dr. Lee had changed his mind on the issue. Also, he noted that although most Opposition parties said they did not support it, in that year a higher proportion were standing in single-seat wards, which he believed gave them more of a chance to enter Parliament as NCMPs.<sup>85</sup>

Dr. Lee was criticised by the PAP for taking the seat, but as stated above, he was open-minded to the scheme at its introduction, unlike Jeyaretnam. Jeyaretnam was denounced for becoming an NCMP. One criticism stated that he only accepted the seat because he desperately wanted to get back into Parliament because of his old age.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Jeyaretnam, *Make it Right*, p. 112.

<sup>83</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* Vol. 67. Iss. 16. Col. 1659

<sup>84</sup> Chua, Beng-Huat, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* (London: Routledge. 1995). p. 177.

<sup>85</sup> Anonymous, 'BG Lee: Opposition should state stand on NCMPs', in *Straits Times* (29 August 1991). p. 22.

<sup>86</sup> Pang Gek Choo, 'Good Reminder not just for Chinese, Says Abdullah', in *Straits Times* (13 January 1997). p. 13.

It can be said that by allowing losing Opposition figures to enter the House, the NCMP scheme serves to boost the PAP's legitimacy. Tremewan pointed out that with NCMPs entering Parliament, the Opposition's credibility would suffer as they were not popularly elected. On the other hand, the PAP would be seen as 'generously accommodating them'.<sup>87</sup> On 18 January 1989, Dr. Lee attacked the PAP for not respecting criticism and not practicing democracy. PAP MP Chandra Das replied, stating that 'here we even allow non-elected members to be present in this house ...'.<sup>88</sup> Ong Chit Chuang, when discussing the NCMP and proposed Nominated MP (NMP) schemes, argued that the government was trying to commit to a higher levels of democracy: 'How else could you explain the presence of a Non-Constituency Member of Parliament like Dr. Lee Siew-Choh? His presence is proof that democracy is at work here'.<sup>89</sup>

On another occasion, whilst Jeyaretnam was an NCMP, he criticised the PAP for not accepting a debate with the WP. Leader of the House, Wong Kan Sang stated

... if we are afraid of having a debate with the Workers' Party, he would not be given a chance to be here, by us, by the way.<sup>90</sup>

Once again, when Jeyaretnam queried the Government about not having an independent electoral commission, and thus criticising Singapore's democratic system, Wong replied: 'Our democratic system, I think, cannot be far more democratic than now. We even allow a loser to be in Parliament to make speeches. ... Where can you find such a democracy in other countries?'.<sup>91</sup> Although the PAP often shrugs off Opposition claims about its lack of democratic credentials, using the NCMP scheme does hold particular significance. Because it is the Opposition which has accepted the scheme<sup>92</sup> (even only at a provisional and token level) and therefore has provided it with *de facto* credibility.

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<sup>87</sup> Tremewan, *Political Economy of Social Control*, p. 159.

<sup>88</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 52. Iss. 4. Col. 238.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, Iss. 6. Col. 418

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 72. Iss. 1. Col. 29

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 67. Iss. 9. Col. 708

As their title suggests, Non-Constituency MPs do not represent a constituency. Although the bill which introduced the scheme stated that the returning officer will declare an NCMP 'elected' as pointed out by Jeyaretnam, the PAP has always maintained that NCMPs do not represent the ward in which they stood for election. This issue was first raised by Dr. Lee when he asked the HDB for office space in a void deck.<sup>93</sup> The HDB's response was that 'Non-Constituency MPs do not represent any constituency and therefore they are not entitled'.<sup>94</sup> When followed up in Parliament, the Minister for National Development, S. Dhanabalan simply followed with the same response that he had no constituency. The same issue was raised after Jeyaretnam was declared an NCMP. From the outset Jeyaretnam argued that he would represent the 45 percent of voters in Cheng San who supported his GRC team. Lee Yock Suan (PAP MP for that GRC) argued that this was just a means for the WP to justify its acceptance of the seat, and that his team were the incumbents. Referring to Jeyaretnam, Lee Yock Suan said 'He has no constituency to represent'.<sup>95</sup> To maintain contact with constituents, Jeyaretnam conducted meet-the-people sessions in coffee shops.<sup>96</sup> Steve Chia has said that he will do the same thing.

Whilst an NCMP, Jeyaretnam also complained about the fact that when he wrote to Government ministries and departments with questions on behalf of residents, he did not receive any answers.<sup>97</sup> He was told that they had been instructed to only reply to MPs who write on behalf of their constituents. Wong replied to Jeyaretnam by repeating the fact that he had no constituency, but that there was no directive issued telling ministries

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<sup>92</sup> The Workers' Party has accepted seats twice, and the NSP party, under the Singapore Democratic Alliance has accepted one.

<sup>93</sup> Prior to 1991 the HDB allowed MPs to use a void deck for office space.

<sup>94</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 53. Iss. 5. Col. 340

<sup>95</sup> Anonymous, 'Cheng San's PAP MPs will serve all the Residents in GRC: Yock Suan', in *Straits Times* (12 January 1997). p. 24.

<sup>96</sup> Anonymous, 'NCMP-to-be to Continue Meeting the People' in *Straits Times* (11 November 2001).

<sup>97</sup> However, it is interesting not that Jeyaretnam complained that he received little or no responses to his questions from ministries or the HDB whilst the MP for Anson (1981-6) *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 43. Iss. 16. Col. 1753).



or departments not to respond to NCMPs. The decision was made in 1992 to only respond to MPs, so as to avoid multiple appeals on the same issue.<sup>98</sup>

The final issue to be dealt with pertains to legislative assistants. Soon after Jeyaretnam became an NCMP in 1997, the government decided to withdraw the S\$500 allowance for NMPs and NCMPs to hire legislative assistants. Wong replied that they did not have as heavy a workload as regular MPs (for instance, they have no constituency work).<sup>99</sup>

It is this depiction of NCMPs as 'second class MPs' which is important for the PAP to reinforce in order to de-legitimise the Opposition. If they were given equal status - for instance, if they were given same benefits as regular MPs and provided with the same recourses for legislative and constituency work - their standings would increase, as would the likelihood of them being elected in the future. And because the first two NCMPs were regime critics, this would have been something the PAP would have dearly wanted to prevent.

### 3.3.5 THE FAILURE OR SUCCESS OF THE SCHEME

The NCMP scheme has been seen to be side lined. This is largely attributed to the fact that the NMP scheme has supplanted it.<sup>100</sup> To a certain extent, this is correct; the NMP scheme has been far more successful than the NCMP scheme. However, two important things should be noted. Firstly, one cannot understand the NMP scheme without the NCMP scheme; in essence, the latter set a precedent in permitting individuals to enter Parliament without an electoral mandate.

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<sup>98</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 67. Iss. 6. Col. 468-70. It is interesting to note that during a discussion in Parliament about increasing the number of NCMPs Wong implied that NCMP's do have constituencies. He was challenging Chiam who was arguing that NCMPs do not represent anyone:

Sir may I ask Mr. Chiam whether he is aware that 49% of the residents of Eunos GRC voted for the Workers' Party, and that is about 35 000 voters in all, and that is many more than those in Potong Pasir? And, therefore, Dr. Lee represents 35 000 people? *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 52. Iss. 6. Col. 422).

<sup>99</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 67. Iss. 9. Col. 693-7

<sup>100</sup> See for instance: Thio *Choosing Representatives*.

The second and far more important point is that both schemes should be dovetailed for two reasons. They are only similar in regard to the fact that they are:

- A means for introducing individuals into the parliament without an electoral mandate.
- That when both Lee Kuan and Goh introduced each bill respectively, they gave identical explanations, not for the reason for introducing each, but for why they saw these schemes as meeting their objectives. Both argued that they did not want to radically alter the constitution or the face of Singapore politics. Rather, they were seen as ‘improvements’. Both categorically dismissed the ideas of establishing an Upper House, or, implementing a system of Proportional Representation.

Both differ because their ‘manifest’ rationales meet different objectives. The NCMP scheme as enunciated by Lee Kuan Yew was intended to educate the population on the role of an Opposition; it would provide sparring partners for younger PAP MPs, and give credibility to the government. Only the last point is considered a rationale for the NMP scheme. Goh explained that the NMP scheme’s rationale was to introduce ‘alternative’ and ‘constructive’ views into the House. He even explained that it was different from the NCMP scheme, because the government would represent the ‘majority’, the Opposition and NCMPs would provide ‘partisan’ views, whereas the NMPs would be the middle of the road and ‘non-partisan’.

Henceforth, when we look at the NCMP scheme and give reasons for it being put on the backburner, only partially should this be attributed to the NMP scheme. The NCMP scheme still exists, however the number has not been increased.<sup>101</sup> One reason may be due to the performance of the two subordinate SDP MPs; Ling How Doong and Cheo Chai Chen. They did not impress the PAP, unlike Low and Chiam, and they did not have an impact on Parliament. To a certain degree, it is possible that the populace ‘learnt’

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<sup>101</sup> This excludes the one time for the 1991 general election.

about the 'destructive' nature of an Opposition. The point to support this is that only Chiam and Low were returned in 1997.

However, this argument is difficult to substantiate, and as elaborated by da Cunha, one of the more central reasons for the Opposition losing half of its seats, and slumping to five percent of total votes, was the PAP's HDB upgrading deal, the decentralisation of counting stations, and the poor decision-making of the Opposition in selecting constituencies to contest.<sup>102</sup>

Much has to do with the fact that the first two NCMPs were both regime critics. Even though Dr. Lee could be categorised, and often was by the PAP in the House, as another regime critic like Jeyaretnam,<sup>103</sup> the PAP argued that his contribution was still of value to the House. The reason for this could be that he did not cross the line into unacceptability by, for instance denouncing the PAP as 'a Mafia Government' running 'Sham elections' as Jeyaretnam did in 1997.<sup>104</sup> Also, as Dr. Lee was the first NCMP, perhaps the Government felt it necessary to give the *scheme* (not so much Dr. Lee) a chance, as touched on earlier.

Towards the end of that Parliamentary session, Jayakumar amended the parliamentary elections act, not to increase the number of NCMPs permitted in the House which was set at three (even though the President could appoint six), but to allow the President, between the dissolution of Parliament and Nomination day to set the number between four and six.<sup>105</sup> If the President did not state a number it would remain at three. The number was increased to four for the 1991 general election, but was inconsequential since four Opposition MP were returned by voters. The scheme was not augmented in the next

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<sup>102</sup> da Cunha, *The Price of Victory*.

<sup>103</sup> There were two instances where he was specifically compared to Jeyaretnam. Jayakumar said after listening to Dr. Lee, that if you close your eyes, it is like listening to Jeyaretnam in *Parliamentary Debates* Vol. 52. Iss. 10. Col. 777, and Lee Yock Suan stated: 'Listening to Dr. Lee, I found myself wondering whether it was Dr. Lee speaking or Mr. J. B. Jeyaretnam speaking' *Parliamentary Debates* Vol. 55. Iss. 10. Col. 649.

<sup>104</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 67. Iss. 4. Col. 252-3.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 58. Iss. 2. Col. 116-9.

general election. There are two possible explanations for this; the latter more plausible than the former due to hindsight:

- Since the Opposition had made steady and considerable gains from 1981 through to 1991, the Government could have come to the realisation that the NCMP scheme had become irrelevant. If the number of NCMPs was expanded to five or six, but was not needed due to a growing number of elected Opposition MPs, the PAP would have lost face.
- On the other hand, with the PAP's electoral machinery, and with its dual tactic of HDB upgrades and decentralised counting stations, the ruling party would have been quite confident of their victory, and therefore would not need to use more NCMP seats to try and dissuade votes from supporting the Opposition.

Several reasons therefore follow to suggest that the PAP did not consider expanding the NCMP scheme. Firstly, it could be argued that the 'manifest' objects set out for the NCMP scheme, were met. The electorate would have been 'educated' on the usefulness of the Opposition in the political system through four MPs being present to oppose the PAP for five-and-a-half years. Also, Chee Soon Juan's consistent negative media attention since entering the political scene would have clearly demonstrated to the electorate how poorly an Opposition can operate in Singapore. Secondly, this presence of Opposition MPs would have proved sufficient to increase MPs debating skills. An interesting point to note is that during the 1997 and 2001 general elections the PAP became involved in another generational shift. In 1997, 23 new candidates were introduced, in 2001 another 27. One can hypothesise that the PAP felt it necessary to have a larger Opposition presence in the House, but 'stability' – a PAP dictum – would dictate a reduced Opposition presence whilst the new MPs 'found their feet'. The third rationale, to provide credibility to the Government, as stated earlier, could also be seen as responsible for introducing the NMP scheme.<sup>106</sup> This would be primarily where the NMP

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<sup>106</sup> In fact, some NMPs were fulfilling that third NCMP rationale exactly as Lee Kuan Yew described it in 1984, some NMPs have had Singaporeans come to them with problems which they have followed up. This was the case for Gerard Ee and Claire Chiang in Irene Ng, 'Have NMPs earned their Parliamentary Spurs?', in *Straits Times* (7 July 1999). p. 62.

scheme comes into play. It was the NMP scheme, not the NCMP scheme that was expanded as a result of the 1997 general election.

Here we come to the 'latent' intention of the NCMP scheme. The scheme was implemented during a period of rising support for Opposition Parties. The PAP tried to persuade the electorate to return PAP MPs by ensuring Opposition representation in the House.<sup>107</sup> By the time the 1997 general election arrived, for the reasons explained in the manifest intention being considerably achieved, the PAP would have become aware of an abating desire to vote for Opposition candidates, both due to their disunity and the PAP's tactics. This presumption would have been justified in the declining vote for the Opposition in the previous two general elections.

Another reason can be deduced, stemming from the mitigated critic, as opposed to regime critic argument. In the 1997 general election, the PAP would have been aware of the swelling ground support for the WP's team in Cheng San GRC. This team, led by the newly returned Jeyaretnam, posed a considerable threat to the PAP. Knowing that by using HDB upgrades, the Opposition vote would drop, and thus, the NCMP scheme would come back into play, the PAP would have been concerned over the prospect of Jeyaretnam or the 'chauvinist' Tang entering the House through the scheme.<sup>108</sup>

The 2001 general election proved to be more troublesome than the previous election. Prior to this election, the Government passed an amendment banning the publishing of opinion polls, but through the use of 'crisis' in the worst economic downturn since 1985-6, the PAP would have been confident of strong electoral support, which eventuated with 75 percent in its favour. Apart from Potong Pasir and Hougang, no other constituency supporting the Opposition parties exceeded 36 percent of total polls. In this case the NCMP scheme had added significance. With no real shining constituency for the Opposition; it would have been difficult for the Government to predict who would have

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<sup>107</sup> Thio suggests that the NCMP (and NMP) Scheme *may* lull the electorate into a slough of complacency by the thought that there will always be an 'opposition' voice if not in the form of elected Opposition MPs, however, Thio *Choosing Representatives*, p. 56 seems far from convinced by this notion.

<sup>108</sup> da Cunha *The Price of Victory*, p. 63

become an NCMP. One thing was clear; the PAP was set to keep Chee Soon Juan out. Increasing the number of NCMPs would have increased the chances of him getting in. Hence, the two central reasons (after the success of the NMP scheme) were that the 'manifest' rationale had become less important by 1997, and that the PAP wanted to prevent regime critic Opposition figures entering the House.

Regarding its latent rationale of playing a divide-and-rule strategy, shifting public attention and trying to prevent constituents voting for the Opposition, the success of the NCMP scheme is not clear cut. As described above, the PAP has used the scheme in an attempt to divide Opposition parties. However, during the 1990s, the problems between regime critics (JB Jeyertnam and Chee) and mitigated critic (Chiam and Low) was a far more decisive factor. The PAP had tried to use it during election times to shift attention, but it has always been the primary concerns of cost of living which dominant politics in Singapore. Finally, it is very difficult to gauge how much the scheme plays on voters minds when they are at the polls. Since the electoral decline of the PAP during the 1980s was not reversed after the scheme's introduction, it therefore can be seen as irrelevant. Also, the adoption of the by-election strategy during the 1991, 1997 and 2001 general elections largely negated it.<sup>109</sup> Instead of the PAP saying: 'vote for the Government and we will provide an Opposition', the Opposition said: 'We have provided you with a Government, vote for the Opposition'.

Although the three NCMPs have been unable to make any serious impact on Parliament, the scheme should not be seen as irrelevant. Thio Li-Ann argued that the presence of 'elected' Opposition MPs in the House has

denuded the rationale underlying the window-dressing that is the NCMP ... The return of competitive politics in Singapore might well signal the *quietus est* of the NCMP scheme.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> This strategy involved the Opposition standing in under half the seats at a general election, so that voters would not worry about voting the PAP out of office by voting for the Opposition.

<sup>110</sup> Thio, *Choosing Representatives*, p. 53

However, seen within its context, her argument did not consider the recent electoral slide of the Opposition. With the two strongest Opposition Parties through the 1980s and 1990s – WP and SDP – experiencing internal strife and with a voter sentiment turning towards the PAP, the Opposition was fortunate not to lose all its seats in the 2001 general election. Hence the NCMP scheme has become relevant again. With a moderate candidate (Steve Chia) from a moderate party (NSP) taking an NCMP scheme, his party will gain good exposure, as it has never had a seat in the House.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## CO-OPTATION THROUGH THE NOMINATED MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT SCHEME

### 4.1 RE-VISITING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the previous chapter, which dealt with the Opposition in Singapore, it was argued that the People's Action Party (PAP) (for Lukes *A*) attempts to manipulate the wants of the *B*. Steven Lukes, in his *Power: A Radical View*<sup>1</sup> offers several relevant theories on the analysis of power. As established in the first chapter, Lukes offers a way forward from the pluralist and behaviourist concepts of power. He illustrates the less visible dimensions of power, which operate through collective forces and social arrangements working to suppress potential issues and avert 'conflict'. In this way, Lukes argues that power can operate to shape the beliefs and preferences of people and operate against their 'real interests'.<sup>2</sup> Hence Lukes argues that '*A* exercises power over *B* when *A* affects *B* in a manner contrary to *B*'s interest'.<sup>3</sup> In relation to Singapore politics, Lukes' *Radical View* draws theoretical relevance to the manner in which the PAP has been able to establish itself in power, and maintain a high level of control within the political sphere.

It was also argued in the previous chapter that the PAP 'informally co-opts' the Opposition in Singapore to ensure this control. The ruling party categorises the Opposition into two groups. Firstly, there are 'mitigated critics', including figures such as Chiam See Tong, Low Thia Kiang and Steve Chia<sup>4</sup> who are accepted as opponents of the PAP; that is to say, 'useful' Parliamentary participants. The second group, 'regime

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-5 & 34-5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> These three Opposition figures are the secretary-generals of the Singapore People's Party (SPP), Workers' Party (WP) and National Solidarity Party (NSP) respectively. They are the only three Opposition politicians in the current Singapore Parliament.



critics' including Chee Soon Juan and JB Jeyaretnam<sup>5</sup> are excluded from the political scene, or at least that which is defined as legitimate 'politics'. This form of co-optation is informal in the sense that there is no agreement between the PAP and the Opposition, either formal or tacit. It does not include the entire Opposition in Singapore, but rather is dealt with on an individual basis

Regime critics intend to change the regime in Singapore through non-revolutionary tactics. It was the PAP which created the regime in Singapore because it has been in government since self-rule in 1959. The methods used by these individuals often breach what is acceptable political discourse for the PAP, which then works to prevent them entering the political system or gaining popularity.<sup>6</sup> The second group, 'mitigated critics' still oppose PAP rule, but their criticism is far less severe. They understand that in order to have any influence, as little as it may be, they must work within the boundaries set by the PAP. It is these individuals who are looked upon more favourably and do not encounter the difficulties of the former group. However, within a Lukesean framework, these Opposition figures can be seen to accept the system and regime, which is directly linked to the PAP, therefore legitimising it through their participation. It is for this reason that mitigated critics may be regarded as 'informally co-opted'.

The reason for re-elaborating Lukes and co-optation is because they will be applied to the case with which this chapter deals, the Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) scheme. Informal co-optation, as discussed in the first chapter, is a method commonly used amongst individuals who, through 'meritocracy', a PAP dictum<sup>7</sup> achieve an influential position in Singapore society. These individuals need not pose a serious threat to the PAP or regime, but be they intellectuals or professionals, but they *are* able to challenge the

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<sup>5</sup> Secretary-general and former secretary-general of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) and WP respectively.

<sup>6</sup> This includes the use of smear campaigns and libel suits by the PAP. These tactics make political existence difficult for individuals. Singapore voters have shied away from regime critics such as Chee Jeyaretnam, through his popularity however, has better negotiated smear campaigns. Libel suits, often in the hundreds-of-thousands dollars have though bankrupted figures, such as Jeyaretnam and thus deemed them ineligible to sit in Parliament or partake in elections. See Ahmad Osman and G. Sivakkumaran, 'JBJ loses appeal and NCMP seat', in *The Straits Times* (24 July 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Diane K. Mauzy & R. S. Milne, *Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party* (London: Routledge, 2002). pp. 51-6.

government with their credibility and public reputation. Therefore, several of these individuals are ‘informally co-opted’ into the state apparatus. The idea for the PAP is to get these individuals on the side of the Government. Cherian George argued a similar line, that in addition to bringing talented individuals into the party:

the government has operated a much quieter system of co-optation, which has been crucial to its maintenance of power. This exercise targets the individuals with the inclination and ability to become part of the decision-making elite, but who do not want to join the ruling party. These individuals have been drawn systematically into the wider establishment.<sup>8</sup>

The NMP scheme can be seen as a new guise through which ‘informal co-optation’ operates, but maintained along the same principles. Like the NCMP scheme discussed in the previous chapter, the NMP scheme emerged as a corollary of the same ‘high activity block’ of 1981-93.<sup>9</sup> This block witnessed the emergence of broadened political aspirations, translated into a growth in the voter share for the Opposition and a new era of Opposition representation in Parliament. A shift in the PAP’s leadership, from Lee Kuan Yew to Goh Chock Tong was considered a movement from a paternalistic, authoritarian style to a more ‘softer’, consultative still. The ‘second generation’ of PAP leaders, who chose Goh as their leader could not maintain the authoritarian style of the erstwhile leaders. Singaporeans largely saw them as technocrats, and therefore, during the 1980s they had to demonstrate that they would be responsive to the populace.<sup>10</sup> Compounded

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<sup>8</sup> Cherian George, *Singapore, the Air-conditioned Nation: Essays on the Politics of Comfort and Control 1990-2000* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 2000). p. 116.

<sup>9</sup> See the second chapter for an elaboration of this block. The NMP scheme was presented to Parliament in 1989, after proceeding through a select committee, due to large pockets of opposition from within the PAP ranks, and passed into law in 1990. For a short survey of PAP opposition to the scheme during its introduction, see Anonymous, ‘Towards a More Feisty Parliament’. In *Asiaweek*, (26 January 1990. 16.4). p. 21. However, at the time of its introduction, the concept of the NMP scheme was not new in Singapore. In 1972, Lee Kuan Yew mooted the idea that some seats in Parliament be reserved for academics that could thus perform the role of an ‘Opposition’. This suggestion followed the General Election of that year, where the Opposition failed to secure a single seat. see Bilveer Singh, ‘Nominated MPs in Singapore: The Debate’, In *The Parliamentarian: Journal of Parliaments of the Commonwealth* (LXXI No. 4. October 1990). pp. 252.

<sup>10</sup> Raj Vasil, *Governing Singapore: National Development and Democracy* (Second Edition) (New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2000). See chapter four for a discussion of this transition within government, and difficulties encountered.

with this, the Singapore economy fell into recession in 1985/6, its first since the 1960s. With the PAP finding itself in a vulnerable position in the 1980s, it decided to introduce a number of initiatives to provide alternative avenues for public involvement in policy debates and thus demonstrate its 'consultative style'. Included was the introduction of the Feedback Unit in 1985; the phased introduction of Town Councils (1986-91); the introduction of Government Parliamentary Committees in 1987; and the creation of the Institute of Policy Studies in 1988.<sup>11</sup> Rodan suggests that although these initiatives were intended to provide further consultation with the populace, but he goes on to remark that the PAP introduced them:

to direct dissent and dissatisfaction with the PAP or particular government policies through institutions controlled by the party or institutions with a potential to depoliticise debate. The clear aim was to foster an alternative to the increasing recourse by Singaporeans to opposition political parties.<sup>12</sup>

In this context, Rodan briefly discussed the introduction of the NMP scheme, therefore categorising it with the other initiatives.

## **4.2 THE NOMINATED MP SCHEME**

### **4.2.1 THE MANIFEST AND LATENT RATIONALES**

The discussion begins with a consideration of the 'manifest' and 'latent' rationales which have shaped the NMP scheme.<sup>13</sup> At the second reading to introduce the NMP scheme, then First Deputy PM Goh Chok Tong explained that the NMP scheme was intended to

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<sup>11</sup> Gary Rodan, 'Preserving the One-Party State in Contemporary Singapore'. In Kevin Hewison et. Al (Eds), *Southeast Asia in the 1990s: Authoritarianism, Democracy and Capitalism*. (New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 1993). pp.87-91.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> 'Manifest' and 'Latent' rationales, which were discussed in the first chapter, refer to the PAP's justifications for introducing particular initiatives. Along their basic definitions, manifest refers to the stated

bring 'alternative' 'non-partisan' views into Parliament. He opened his reading by stating that

The aim of this Bill is to further strengthen our political system by offering Singaporeans more opportunities for political participation and to evolve a more consensual style of government where alternative views are heard and constructive dissent accommodated. It is part of the broader vision which we in the PAP Government painted in 1984, and which led to the introduction of Non-Constituency MPs, and the establishment of GRCs and Town Councils. It should therefore be seen in this wider context.<sup>14</sup>

He suggested that it would allow individuals to enter Parliament who have 'distinguished themselves', or who have 'special knowledge and practical experience in the professions, commerce, industry, cultural activities, social service, or people from an underrepresented group ...'.<sup>15</sup> He stated quite clearly that NMPs would not be Opposition or Government MPs. It was essential that they remain non-partisan, and therefore *should* not belong to a political party. Goh went on to delineate the differences between 'Government or PAP MPs', 'Opposition and Non-Constituency MPs' and the new 'NMPs'. The first, he argued, represented the 'middle ground'. The second group represented the 'anti-establishment voters'. The NMPs would be independent and speak for those who felt their interests are not adequately represented by the previous two.<sup>16</sup> Goh briefly gave three principles underlying the Bill: First, to build consensus; second, to encourage political participation and contribution; and, third, to accommodate constructive dissent and alternative views.<sup>17</sup> Of central importance was that these NMPs would offer alternative views and be an improvement on the current system of Parliament. For Goh, they would focus on the substance of the debate, rather than the

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or acknowledged rationales given by the PAP for introducing a scheme. Latent refers to the non-stated or hidden reasons.

<sup>14</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore: Official Report*. Vol. 54. No. 8. Column [hereafter referred as Col.]. 695. Non-Constituency MPs were discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 697.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, cols. 700-2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 705.

rhetoric. They would ‘fulfil a constructive role’ which the Opposition in the House did not provide.<sup>18</sup>

The manifest rationale for the scheme therefore was quite simple. The latent rationale, on the other hand, had several nuances. The Opposition and critical academics, as discussed in the preceding chapter, explicated the latent rationale for the NCMP scheme and they have also endeavoured to expose the latent rationale for the NMP scheme.

To begin with the Opposition, its stand against the scheme was clear. The two Opposition figures in the Parliament during the scheme’s introduction were critical of the idea of bringing individuals into Parliament without going through the standard electoral process. Chiam See Tong<sup>19</sup> was very opposed to its introduction firstly because NMPs would have no measure of electoral support.<sup>20</sup> Towards the end of his speech, Chiam argued that the PAP was trying to demonstrate that it was open to the idea of having Opposition in the House when in reality it worked to prevent the emergence of an elected Opposition. He mentioned the issues of ‘freer’ and ‘fairer’ polls without resorting to smear tactics, changing electoral ground rules and boundaries to suit itself:

The truth is that the Government is afraid that at the next general elections [*sic*] more opposition will be voted into Parliament and it does not want any more elected opposition in Parliament. Therefore the Government has to do something about it. Hence, the introduction of 6 nominated MPs.<sup>21</sup>

Although Chiam was a member of the ‘Select Committee’ to amend the NMP bill, he still (unsurprisingly) rejected it. In the third reading he argued that the scheme was a way of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 700.

<sup>19</sup> Chiam is the longest serving Opposition figure in the Singapore Parliament, he was first elected in 1984, and was returned in all four General Elections which followed. Chiam was the founder and secretary-general of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) until he was ousted in 1995. In the 1997 General Election he shifted to the Singapore People’s Party (SPP) where has been the secretary-general since then.

<sup>20</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*. Vol. 54. No. 8. Cols. 734-6.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., col. 737.

...taking the initial steps towards totalitarianism. The whole world is marching towards democracy. We are in fact moving away from it.<sup>22</sup>

The other Opposition figure in the House, Dr. Lee Siew-Choh,<sup>23</sup> listed similar concerns as Chiam. He argued that the PAP saw itself as the 'dominant party' in Singapore<sup>24</sup> and suggested that both the NCMP and NMP schemes were methods for the PAP to pave the way for a dominant party system, like a communist system.<sup>25</sup> He also argued that what the PAP should be doing, if it were serious about wanting to hear more views, was to open the political system, uphold basic human rights and allow the press to give full coverage to the Opposition.<sup>26</sup>

At an academic level, the latent rationale has also been described. Garry Rodan has discussed the scheme several times in the context of the PAP initiatives in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He noted that at the time Lee Hsien Loong 'quite explicitly expressed the hope for the NMPs to halt the growing support for opposition candidates'.<sup>27</sup> Rodan also included the NMP scheme in his discussion (mentioned above) about how these schemes were used by the PAP to direct dissent through institutions controlled by the party or with potential to depoliticise debate. In another chapter, Rodan suggested that the scheme was used 'to avoid the politics of contestation'.<sup>28</sup>

Rodan went into more detail three years later. He argued that through the NMP scheme, the PAP was trying to 'steer disaffection with it away from the formal opposition in favour of co-optation'.<sup>29</sup> The NCMP scheme was virtually 'sidelined' in favour of the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Vol. 55. No. 15. Col. 1031.

<sup>23</sup> Who shall be referred to as Dr. Lee to distinguish him from Lee Kuan Yew, was a Workers' Party (WP) candidate in the 1988 General Election and who became the first NCMP (1988-91).

<sup>24</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*. Vol. 54. No. 8. Cols. 752-4.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., col. 752; &, 754.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., col. 752.

<sup>27</sup> Rodan, 'Preserving the One Party state', p. 89.

<sup>28</sup> Garry Rodan, 'The Growth of Singapore's Middle Class and its Political Significance'. In Garry Rodan (Ed), *Singapore Changes Guard: Social, Political and Economic Directions in the 1990s* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993). p. 103.

<sup>29</sup> Garry Rodan, 'Elections without Representation: The Singapore Experience under the PAP'. In R. H. Taylor (Ed), *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). p. 72. The issue of co-optation will be dealt with later in the chapter.

NMP scheme, Rodan argued, because it was not attached to party affiliation. The NCMP scheme had failed to dissuade voters from supporting the Opposition, as the 1991 General Election demonstrated, when four Opposition candidates were returned (the highest number in 25 years). The PAP hoped that the NMP scheme could do this.<sup>30</sup> Rodan suggested that the increase of NMPs in Parliament following the 1991 General Election (from two to six) was a result of increased Opposition presence in the House (from one MP to four).<sup>31</sup> This point is somewhat difficult to support. It was the original stated intention of the scheme to have six NMPs in the House. Only two were appointed initially in order to test the scheme. The first two NMPs did not make a major impact on the House, due largely to the fact that it was new, and that they were in the House for a short period (November 1990-July 1991). Nonetheless, further evidence does support Rodan's point. After the 1997 General Election, where only two Opposition candidates were returned, the PAP decided to increase the number of NMPs. In the words of Wong Kan Seng, Leader of the House:

Sir, to make up for the decline in the number of elected opposition MPs, I will, ... increase the number of NMPs from six to nine so that Parliament can give vent to views which may not be canvassed by the PAP or opposition Members. They will help fill the void left by the loss of two elected Opposition MPs.<sup>32</sup>

This statement supports Rodan's argument that NMPs were used to counter the Opposition. In this case, Wong intended to further overshadow the weakened Opposition by introducing more NMPs. That fact that he raised the number of NMPs after a decline in the number of Opposition MPs shows that the PAP believes that the scheme is a successful countermeasure. Rodan also suggested that this occurs at another level. The nature of the NMP scheme will see that a wide variety of individuals are selected, representing particular groups in society, including, academics, lawyers, doctors, business and trade union leaders and women. Rodan suggests that this is a 'preemptive move to

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 72-3. This issue of the NMP scheme supplanting the NCMP scheme shall be dealt with in the following chapter.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>32</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*. Vol. 67. No. 5. Col. 417.

ensure that any disaffection with the government from de facto interest groups does not translate into greater support for opposition parties'.<sup>33</sup> Rodan's views are also supported by Christopher Tremewan who argued a similar line:

The benefit to the PAP will be considerable because the political effect of having yet a third category of MP in parliament [after elected MPs and NCMPs] will be to undermine the democratic concept of opposition. ... The line between government and opposition, and between elected and appointed, will become blurred – presumably an intentional effect.<sup>34</sup>

As a final issue to deal with in this section, it is interesting to see where the scheme fits within the PAP's ideology. It has been suggested that the scheme is positioned nicely with the PAP's principle of meritocracy. In fact, as Rodan has pointed out, the NMP scheme can be seen as a signal that the PAP is unwilling 'to compromise on the elitist ideology of meritocracy'.<sup>35</sup> This point is realistic because, as shall be outlined below, the criteria for becoming an NMP is firmly set within meritocratic guidelines. However, it is interesting to note that the scheme is not completely congenial to another, more recent PAP principle. The fourth 'Shared Value', presented as a White Paper in 1991 is 'Consensus instead of Contention'.<sup>36</sup> This principle is established on the notion that open political debate on issues (particularly controversial issues) is not an accepted value. Rather, contentious issues are better dealt with between relevant parties at a more clandestine level. This is in an effort to avoid the possibility of social discord. The idea of having individuals enter Parliament, a public domain, and providing alternative and constructive views does not necessarily challenge this principle. Nonetheless, it does produce the possibility that it will indirectly lead to conflict.

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<sup>33</sup> Rodan, 'Elections without Representation', p. 74. This topic shall be re-visited later in the chapter.

<sup>34</sup> Christopher Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press 1994). p. 172.

<sup>35</sup> Rodan, 'Elections without Representation', p. 77. He also suggests that this may inadvertently legitimise notions of political representation at odds with meritocracy. It is difficult to substantiate this point as the NMP scheme has largely been seen as a success, and that the PAP has continued to choose its candidates and ministers along that meritocratic line.

<sup>36</sup> *Shared Values* (White Paper), cmd. 1 of 1991. 2 January. p. 10.



Although the Opposition figures and academics surveyed in this study go into detail about the latent rationale(s) for introducing the NMP scheme, this chapter will argue that it is consistent at a broader level of analysis with the Lukesean concept of power. The PAP co-opts NMPs in an effort to manipulate the wants of Singaporeans and to demonstrate that the PAP is the only legitimate party and is therefore in the best position to govern Singapore.

#### 4.2.2 THE MECHANICS OF THE SCHEME

During its introduction, the NMP scheme did not attract a high level of interest from the population. Chua Beng Huat pointed out that the press received only five letters to the editor on the issue.<sup>37</sup> The scheme did draw attention from the Opposition (as mentioned above) and from PAP backbenchers. The central concerns from the latter group were that the Government was disappointed in the performance of PAP backbenchers, even though they had actively served as a ‘surrogate Opposition’. Nominated Members were present during the early years of the legislature in Singapore prior to self-rule, therefore, it was seen as a retrogressive step back to colonial days. Another point was that it was not congruent with the notion of ‘representation’ and that it would serve as a ‘backdoor’ entry into Parliament for those unwilling to conduct constituency work. Finally, some expressed concern that the scheme may be a way for individuals to enter Parliament who could stir unrest in the population through religious, racial and linguistic concerns.<sup>38</sup>

Although Goh did try to dispel much of the criticism levelled at the scheme, he decided to take it to a Select Committee where some amendments were made. To a large extent, the NMPs have similar restrictions as NCMPs. Like NCMPs, NMP are not permitted to vote on financial or supply bills, bills to amend the constitution, votes of no confidence in the Government, or, after the introduction of the Elected President to impeach the Head

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<sup>37</sup> Chua Beng-Huat, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* (London: Routledge 1995, paperback 1997), p. 39.

<sup>38</sup> See the second reading of the Bill: *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 54. No. 8. Cols. 695-768; &, No. 9. Cols. 785-854. For a condensed view see Anonymous, ‘Towards a More Feisty Parliament’, p. 21; &, Bilveer ‘Nominated MPs in Singapore’, p. 253.

of State. Also, neither are permitted to sit on any Town Councils.<sup>39</sup> Initially, the scheme permitted six individuals to serve as NMPs at any one time, but as stated above, this was increased to nine following the 1997 General Election. To qualify as an NMP, an individual must be nominated and seconded (each individual must be a Singapore citizen and appear on the Singapore electoral role). Appointments are made by the President on the recommendation of a 'Special Select Committee'.<sup>40</sup> Individuals who are nominated are subject to the same qualifications and disqualifications as those who stand for election. An NMP's term in Parliament was set at two years (unless Parliament is dissolved, they resign, or the seat become vacant), yet they can re-apply. Like NCMPs, if an NMP becomes an elected MP, they must resign their seat.<sup>41</sup>

The Select Committee convened to deal with the bill made seven recommendations to amend it, which were accepted in the third reading. The amendments were an effort to appease the concerns of those in Parliament who had raised objections to the scheme. The first was labelled a 'sunset clause'. Each new Parliament would not be bound to appoint NMPs; rather, it was required to decide by resolution within the first six months of its existence whether it wanted NMPs for that Parliament.<sup>42</sup> Secondly, the committee recommended that the special select committee, wherever possible, consult Members of Parliament before taking a final decision.<sup>43</sup> It was also amended to provide a general criteria for the selection of NMPs:

NMPs should be nominated from among citizens who have rendered distinguished public service or who have brought honour to the Republic or who have distinguished themselves in the field of arts and letters, culture, the sciences, business, industry, the professions, social or community service, or the labour

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<sup>39</sup> Thio Li-ann, 'Choosing Representatives: Singapore does it her own way'. In Graham Hassall & Cheryl Saunders (Eds), *The People's Representatives: Electoral Systems in the Asia-Pacific Region* (NSW: Allen & Unwin 1997). p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> Interesting to note, is that an Opposition member has always been present on these committees.

<sup>41</sup> Bilveer 'Nominated MPs in Singapore', p. 252-3.

<sup>42</sup> All Parliaments since then, the eighth, ninth and tenth Parliaments, all resolved to have NMPs.

<sup>43</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment No. 2) Bill [Bill No. 41/89]*. Parl. 4 of 1990. Presented to Parliament on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1990. p. xii.

movement; and the Special Select Committee shall have regard to the need for NMPs to reflect as wide a range of independent, non-partisan views as possible.<sup>44</sup>

It was also decided that by being an NMP, an individual should not be disqualified from holding political office in Government, which, as pointed out by the committee, was also the case for an NCMP. In the view of the committee, the current Government did not intend to appoint NMPs to political office, but felt that it should not deny future Governments from doing so. The decision was made with the nation's interests in mind.<sup>45</sup> This did cause a stir among the Opposition during the third reading of the Bill in Parliament. Dr. Lee suggested that the PAP had already identified someone as suitable to become a minister through the NMP scheme.<sup>46</sup>

The select committee also maintained that voting rights of NMPs remain the same as NCMPs. The final two recommendations were of political salience. The Select Committee did not require an individual who was nominated for an NMP seat to resign or sever ties from a political party. Finally, the committee recommended that an NMP should only vacate their seat if they unsuccessfully stood in a by-election for a political party, not as an independent.<sup>47</sup> The rationale for this was that forcing someone to resign from their party would not guarantee that their political philosophy or sympathy for that party would change.<sup>48</sup> Wong Kan Seng also later revealed that to exclude members of a political party would limit the number of potential NMPs.<sup>49</sup> For the latter, the committee decided that if an individual stands for a political party in a by-election, they will have to campaign along party lines and would therefore affect their image as 'non-partisan'. This would not be the case if they stood as an independent.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. vi-vii

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. viii-ix.

<sup>46</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 55. No. 15. Col. 1028. It should be noted though, that to date, no NMP has been appointed to political office.

<sup>47</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment No. 2)*, p. xxi.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. x.

<sup>49</sup> Anonymous, 'News in Short', in *The Straits Times* (11 February 2001).

<sup>50</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment No. 2)*, p. xi.

### 4.2.3 THE NMP SCHEME AND CO-OPTATION.

Co-optation, as a theoretical thread in this thesis, is of particular relevance to the NMP scheme. Joseph B. Tamney (citing Leslie Fong) has pointed out that ‘critics charged that the new role was created as a means of committing potential political opponents to the present set up’.<sup>51</sup> It was argued that the NMP scheme was a means to prevent individuals with abilities and talent from posing a threat to PAP rule through joining the Opposition. Micheal Haas dismisses the NMP scheme (and the NCMP scheme) simply as a means for the PAP ‘to dilute and co-opt the opposition’.<sup>52</sup> Chua and Rodan have also cast the NMP scheme within the field of co-optation. Chua argues that

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 may be labelled as *co-optation* ...<sup>53</sup>

Rodan also points in this direction. During the 1980s, and as a result of a ‘rapidly expanding, younger middle-class’ which was alienated from the Government, electoral support for the PAP declined. He argues that ‘as a result, mechanisms to effect political *co-optation* have been considerably extended in an attempt to divert the disaffected from oppositional politics’.<sup>54</sup> Soon after, he says that ‘the NMP scheme is the most significant of these co-optation initiatives’.<sup>55</sup>

However, as Rodan points out, this does not necessarily imply that those who become NMPs will simply be PAP supporters or ‘yes-men’.

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<sup>51</sup> Joseph B Tamney, *The Struggle over Singapore's Soul: Western Modernisation and Asian Culture* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1996). p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> Micheal Haas, ‘Mass Society’. In Micheal Haas (Ed). *The Singapore Puzzle* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999). p. 175.

<sup>53</sup> Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy*, p. 176. Emphasis added.

<sup>54</sup> Garry Rodan, ‘State-Society Relations and Opposition in Singapore’. In Garry Rodan (Ed), *Political Opposition in Industrialising Asia* (London: Routledge, 1996). p. 102. Emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

None of this rules out critical individuals' being appointed as NMPs. Indeed, the scheme will have no credibility if NMPs do not demonstrate a sufficient independence of mind from the government. Importantly, though, the government will be able to set the limits of this criticism through its control over appointment.<sup>56</sup>

The perspectives of the latter two academics on the 'co-optation' process are most relevant to this chapter. The views expressed by Fong and Haas are too difficult to substantiate. Rodan and Chua, arguing that this form of co-optation was a means to draw attention away from the Opposition is far more realistic. It can therefore be proposed that the NMP scheme is a method to co-opt individuals in an effort to suppress the growth of Opposition evident during the period of the scheme's introduction.<sup>57</sup>

Of course, NMPs will challenge the notion that they are co-opted; this is understandable as it places the scheme, and themselves in a negative light. For instance, in an interview, a prominent former NMP, Dr. Kanwaljit Soin,<sup>58</sup> stated that:

I do not believe that the NMP concept is the People's Action Party's scheme to co-opt potential Opposition candidates. NMPs and Opposition parties do not substitute each other – it is not a zero sum game.<sup>59</sup>

There were similar views expressed by other NMPs, including Steven Tay (1997-2001), Shrinivas Rai (1997-2001), and Chandra Mohan (2001-).<sup>60</sup>

It is central to the understanding of the argument of co-optation of NMPs to fathom how the concept of co-optation is approached. The theoretical underpinnings of the concept of

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<sup>56</sup> Rodan, 'Elections without Representation'. p. 74.

<sup>57</sup> Some of these academics do, however, suggest that at a certain level, and particularly with an extended period of having NMPs in Parliament, there are positives to be drawn. This will be more relevant to the next chapter where they will be discussed.

<sup>58</sup> Kanwaljit was an NMP for two terms (1992-6). Between 1991-3, she was the President of the Association of Women for Action and Research in Singapore (AWARE).

<sup>59</sup> 'An Interview with Dr Kanwaljit Soin'. Accessed from the Internet. Accessed on 7 April 2003. <http://www.geocities.com/newsintercom2001/sp/interviews/soin.html>.

‘informal co-optation’ were explicated in chapter one and further applied to Opposition figures and NCMPs in chapter four. To re-visit the primary threads of this concept, it is critical to understand that informal co-optation is not an explicit and open agreement agreed upon by both parties. Informal co-optation is far more tacit and subtle. No explicit contractual agreement is required. Basically, it is for these individuals, who because of their stature (education/professional backgrounds) *may* pose a challenge to the PAP, to be positioned within the state. They are permitted to take an active role, but must respect the boundaries as set by the PAP. As Chua correctly points out:

The collective political effect of these changes [which he includes the NMP scheme] 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.<sup>61</sup>

This returns us to the discussion in the previous chapter concerning ‘regime critics’ and ‘mitigated critics’.<sup>62</sup> The form of informal co-optation, which operates with mitigated critics in the Opposition, is a relevant framework for the type of co-optation operating in the NMP scheme. This distinction between the two types of critics can be applied to the NMP scheme. As stated above, it was Goh who argued that the scheme would be set within the ‘consensual style of Government where alternative views are heard and *constructive dissent* accommodated’. The NMPs were to be ‘*non-partisan*’, ‘fulfil a *constructive role*’ which the Opposition in the House did not provide and ‘Concentrate on

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<sup>60</sup> Private interviews conducted 04-04-2002, 18-04-2002 and 19-03-2002 respectively.

<sup>61</sup> Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy*, p. 177. The point about ‘political differences’ shall be revisited in the next chapter.

<sup>62</sup> As per the discussion in the previous chapter, regime critics are those Opposition figures who direct their attention towards drastically altering the ‘regime’ in Singapore, but in non-violent or revolutionary ways. The Internal Security Act does completely prevent those who try to change the regime along violent and/or revolutionary lines. Included, as regime critics are JB Jeyaretnam and Chee Soon Juan. Mitigated critics are those Opposition figures who are far less critical in their stand against the PAP. This includes Chiam See Tong and Low Thia Khiang. These figures are seen to be ‘constructive’ and ‘moderate’ whereas the former are seen as ‘opposition for oppositions sake’ by the PAP. It is the latter that is more accepted by the PAP and has seen more success in politics. The former group is heavily criticised by the PAP and encounter several difficulties through their more confronting methods. The central trade off made by mitigated critics is that because their line against the regime is moderated, they can be seen to accept the regime, thus legitimising the PAP which is so embedded in it.

the *substance* of the debate, rather than the *rhetoric*'. He also said that the scheme was intended 'to accommodate *constructive dissent* and *alternative views*'.<sup>63</sup>

The NMPs, during the Eighth Parliament (1991-6),<sup>64</sup> acted in conformity with the 'mitigated critic' role. Only rarely did they challenge PAP policy of a political nature.<sup>65</sup> The first instance of this was in August 1994 during the debate on a constitutional amendment bill pertaining to the Elected President. Woon raised two concerns. Firstly, that the amendment allowed a Government to waive the President's veto<sup>66</sup> under 'national security'. Woon was obviously not concerned with this under a responsible Government, but did worry about what an 'irresponsible profligate government would do'.<sup>67</sup> Second, he also pointed out that a President could not refer a constitutional question to a tribunal without the advice of the cabinet, thus impeding his limited executive powers. Kanwaljit also expressed her concern, stating that when Goh introduced the Elected President, he

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<sup>63</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 54. No. 8. Passim. Emphasis added.

<sup>64</sup> Ten NMPs sat through this Parliament, some of which were re-appointed once. Those initially appointed in 1992 included (with their occupation at the time): Mr. Chia Shi Teck (Executive Chairman of Heshe Holdings); Mr. Robert Chua (Chairman of the Singapore Manufacturers Association and Chairman of A.C.E. Daikin); Dr. Kanwaljit Soin (Orthopaedic Surgeon and President of AWARE); Mr. Toh Keng Kiat (Haematologist); Mr. Tong Kok Yeo (Head of the Telecommunications Workers Union); &, Prof. Walter Woon (Professor and Vice-Dean in the Faculty of Law at the National University of Singapore). The next line of appointments took place in 1994 where Kanwaljit and Woon were re-appointed. New appointees included: Mr. Imram Mohamed (President of the Association of Muslim Professionals); Mr. John de Payva (Secretary-general of the Singapore Manual and Mercantile Workers' Union); Mr. Stephen Lee (President of the Singapore National Employers' Federation); &, Dr. Lee Tsao Yuan (Economist & Director of the Institute of Policy Studies).

<sup>65</sup> In this sense, 'political nature' or 'political grounds' refers to matters which relate to PAP power, either as a Government or which impacts on the Opposition. Hence, it concerns democracy and elections in Singapore.

<sup>66</sup> The Elected President has veto powers over: Government expenditure bills; budgets of the Government, key statutory boards and government-owned companies and bills raising loans, incurring debts or providing guarantees on the part of the Government; bills that change the investment powers of the Central Provident Fund Board; Key public service appointments, such as Supreme Court judges, the Attorney General, Public Service and Chief of defence; the right of the Government to recommend to declare a state of emergency; &, bills which he/she considers will circumvent his blocking powers. The President also has the final say over the release political detainees, the issuing of prohibition orders against religious leaders and the investigation of cabinet members for corruption. Tremewan, *The Political Economy*, pp. 174-5.

<sup>67</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 63. No. 5. Col. 435.

‘said the Government was, in fact, “clipping its own wings”. It seems to me that, in introducing this amendment, the Government is now trying to add on some feathers’.<sup>68</sup>

She also pointed out that when the President was appointed, in their oath, they had to say ‘and without any regard to any previous affiliation with any political party’, whereas this was not required for the Elected President.<sup>69</sup>

Even though this was the first instance where NMPs challenged PAP policy on a political ground, both NMPs still acted as ‘mitigated critics’.<sup>70</sup> Through the Eighth Parliament, NMPs could not stray much further beyond this line for two reasons. Firstly, the scheme was still in its testing phase. The individual performances of particularly NMPs, including Woon, Kanwaljit and later Lee Tsao Yuan who all proved themselves as credible Parliamentarians would give the scheme as a whole some respectability, but this was only recognised at the beginning of the Ninth Parliament.<sup>71</sup> Secondly, the Eighth Parliament saw the largest number of Opposition MPs since 1966 with four. Under these circumstances NMPs would have been cautious in how they approached political issues. The PAP would not risk any further erosion of its power, and if NMPs did stray outside mitigated criticism, they may not have been asked to return in the next Parliament.<sup>72</sup>

The first point when looking at the notion that mitigated critics are co-opted through the NMP scheme is the selection process. As mentioned above, in the lead up to a new round

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Col. 444.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Col. 445.

<sup>70</sup> This amendment however, was not as highly controversial as other bills introduced towards the end of the Eighth Parliament and in the Ninth Parliament. In these instances, as shall be discussed further in the next chapter, NMPs found a stronger political voice.

<sup>71</sup> As stated earlier, at the beginning of the Ninth Parliament, the number of NMPs rose from six to nine. Wong Kan Seng argued that ‘the NMP scheme has proven to be viable and credible ... The NMPs have helped to raise the quality of debates in this Chamber. Their non-partisan and independent views showed that they were not yes-men or –women of the PAP. They did not play to the gallery.’ He went on to point out that Kanwaljit asked the most questions during the Eighth Parliament with 287. He also stated that NMPs outshone the performances of some of the Opposition MPs in the last Parliament. Jason Leow, ‘NMPs raised Quality of Parliamentary Debates’, In *The Straits Times*. (17 July 1997). p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> Another point supports this. Rodan Has pointed out that NMP Chia Shi Teck ‘created a stir when, after asserting that senior civil servants were inflexible in their dealings with the private sector, he claimed to have been advised by government backbenchers against taking too critical a stance. Rodan, ‘Elections without Representation’, p. 73.



of appointments, the public is invited to nominate individuals. Those names then go onto a 'Special Select Committee' of Parliament. The President appoints the new NMPs on the advice of the committee. The composition of the committee is therefore significant as it decides who will be appointed. The Speaker of Parliament, who is a PAP MP, chairs this committee. Seven other MPs are selected to participate. However, each convened committee has only ever had one Opposition MP. The first two committees (convening in 1990 and 92) had Chiam See Tong. The next committee (1994) had Ling How Doong of the SDP. Low Thia Kiang has been a member on the following four committees (1996, 97, 99 and 2001).<sup>73</sup> Also mentioned above, the committee will wherever possible, consult MPs before taking a final decision. By virtue of PAP dominance in Parliament, and on the committee, it is logical to assume that those who are appointed will be, not necessarily 'yes-man and -women of the Government', but surely those who would be considered mitigated critics. The committee has never appointed an individual who is judged to be a regime critic.

Such a case presented itself during the General Election in 1996-97. A new WP candidate, lawyer Tang Liang Hong, who stood in Cheng San GRC experienced a heavy smear campaign from by the PAP which led to libel suits and allegations of tax evasion against him. On 27 December 1996, Environment Minister Teo Chee Hean made public that at a dinner he attended two years before, 'Tang used his oratorical skills to work people up over language and religion ... impl[ying] that there were too many English-educated people and Christians in Government and that this was not good'.<sup>74</sup> Teo concluded that Tang was an 'extremist' using 'dangerous talk'. Lee Kuan Yew also joined the campaign against Tang, noting that he 'was a political opponent of the Government from his student days'.<sup>75</sup> Lee Kuan Yew said that Tang had participated in student demonstrations and other troubles with Chinese Middle School student unions in

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<sup>73</sup> See *Report of the Special Select Committee on Nominations for Appointments as Nominated Members of Parliament*, Parl. 8 of 1990. Presented to Parliament: 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1990; Parl. 5 of 1992. Presented to Parliament: 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1992; Parl. 6 of 1994. Presented to Parliament: 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1994; Parl. 4 of 1996. Presented to Parliament: 28<sup>th</sup> of August, 1996; &, Parl. 2 of 1997. Presented to Parliament: 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1997.

<sup>74</sup> Anonymous, 'Two WP men want your vote to pursue own interest: Rear-Adm Teo', In *The Straits Times* (27 December 1996). p. 27.

the mid-50s. Goh also noted that Tang was a 'dangerous character' because he had a 'personal axe to grind'. He went on to describe him as a 'covert opponent' of the Government's education policy.<sup>76</sup>

Tang was therefore seen by the PAP as a 'regime critic'. However, it was also disclosed by Goh that 'Tang Liang Hong had put himself up to be a Nominated MP in 1992 but was rejected because of objections to his "extreme views on Chinese language and culture".<sup>77</sup> Goh pointed out that some PAP MPs presented written objections to him becoming an NMP. Two days later, after receiving permission to publish these letters from the four MPs, Goh presented them to the media. In his letter dated 6 August 1992, Ch'ng Jit Koon pointed out that Tang was 'inclined to speak like a "Chinese chauvinist" to the discomfort of other races'.<sup>78</sup> Ow Chin Hock (11 August 1992) stated Tang had 'taken extreme positions on some issues such as Chinese language, culture and civilisation ...'.<sup>79</sup> Tay Eng Soon (30 July 1992) expressed similar views suggesting that he 'tends to be chauvinistic about Chinese culture'.<sup>80</sup> Finally, Ker Sin Tze (6 August 1992) pointed out that 'Tang holds radical views on the promotion of Chinese language and culture'.<sup>81</sup> After the General Election, Jeyaretnam questioned Goh about releasing these letters, Goh replied:

The letters showed that Tang was a *Chinese chauvinist*. I decided to release them to the media. Tang was standing for election. Singaporeans have a right to know before the election that long before Tang contemplated entering opposition politics, four Chinese educated MPs, plus Dr Tay Eng Soon, all of whom had known Tang for many years, had concluded that he was a *dangerous extremist*. There was

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<sup>75</sup> Anonymous, 'Jeya and Tang are Strange Bedfellows: SM', in *The Straits Times* (27 December 1996). p. 27.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in Anonymous, 'WP's Tang Liang Hong a Dangerous Character, says PM', in *The Straits Times* (27 December 1996). p. 27.

<sup>77</sup> Anonymous, 'WP's Tang has "Extreme Views"', in *The Business Times* (27 December 1996). p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> Cited in Anonymous, "'Why Tang is Dangerous': 1992: Why MPs did not want Tang to become an NMP", in *The Sunday Times* (29 December 1996). p. 18.

<sup>79</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>80</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>81</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 18.

nothing personal. But they considered Tang unfit to be a Nominated Member of Parliament.<sup>82</sup>

Even in these letters addressed to the Speaker of the House, include recurrent language used against regime critics. This type of language is often reserved for regime critics who stand in elections, and which Tang, as illustrated above, was subjected to when he stood for the WP. The fact that they was used to dissuade the committee from appointing him an NMP in 1992 clearly shows that the PAP will not permit individuals seen as regime critics to become NMPs.

During the Eighth Parliament, the contribution of NMPs was making headway in the media, particularly *The Straits Times*. Much of the contributions made, in the form of debate around Government bills, dealt with technical matters. This was particularly the case during passing of the annual budget. A survey of NMPs contributions in Parliament would reveal that NMPs often begin or conclude their speeches with expressions such as: 'I support this bill'. In the former case, they regularly followed though with polite qualifications, such as: 'however, I do have some concerns', or 'However, I would like to comments on certain aspects of the bill'. This is not something to discredit NMPs, but, it does demonstrate that NMPs would not stray outside what may be defined as mitigated criticism.

Several NMPs have moved motions for the House to adopt, and in all but one case, the Government has supported them. This is because these motions often reinforce the philosophical and/or political positioning of the PAP. The first such instance occurred in 1993 with a motion raised by Chia Shi Teck. It concerned the Dismissal of Chee Soon Juan from the National University of Singapore for alleged misuse of his research funds, which Chee argued was politically motivated due to him standing as a candidate for the Singapore Democratic Party in the Marine Parade GRC By-election in 1992. Chia's motion was:

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<sup>82</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 67. No. 18. Col. 1821. Emphasis added.

That this House *expresses its concern* over the allegation by Dr Chee Soon Juan that his dismissal from NUS for alleged misuse of his research funds amounting to a sum of \$226.00 was politically motivated, and seeks *clarification* from the Minister for Education of *the actual facts* that caused Dr Chee's dismissal.<sup>83</sup>

Clearly this motion was worded in a sense that would draw PAP support. In his address, Chia suggested that his initial impression of Chee was that he was a 'very clever politician'. Chia also said that

... his sudden dismissal did cause some concern amongst the public. Dr Chee had said many a time that he has a good brain. So using this good brain of his, he decided ... to go on a glucose-coated hunger strike.<sup>84</sup>

Shortly after he said:

I thought there must be other better, perhaps, less dramatic, but certainly more effective ways to clear his name, if he is innocent.<sup>85</sup>

It was evident through his opening address that Chia was somewhat sarcastic. This was pointed out immediately by Chiam:

I would also like to thank the Nominated MP, Mr Chia Shi Teck, for moving this motion but I thought he was, at times, in his speech a bit sarcastic. I would like to remind him that, as one who has been in Parliament for nearly nine years now, it is not wise to speak in that tone. If he wants the truth, I think that is a very honourable thing to ask for but, at the same time, I do not think he needs to ridicule Dr Chee.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Parliamentary Debates Singapore, Vol. 61. No. 2. Col. 157. Emphasis added.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., Col. 158.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., Col. 159.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., Col. 160.

Chia concluded the debate by saying that, after hearing the evidence from the Education Minister and from Dr Vasoo (PAP MP and Head of Department from which Chee was dismissed) he was convinced that the dismissal was not politically motivated. He also thought that the hunger strike taken by Chee was 'inappropriate and ... childish'.<sup>87</sup> This motion was supported by the Government and therefore accepted by the House.<sup>88</sup>

The other motion raised in the Eighth Parliament concerned the execution of Flor Contemplacion, a Filipina maid. She was hanged in 1995 for the 1991 double murder of another Filipina maid and the four-year-old son of the murdered maid's employer. Prior to the execution, President Ramos of the Philippines asked Singapore President Ong Teng Cheong to grant clemency, which was refused. The execution led to protests outside Singapore's embassy in Manila. The Filipino Government asked, in light of new evidence, for a stay of execution, which was again rejected by the Singapore authorities. On 25 May 1995, a week after the execution, Kanwaljit raised a two part motion:

That this House (1) asks the Government to explain its refusal to stay the execution of Flor Contemplacion, despite President Ramos' appeal and the submission of new evidence, when a stay could have prevented the present strain in Singapore-Philippine relations, and (2) reaffirm its confidence in Singapore's criminal justice system, especially the integrity of the judges in upholding the rule of law and order, which are strong pillars supporting our stability and prosperity.<sup>89</sup>

In her address, Kanwaljit at no stage placed doubt on the integrity of the Judiciary or police in Singapore. Towards the end, she did make some suggestions to improve the system, for instance, pertaining to Miscarriage of Justice.<sup>90</sup> Nonetheless, she did clearly argue that the integrity of the Judiciary must be guarded, and that the findings of the Gancayco Commission in the Philippines that Contemplacion could not have committed

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., Col. 245.

<sup>88</sup> To note, the motion was seconded by NMP Toh Keng Kiat. the other NMPs present during this sitting, Tong Kok Yeo and Walter Woon voted in its favour. All opposition MPs did not.

<sup>89</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 64. No. 11. Col. 1147. The motion was seconded, again by an NMP, John de Payva.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Cols. 1156-7.

the murders were erroneous. She stated that '[t]hese findings have been rightly rejected by our Government as being based on uncorroborated and, worse, hearsay testimonies'.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, Kanwaljit never doubted Contemplacion's conviction, but did ask the Government that with its relations with the Philippines being adversely affected, why it was not compelled to grant the stay of execution. It must be added though, that whilst addressing this first part of her motion, Kanwaljit remained within the blurred boundaries of mitigated criticism.<sup>92</sup>

Two other motions raised by NMPs in the Ninth Parliament were also congruent with PAP philosophy.<sup>93</sup> The first of these instances occurred in mid-January 1998. Cyrille Tan raised a motion:

That this House recognise tripartism as a key competitive advantage of Singapore, and calls on Government, employers and unions to further strengthen tripartite partnership in Singapore so as to enhance Singapore's competitiveness as we face new and greater economic and social challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>94</sup>

This motion, with the Asian Economic crisis of 1997-8 in mind, argued that unions in have made Singapore a better place to live, because they prefer negotiation over strike action. Tan called on unions to not hamper the efforts of companies who were going

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., Col. 1151.

<sup>92</sup> The motion was supported by the Government, and the other two NMPs present on the day, de Payva and Imran.

<sup>93</sup> 14 new NMPs sat in the Ninth Parliament, which increased the number of NMPs sitting at one time from six to nine. In 1997, Lee Tsao Yuan was the only re-appointment, she applied for a third term in 1999, but was not accepted. See Lydia Lim, 'More Consultation, please', in *The Straits Times* (24 September 1999), p. 60. The new appointments for that term included (plus occupation at the time): Ms. Claire Chiang (Director of the Banyan Tree Gallery and President of the Society Against Family Violence); Mr. Chuang Shaw Peng (Business man); Mr. Gerard Ee (Accountant and President of the Automobile Association of Singapore); Mr. Shriniwas Rai (Lawyer); Mr. Cyrille Tan (Labour movement representative); Associate-Prof. Simon Tay (Law Lecturer at NUS and Roundtable member); Mr. Tay Beng Chuan (Businessman president of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry); & Mr. Zulkifli Baharudin (Executive Director of Hong Kong Logistics company and Roundtable member). The Roundtable is a non-partisan discussion group in Singapore. In 1999, Chiang, Ee, Simon Tay, Tay Beng Chuan and Zulkifli were re-appointed. New appointments included: Mr. Goh Chong Chia (principle partner at TSP Architects and Planners); Dr. Jennifer Lee (CEO of Kandang Kerbau Hospital); Mr. Noris Ong (Tax consultant and partner at Price WaterHouse Coopers); & Mr. Thomas Thomas (General Secretary of the Shell employees' Union).

<sup>94</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol 68. No. 2. Col. 168.

through restructures in an effort to become more competitive.<sup>95</sup> He also called on the Government to further invest in worker training. Tan expressed hope that the 'NTUC's [National Trade Union Congress] symbiotic ties with the PAP will remain strong'.<sup>96</sup> He closed by stating that:

Singapore has succeeded so far because Government, employers and workers have worked well together. Where there is industrial harmony, there is social and economic development ... A strong tripartite relationship is not just critical in maintaining this industrial harmony. It is also a key competitive advantage to help us become a developed economy early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>97</sup>

This motion clearly falls into the PAP's approach towards industrial relations, and was supported by the PAP. Also, the three NMPs who spoke on the motion, Lee Tsao Yuan, Clair Chiang and Tay Beng Chuan, each supported it.

Six months later, Shriniwas Rai moved in Parliament:

That this House records with gratitude the contribution made by our founding fathers in building a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-lingual society and reaffirms these principles.<sup>98</sup>

Rai went on to thank those who came before and during colonialism to build this place. He also thanked the Old Guard of the PAP, including Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Keng Swee, S Rajaratnam and Eddie Baker, and also David Marshall for committing their lives to the building of a modern, prosperous Singapore.<sup>99</sup> Again, the NMPs who spoke on this motion, Chiang, Simon Tay and Zulkifli each supported it, as did the PAP.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Col. 169.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., Col. 171.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., Col. 173.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Vol. 69. No. 4. Col. 651.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., Cols. 653-4.

A different case, which may be seen as a high point in the NMP experience, occurred in 1994. NMP Walter Woon became the first Parliamentarian since independence to submit a private members' bill – the Maintenance of Parents Bill. It was intended to empower parents to legally force their children to support them adequately in old age. The bill was passed with strong PAP support because, as Rodan points out, 'it neatly complements the government's ideological aversion to greater direct state welfare and its championing of "traditional family values"'.<sup>100</sup>

It is evident that these cases reinforce PAP philosophical and political principles. To have 'non-partisan' individuals act in such a manner adds credence to these PAP principles. Also, the case of the motions on Chee's dismissal, the execution of Contemplacion, and the Maintenance of Parents bill, were somewhat controversial. In the first two cases, to have NMPs raising them works to eliminate the suggestion that the motions were moved by the PAP to gain support from the legislature on those issues. Concerning the Maintenance of Parents bill, as Rodan suggests, 'since it was Woon's initiative, the political flak for the PAP was less than otherwise might have been the case'.<sup>101</sup>

As a result of such motions and bills, and through NMP's mitigated criticism which rarely has seen them oppose a Government bill, PAP MPs and Ministers have used this to illustrate that it knows the wants and interests of the people of Singapore. Here, it is possible to show that the latent rationale of the scheme, to co-opt mitigated critics, is illustrated further. It is to the benefit of the PAP, in an analysis of Lukesean power, to have these 'non-partisan' individuals raise motions supporting PAP principles, and keep criticism of the Government to a minimum. For Lukes:

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<sup>100</sup> Rodan, 'Singapore: State-Society Relations', p. 104. Kanwaljit also presented a private members bill shortly after on family violence. The bill aimed at empowering police in investigations of domestic violence (to enter homes), and establish a framework of penalties for offenders. The bill did not entirely deal with wife battering, but included any forms of violence, where the victims were wives, children or elderly parents. See Wang Hui Ling, '2<sup>nd</sup> NMP to put up Private Member's Bill', in *The Straits Times* (28 July 1995). Simon Tay points out that although her bill was rejected by the House, 'many of its provisions informed the government bill that followed' (the Women's Charter Amendment bill). Simon Tay, 'Towards a Singaporean Civil Society', in Derek da Cunha and John Funston (Eds), *Southeast Asian Affairs 1998* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1998). p. 248.

<sup>101</sup> Rodan, 'Singapore: State-Society Relations', p. 104. There was another motion raised in the House, by Rai (Less Adversarial Parliamentary System) which did not suit PAP political principles and therefore not support. This will be discussed in the following chapter.



Indeed, is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have – that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?<sup>102</sup>

In two particular cases, the PAP argued that the NMP's contributions to debate in House were of a high standard, indeed higher than the Opposition's. Wong Kan Seng said:

Having seen the performance of the NMPs, I am of the view that the NMPs have acquitted themselves very well. They have fully justified the privilege conferred upon them... The NMP scheme has proven to be viable and credible. All the NMPs [of the Eighth Parliament] were very active ... the NMPs have helped to raise the quality of debates in this Chamber... Depending on the merits of the issues, the NMPs have, at times, been dissenting and critical, sometimes supportive and other times constructive in their views... Indeed, Sir, some will even say that the performance of the NMPs outshone that of the two SDP Members who are no longer in this House.<sup>103</sup>

And this, from Lee Kuan Yew:

If we can get in opposition people of the calibre of the Nominated MPs, I say Singapore is better off. At least, I respect them. I can join in the argument.<sup>104</sup>

#### **4.2.4 ISSUES RELATED TO CO-OPTATION OF NOMINATED MPs**

There are other issues supporting the idea that NMPs are co-opted. It is evident that a large number of NMPs, either leading up to, during or following their sojourn in Parliament have been involved in Government statutory boards or other positions in different arms of the state. What follows is a listing of the 24 NMPs who sat in the

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<sup>102</sup> Lukes, *Power*, p. 23.

<sup>103</sup> Parliamentary Debates Singapore, Vol. 67. No. 5. Cols. 415-6.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Vol. 63. No. 8. Col. 815.

Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Parliaments (and includes other such positions they held in the state apparatus).<sup>105</sup> The survey covered 1990-2001, the NMPs are listed in descending order preceded by the year they became an NMP:

1. (1999) **Dr. Jennifer Lee** (*Doctor*):
  - a. 2000-02: Member of Feedback Unit Supervisory Panel (Ministry of Community Development and Sport)
2. (1999) **Mr. Thomas Thomas** (*union*):
  - a. 2000-02: Member of Public Transport Council (Ministry of Transportation)
3. (1999) **Dr. Goh Chong Chia** (*architect*):
  - a. 1995-02: Board Member for Board of Architects (Ministry of Communication, Information and Technology)
  - b. 2002: Board Member for Singapore Professional Engineers Board (Ministry of National Development)
4. (1999) **Mr. Noris Ong** (*tax consultant*):
  - a. 2000-02: Board Member for Public Accountants Board (Ministry of Finance)
5. (1997) **Mr. Shrinivas Rai** (*lawyer*):
  - a. 1998-02: Member for Strata Titles Boards (Ministry of Law),
  - b. sits as a recourse panel member on the GPC – col. 1002 vol. 70
  - c. 1999-02, Member for the Tribunal for the Maintenance of Parents,
  - d. 1992, 1997-02: Board Member for the Hindu Endowment/advisory Board (Ministry of Community Development and Sports)
6. (1997) **Mr. Chuang Shaw Peng** (*Business*):
  - a. 1996-97: Member of Board Of Directors for National Crime Prevention Council (Ministry of Home Affairs)
  - b. 1996-98: Member of Construction Industry Development Board (Ministry of National Development)
7. (1997) **Mr. Zulkifli Baharudin** (*business*):
  - a. 2000-02: Board Member for Temasek Polytechnic (Ministry of Education),
  - b. 1996-97: Member for Feedback Unit Supervisory Panel (Ministry of Community Development)
  - c. 1997-01: Member of Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (Ministry of Home Affairs)
8. (1997) **Associate-Prof. Simon Tay** (*law academic*):
  - a. 1998-02: Member of the National Library Board (Ministry of Information and the Arts)
  - b. 1999-02: Board Member for National Parks Board (Ministry of National Development)
9. (1997) **Mr. Tay Beng Chuan** (*Business*):
  - a. 1/98D, 7/98D, 1/99D, 7/99D, 7/00D, 1/01D, Member of the National Heritage Board (Ministry of Information and the Arts)
10. (1997) **Mr. Cyrille Tan Soo Leng** (*Union*):
  - a. 1996-98: Member of National Productivity and Quality Council (Ministry of Trade and Industry)
  - b. 1990: Member of the Vocational & Industrial Training Board (Ministry of Education)

<sup>105</sup> The positions were sourced from: Ministry of Information and the Arts (Singapore), *Singapore Government Directory* (Singapore: Published by Information Division to Jan 1990, Pacific Trade Press to Jul 1992, SNP Publishers to Jan 1996, SNP References to Jul 1998, Times Trade Directories to Jul 99, Times Media to date, publications surveyed include: July 1990, July 1992, January & July 1993, January & July 1994, January & July 1995, January & July 1996, January & July 1997, January & July 1998, January & July 1999, July 2000, January 2001, and January & July 2002). Because the 2003 editions have not been included, positions listed as ending in 2002 do not necessarily mean that the position was vacated.

- c. 1992-93, 1996-01: Member of Institute of Technology Education Board of Governors (Ministry of Education)
- d. 1997: Executive Officer for Special Tests & Training Section [of Specialised Pupil Programmes Branch] (Ministry of Education)
- 11. (1997) **Mr. Gerard Ee** (*accountant*):
  - a. 1994: Vice President for the National Council of Social Services (Ministry of Community Development)
  - b. 1997-98: Member of the Adult Probation Case Committee (Ministry of Community Development)
  - c. 1998-99: Member of Probation Committee (Ministry of Community Development)
- 12. (1994) **Dr. Lee Tsao Yuan** (*Economist academic*):
  - a. 2000: Board Member of Land Transport Authority (Ministry of Transport), member of 'Audit Committee' and 'Public Relations Steering Committee'
  - b. 1996: Member of the Board of Trustees for Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (Ministry of Education)
  - c. 1997-99: Consultant for International Economics Directorate (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
- 13. (1994) **Mr. Imram Mohamed** (*Director AMP*):
  - a. 1996-99: Member for National Council Against Drug Abuse (Ministry of Home Affairs)
- 14. (1994) **Mr. Stephen Lee** (*President of Singapore National Employers' Federation*):
  - a. 1992-02: Member for International Enterprise Singapore (Ministry of Trade and Industry), formally known as Trade Development Board (Chairman 1995-02)
- 15. (1994) **Mr. John de Payva** (*union*):
  - a. 1995-99: Member for the National Productivity Board (Ministry of Trade and Industry)
  - b. 1996-99: Member for Feedback Unit Supervisory Panel (Ministry of Community Development)
- 16. (1992) **Mr. Tong Kok Yeo** (*union*):
  - a. 1999-00: Member of Central Providence Fund Board (Ministry of Manpower)
- 17. (1992) **Mr. Robert Chua** (*business*):
  - a. 1992-94: Member of Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research (Ministry of Trade and Industry)
  - b. 1990: Member of the Vocational & Industrial Training Board (Ministry of Education)
  - c. 1995-97: Chairman (No. 2) for the Trade Development Board (Ministry of Trade and Industry)
  - d. 1996-98: Member of the National Productivity and Quality Council (Ministry of Trade and Industry)
  - e. 1998-99: Member of the Singapore Productivity and Standards Board (Ministry of Trade and Industry)
  - f. 1992, 1996-98: Member of Institute of Technology Education Board of Governors (Ministry of Education)
  - g. 1990-93: Board Member for National Crime Prevention Council (Ministry of Home Affairs)
  - h. 1992: Member for the Jurong Town Corporation
- 18. (1992) **Prof. Walter Woon** (*law academic*):
  - a. 1998-2000: Embassy of the Republic of Singapore – Germany & Greece (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), a position he has continued in.
- 19. (1992) **Mr Chia Shi Teck** (*business*):
  - a. 1990-92: Member of Feedback Unit Supervisory Panel (Ministry of Community Development)
- 20. (1990) **Mr. Leong Chee Whye** (*business*):
  - a. 1990-93: Chairman of the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (Ministry of Trade and Industry)<sup>106</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Kanwaljit Soin (1994-6), Toh Keng Kia (1992-4), Maurice Choo (1990-1) and Claire Chiang (1997-01) do not appear in this list because their names did not appear in the directories surveyed. These positions

Some of these NMPs have also participated in other areas more related to the Legislature. A number of NMPs have made written and/or oral submissions to various Select Committees (Committees which deal with the technical issues of a bill for the third reading). Shrinivas Rai made a written submission to the Select Committee dealing with the NMP scheme, and was invited to present an oral submission.<sup>107</sup> Walter Woon made both a written and oral submission to the Select Committee on the Companies Amendment Bill in 1987<sup>108</sup> and 1989.<sup>109</sup> Both Rai (in a collective submission) and Simon Tay made written and oral submissions to the committee dealing with the introduction of Group Representation Constituencies.<sup>110</sup> In the committee dealing with the introduction of the Elected President, Rai and Woon made written and oral submissions.<sup>111</sup> Rai made also made written and oral submissions to the committee on Land Transport Policy<sup>112</sup> and the committee dealing with the introduction of the Maintenance of Parents Bill.<sup>113</sup> Finally, Goh Chong Chia made a written and oral submission in 1991.<sup>114</sup> These cases illustrate that these individuals are at the most, mitigated critics, their submissions to these committees were constructive and did not challenge the particular policy along a 'regime critic' line as in many cases submissions from Opposition Parties did.<sup>115</sup>

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illustrate that co-optation of the NMPs does not begin and end with their terms in Parliament, but demonstrates that many are further integrated into the state.

<sup>107</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment No. 2).*

<sup>108</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on the Companies (Amendment) Bill [Bill No. 9/86].* Parl. 5 of 1987. Presented to Parliament on 12<sup>th</sup> March, 1987.

<sup>109</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on the Companies (Amendment) Bill [Bill No. 24/89].* Parl. 4 of 1989. Presented to Parliament on 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1989.

<sup>110</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Bill [Bill No. 23/87], and, The Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (amendment No. 2) Bill [Bill No. 24/87].* Parl. 3 of 1988. Presented to Parliament on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1988.

<sup>111</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment) Bill [Bill No. 23/90].* Parl. 9 of 1990. Presented to Parliament on 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1990.

<sup>112</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on Land Transport Policy.* Parl. 1 of 1990. Presented to Parliament on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1990.

<sup>113</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on The Maintenance of Parents Bill [Bill No 13/94].* Parl. 2 of 1995. Presented to Parliament on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1995.

<sup>114</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on Architects Bill [Bill No. 9/91] Professional Engineers Bill [Bill No. 10/91] Land Surveyors Bill [Bill No. 11/91].* Parl. 3 of 1991. Presented to Parliament on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 1991.

<sup>115</sup> See the SDP written and oral submissions to the Committee dealing with the introduction of NMP scheme. *Report of the Select Committee on the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment No. 2).*

During their time in Parliament, NMPs have also been involved on Select Committees. In 1998 Zulkifli Baharudin was a member of the Select Committee on the Administration of Muslim Law Amendment Bill.<sup>116</sup> In 1999, Zulkifli also became a member of a Parliamentary Committee: The Public Petitions Committee.<sup>117</sup> Rai was a member of the Select Committee on the Land Titles (Strata) Amendment Bill.<sup>118</sup> After her Family Violence bill was rejected, Kanwaljit participated on the Select Committee on the Women's Charter Amendment Bill.<sup>119</sup> Robert Chua participated on the Select Committee on the Patents Bill.<sup>120</sup>

Another point demonstrating further involvement of NMPs, is that both Lee Tsao Yuan and Simon Tay were committee members for the Singapore 21 Report. The Report aimed to set Singapore's goals for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>121</sup> Lee was Co-Chair of the Subject Committee for "Internationalisation/Regionalism vs. Singapore as Home". Tay was Co-Chair of the Subject Committee for "Consultation & Consensus vs. Decisiveness & Quick Action". Of the 11 committee members, Lee and Tay were the only two not to come from PAP Parliamentarians or Ministers.

Co-optation in the NMP scheme has expanded in another way after the 1997 and 2001 General Elections. In the motion to accept NMPs in the Ninth Parliament, Wong stated that

[a]fter having operated this NMP scheme for more than six years, we should fine-tune and improve the selection process. Therefore, I intend to propose to the Special Select Committee that apart from inviting members of the public to nominate suitable and interested individuals ... we can invite the leaders of certain

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<sup>116</sup> *Third Report of the Committee of Selection*. Parl. 4 of 1998. Presented to Parliament 7<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>117</sup> *Report of the Committee of Selection*. Parl. 4 of 1999. Presented to Parliament 6<sup>th</sup> December 1999.

<sup>118</sup> *Fourth Report of the Committee of Selection*. Parl. 5 of 1998. Presented to Parliament 11<sup>th</sup> August 1998.

<sup>119</sup> *Report of the Committee of Selection*. Parl. 2 of 1996. Presented to Parliament 13<sup>th</sup> May 1996. To note, Woon obviously participated on the committee dealing with his own private member's bill. *Report of the Committee of Selection*. Parl. 4 of 1994. Presented to Parliament 16<sup>th</sup> August 1994.

<sup>120</sup> *Report of the Committee of Selection*. Parl. 2 of 1994. Presented to Parliament 6<sup>th</sup> April 1994.

<sup>121</sup> Singapore 21 Committee (Compiled by), *Singapore 21: together we make the difference* (Singapore: Singapore 21 Committee, 1999).

key functional groups to nominate their members for consideration ... They are: (a) business and industry; (b) the professions, and (c) the labour movement.<sup>122</sup>

These functional groups would become 'proposal panels'. Later, Wong went on to outline how these groups would be made up. The first would comprise the Manufacturers' Association, and the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and so on. The second would include doctors, lawyers, accountants, architects, engineers and so on. And, the NTUC would be involved on the labour panel. Wong also pointed out that the Government was open to others, maybe for the National Council of Social Services, the Culture, the Arts, the Universities and so on.<sup>123</sup> At a later stage, Wong further elaborated the membership of the first two panels. Business and Industry would comprise of the Presidents of the Singapore National Employers' Federation, Chinese, Indian, and Malay and International Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and the Singapore Confederation of Industries. For the Professions: Presidents of the Singapore Medical Association, Presidents of the institutes of Certified Public Accountants, Engineers, Architects, and Master of the Academy of Medicine. He also stipulated that they might be expanded.<sup>124</sup>

The number of proposal panels was expanded in 2002 to include another three panels: 'those in social and community work, people from the media, arts and sports arena, plus polytechnic and university lecturers'.<sup>125</sup> Also in that year, the terms of an NMP were increased so that they would be appointed only twice in every parliament.<sup>126</sup> The establishment of 'proposal panels', expands the reach by which co-optation occurs. It is not sufficient enough that a lawyer from here or a union leader from there is co-opted, but

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<sup>122</sup> Parliamentary Debates Singapore, Vol. 67. No. 5. Cols. 417-8.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 441.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., Vol. 67. No. 15. Cols. 1497-8.

<sup>125</sup> Anonymous, 'NMPs to come from wider pool', in *The Straits Times* (21 February 2002).

<sup>126</sup> Anonymous, 'Longer term for Nominated MPs', in *The Straits Times* (6 April 2002). The maximum of nine NMPs were appointed in 2002, Jennifer Lee the only re-appointed from 1999. New NMPs include: Mr. Ng Ser Miang (Singapore Sports Council chairman); Ngiam Tee Liang (Social Work and Psychology lecturer); Mrs Fang Ai Lian (Accountant); Olivia Lum (Entrepreneur); Gan See Khem (Entrepreneur); Breema Mathi (Hospital Corporate Communications manager); Mr Nithiah Nandan (Labour Movement Representative); and, Chandra Mohan (Lawyer). Anonymous, 'Six new face chosen to serve as Nominated MPs', in *The Straits Times* (20 June 2002). Braema Mathi and Chandra Mohan were appointed in 2001, but only served 18 days before Parliament was dissolved.

rather, to have that group pick someone, that person is co-opted far more broadly. These groups, which may support Opposition parties, would feel compelled not to.

These groups find a stake in the scheme. Also, because the NMPs with a business or trade union background are selected as the representatives of those groups, when they support a pertinent government bill, they are speaking on behalf of the related group, thus fitting into the Lukesean view of power.

In 2000, Lee Kuan Yew suggested that due to the difficulty in finding talented individuals to become MPs, the PAP might approach former NMPs to stand for the party. This, he suggested was the feeling among some younger PAP leaders.<sup>127</sup> This suggestion spawned a debate on the nature of the NMP scheme and several NMPs gave their opinions towards the idea. To this point, no NMPs have stood for the PAP, nonetheless, such a suggestion would not be made if not serious by Lee Kuan Yew. What this illustrates is another and obviously deeper level of co-optation. At another level, it is a suggestion that may give the appearance that the scheme is a stepping stone, and thus erode its 'non-partisan' image.

#### **4.2.5 CONCLUSION: RE-VISITING THE MANIFEST AND LATENT RATIONALES**

Regarding the manifest rationale, it is apparent that the scheme has met its objective. Nominated MPs often dominate Question time, debates on Bills, and Budget debates. Their contributions are noteworthy. An important factor is that the PAP has permitted critical individuals in Parliament, notwithstanding the fact that they seldom reject a Government bill. This point will be further discussed in Chapter six.

On the latent level, it is difficult to suggest that the NMP scheme is used to co-opt *potential* Opposition figures, but the case of Tang does stand out. This of course, is not the true latent rationale, which is: to have credible individuals enter Parliament under a 'non-partisan' banner and deliver legitimacy to the Government, whilst at the same time discrediting the Opposition as legislators. This chapter has endeavoured to make the point

that NMPs may be ‘mitigated critics’, but their co-optation into Parliament results in general support for PAP political and philosophical principles and for specific policies, even if they make suggestions. What this chapter has not examined is how NMPs, in the favourable position in which they find themselves, can have an affect on the political system in Singapore and if at all towards altering the PAP’s relationship with power, in a Lukesean sense. This shall be the focus of the final chapter.

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<sup>127</sup> Chua Mui Hoong, ‘PAP may field NMPs in next polls’, in *The Straits Times* (16 February 2000). p. 44.



# CHAPTER FIVE

## AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO THE NOMINATED MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT SCHEME

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous two chapters, which dealt with the Non-Constituency MP and Nominated MP (NCMP and NMP) schemes respectively, examined each as techniques through which the People's Action Party (PAP) maintains power in Singapore. Through a particular method of co-optation (that of informal co-optation) Opposition candidates (MPs or NCMPs) and those who would become NMPs are accepted into the legislative process. The character of individuals who are co-opted is of salience. The second chapter illustrated that the PAP employs a divide-and-rule strategy with the Opposition. It categorizes individual Opposition figures into two main groups; 'regime critics' and 'mitigated critics'.

This chapter will attempt to introduce a different line in analysing the NMP scheme. The analysis of the NCMP and NMP schemes in the previous two chapters cast the discussion within a Lukesean framework of power, derived from his work *Power: A Radical View*.<sup>1</sup> I argued that the NCMP and NMP schemes can be seen as methods by which the PAP maintains power through the manipulation of interests. This chapter will suggest that a major pre-occupation of the Opposition has been to encourage the development of 'relative autonomy' and 'democratic participation'. This has been an endeavour of both mitigated and regime critics, but more so the latter who see the regime as directly hostile to this desired situation. Opposition figures have always pointed to the need for the evolution from a one-party system, concurrent with furthering liberal democracy and loosening of PAP controls on the state. Of course, the PAP invariably rebuts these calls made by the Opposition. Like most calls made by the Opposition on several issues, the

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

PAP can easily reject them because the Opposition in Singapore suffers a credibility crisis due in large measure to the PAP's success in presenting regime critics as destructive and dangerous eccentrics.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, if Singapore is to move out of a situation where the PAP actively manipulates wants, a credible group must initiate it. Such a credible group, in the eyes of the media and the PAP, does however exist. Nominated MPs, as discussed in the previous chapter, are seen as credible Parliamentarians because they project a non-partisan image. PAP leaders such as Wong Kan Seng and Lee Kuan Yew have praised their performances in Parliament.

Under a relationship of power, as Lukes postulates in *Power: A Radical View*, real interests are subjected to manipulation by the power holder. Lukes therefore suggests that in empirical situations, real interests can be identified under relative autonomy and democratic participation. Entering this situation is therefore central. This chapter will maintain this concern in relation to Singapore. It will not attempt to identify real interests, because as per the argument of this thesis, relative autonomy and democratic participation do not exist to the level Lukes referred to. Rather, the ensuing discussing will focus on the possibility that the NMP scheme, or more specifically the individuals within it, can begin to push the PAP into developing politics in Singapore towards a condition more conducive to relative autonomy and democratic participation.

## 5.2 THE OPPOSITION

It is essential to first briefly examine how the Opposition has been involved in the process of trying to move Singapore into a situation of relative autonomy and democratic participation, and, how unsuccessful it has been. It can however, be suggested that the Opposition has been by far the leading contender in Singapore for this push. Other possible contenders have not been able to make any serious progress towards this end. As

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<sup>2</sup> For a good discussion of the credibility difficulties faced by the Opposition see Gary Rodan, 'State-Society Relations and Political Opposition in Singapore', in Gary Rodan (Ed), *Political Opposition in*

stated in the second chapter, the Media and Trade Unions came under the fold of the ruling party.<sup>3</sup> These three groups, which under more common circumstances may be able to initiate change in a regime, are unable to force the PAP into directions that it is unwilling to venture, hence the Opposition has had to try to push in this direction virtually alone. Opposition parties have been trying to do so since early in Singapore's independence. The two broad issues which the Opposition has highlighted, particularly since the 1980s are cost of living difficulties, and the need to check the power of the PAP. In an electoral sense, the former is obviously the better approach. Whether 'regime critic' or 'mitigated critic', all have focused on these two areas. The difference, as discussed in chapter three revolves largely around their delivery. For instance, JB Jeyaretnam, former secretary-general of the Workers' Party (WP) and regime critic, has gone to the extent of calling the PAP government a 'Mafia Government' in Parliament.<sup>4</sup> Chiam See Tong, secretary-general of the Singapore People's Party (SPP) and mitigated critic, at his most critical has labelled the PAP 'authoritarian'.<sup>5</sup> Before outlining the difficulties faced by the Opposition in Singapore, it is useful to first outline what they have pushed for in regard to developing relative autonomy and democratic participation in Singapore.

### 5.2.1 AIMS OF THE OPPOSITION

It is not difficult to find evidence to show that Opposition figures in Singapore have attempted to develop relative autonomy and participatory democracy in Singapore. The first Opposition party to seriously highlight the undemocratic nature of the PAP Government was the Barsian Socialis (BS) in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> Its opposition was highlighted by its boycott of Parliament soon after Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia in 1965 and

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*Industrialising Asia* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> As Barr points out, soon after independence Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP went about building a hard working 'rugged society'. 'Trade union leaders, newspapers editors, religious leaders and Chinese clan and cultural leaders were convinced, cajoled or pressured to co-operate with the government's plans'. Michael D. Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Beliefs Behind the Man* (Surrey: Curzon, 2000), p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore: Official Report*. Vol. 67. No. 4. Column [hereafter referred as Col.]. 253.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 59. No. 2. Col. 80.

<sup>6</sup> The BS was left-wing group within the PAP which, after becoming disillusioned with the party leadership, especially their decision to join the Malaya, split from the party in 1961.

the following General Election in 1968, which saw the PAP retain every seat in Parliament. The boycott was launched as a direct response to the arrest and detention of the BS's Chia Thye Poh. The party cited 'the impossibility of participating in the political environment while the PAP exercised regressive measures against duly elected members'.<sup>7</sup> In an interview before his death, Lee Siew-Choh<sup>8</sup> stated that the boycott was intended to raise public consciousness of 'the undemocratic practices by the Government'.<sup>9</sup>

More recently, it is evident that the Opposition has continued to push for the development of relative autonomy and democratic participation. The period from 1981 should be highlighted, as it witnessed the rebirth of a Parliamentary Opposition. Jeyaretnam, who was an MP between 1981-6, and Non-Constituency MP between 1997-2001, has been the most significant Opposition figure. During the debate to introduce the NCMP scheme in 1984, he pointed out that if the PAP was sincere about wanting to give the Opposition an opportunity to be involved in Parliament, the NCMP scheme was not the way to go. In lieu of that he pointed towards other areas where the PAP had created an unfair democratic system. He made the argument that

We have heard it time and time again, lip service to the idea of an Opposition in Parliament ... Secretly everything was directed towards suppressing any form of dissent ... The press was controlled. TV and radio was completely controlled. Any public meeting was banned. Any form of dissent was prohibited. As Amnesty reported, the Internal Security Act was used against persons who tried to bring up any questions by way of dissent.<sup>10</sup>

Jeyaretnam then went on to make suggestions for measures which would bring genuine Opposition members into the House and advance parliamentary democracy in Singapore. Firstly, he pointed out that the PAP should consider lifting the ban on political parties

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<sup>7</sup> Damien Kingsbury, *South-East Asia: A Political Profile* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press 2001), p. 336.

<sup>8</sup> leader of the BS during the boycott and until the party merged with the WP in the late 1980s.

<sup>9</sup> cited in Anonymous, 'The Good Doctor Carries on', in *Straits Times* (17 June 2001).

holding public rallies, and allow them more access to radio and television.<sup>11</sup> He argued against the Internal Security Act (ISA) and proposed that an Electoral Commission be appointed from outside the Government with more participation from Opposition parties. Jeyaretnam also suggested longer campaign periods and more consultation with political parties on election rules.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst an NCMP himself, Jeyaretnam raised several motions and made other speeches in the House which were consistent with the broad objectives of enhancing in Singapore relative autonomy and democratic participation.<sup>13</sup> In these speeches, he dealt with several topics. In his first speech, in response to the President's address opening the Ninth Parliament, he discussed the topic of 'fear', a running theme he used through his time in Parliament. For Jeyaretnam, the practices of the PAP bring fear into the lives of Singaporeans towards the idea of participating in decision making. He suggested that this fear can be removed by abolishing the ISA, the establishment of the rule of law and freedom of speech and assembly. He also argued that defamation laws be reformed so as to allow citizens more freedom in criticising public officials without fear of financial retributions. Finally, he argued that Singapore needs more freedom of information and that the press should be less concerned with simply reprinting what the Government has said.<sup>14</sup>

Through his time in Parliament he has raised motions related to these topics. Some include making the Government more accountable to Parliament and the Judiciary, and removing the PAP's influence over the latter;<sup>15</sup> removing fear from peoples' lives in supporting non-PAP parties and public dissent;<sup>16</sup> changing defamation laws to further protect the rights of the individual;<sup>17</sup> and, to have more freedom of the press by

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<sup>10</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 43. No. 16. Cols. 1747-8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 1754.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Cols. 1755-6.

<sup>13</sup> Joshua Benjamin Jeyaretnam, *Make it Right for Singapore: Speeches in Parliament 1997-1999* (Singapore: Jeya Publishing, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-34.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-65.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-76.

introducing a non-government linked newspaper.<sup>18</sup> Jeyaretnam also raised a motion calling for the rule of law in Singapore.<sup>19</sup> In this motion he argued that just because a law is passed by Parliament, this does not necessarily imply that it concurs with the rule of law. During this motion he made several suggestions, including the abolition of some laws imposing detention without proper trial or charge, repealing provisions for the Housing and Development Board to evict without trial, to remove political control over the police force and to establish an independent electoral commission.

Of course, Jeyaretnam is not the sole Opposition figure making these suggestions; others have also become involved. Even mitigated critics, such as prominent Opposition MP Chiam See Tong have pushed for relative autonomy and democratic participation. During the debate to introduce the Nominated MP scheme in 1989, Chiam argued that in Singapore:

We practice a brand of authoritarian, paternalistic, pseudo-democracy with a dominant party which intends to keep political power for ever. That is really what the amendment is all about.<sup>20</sup>

He went on to argue that the PAP should be fairer in its treatment of the Opposition. He said that

the Government should be fair at the polls and not resort to smear tactics, changing of the ground rules, changing of boundary lines, juggling with constituencies, and resorting to the tactics of fear by using the Internal Security Act to make arbitrary arrests.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 77-93.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 139-58.

<sup>20</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 54. No. 8. Col. 736.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Col. 737.

## 5.2.2 THE DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY THE OPPOSITION

As pointed out in the third chapter, the Opposition suffers a credibility crisis through the 'de-politicisation' of Singapore politics by the PAP (elaborated in the second chapter). As Carolyn Choo has pointed out, the PAP has been successful in projecting itself as synonymous with Government, and has been able to extend its control to the grassroots level. It has done this directly by establishing its own branches in constituencies, and indirectly through its influence over Government institutions. These institutions have served as a line of communication between the PAP and the people. The MP's Meet-the-People sessions, a continued aspect of politics in Singapore, kept the party in touch with its constituents.<sup>22</sup> Other institutions formed were the Citizen's Consultative Committees (CCCs), Management Committees for the People's Association Community Centres (MCs) and the Residents' Committees (RCs). The first two were formed in the 1960s, but lost their significance in the 1970s. RCs, formed in 1977, were the offshoots of CCCs and MCs:

The importance of these institutions can be verified by the fact that they were placed directly under the responsibility of the Prime Minister's Office. The leaders of these committees, the men approved by the MP and the Prime Minister's Office, formed an essential link between the government and the people. It is no wonder then that these institutions have been described as the eyes and ears of the leadership. The leaders of these committees mobilized support for the government and party policies... They contribute to the predominant position of the PAP and reduced the political space for the opposition parties to work... These institutions had also cut off a potential recruitment source of the opposition.<sup>23</sup>

There are several other reasons why the Opposition has had difficulty finding support in Singapore. The obvious problem first stems from the electoral system. The first-past-the-post voting system is very damaging to the Opposition. If more than one Opposition

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<sup>22</sup> Carolyn Choo, *Singapore: The PAP & the Problem of Political Succession* (Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 1985). pp. 41-2.

candidate stands against a PAP candidate, it is unlikely that they will score high. The Opposition receives a considerable amount of support through protest votes against the PAP, hence, if that vote is to be divided into two, the PAP candidate will have a higher chance of securing enough votes to win first-past-the-post.

Electoral campaign periods are the one time when the Opposition can receive the greatest attention from the media; between elections they receive little representation in the media, much of this is reserved for the Government and Parliamentary proceeding. However, campaigns last on average no more than ten days. For instance, in 2001, the new electoral boundaries were announced on 17 October, Parliament was dissolved on 18 October, Nomination day was 25 October, and polling day was 3 November. This was the shortest period between delineation and calling of the election. As also stated earlier, the use of liable suits against Opposition figures has crippled several individuals. The use of libel suits also acts as a disincentive for 'high calibre' individuals joining Opposition parties. The plight of Chee Soon Juan discussed in the third chapter is a good example.

A primary difficulty faced by the Opposition is its lack of unity. No single Opposition party since the BS in the 1960s has been able to command a level of support sufficient to become a credible force inside or outside of Parliament. Since the BS's boycott of Parliament, several parties have attempted to do so, but all have failed. During the 1970s, many of these parties attempted to unify to present a united front, but they have been short lived. Through the 1970s, the BS remained weak, and Malay based parties, such as the SMNO (an offshoot of UMNO) have had difficulty attracting Malay professionals. Although Jeyaretnam and other professionals revitalised the WP, the PAP prevented it from establishing party branches. In the 1972 election, the Opposition fared poorly because it could not organise itself. Through the decade, many alliances were made between particular parties, but suffered as they did not incorporate a large enough grouping, with the possible exception of the Joint Opposition Council. Nonetheless,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-4.



differences in approach between and within Opposition parties prevented a strong alternative to the PAP emerging.<sup>24</sup>

The highpoint for the Opposition came in the 1991 General Election, when, under the guidance of Chiam, a large number of Opposition parties agreed to adopt the 'by-election' strategy where they would contest in less than half the seats. This approach was two-fold. Firstly, because resources in the Opposition were low, by focusing on a smaller number of seats they could better direct their resources. Secondly, it removed the possibility of the PAP being voted out of government; hence Singaporeans could feel free to vote for the Opposition without losing the only party that could govern. Within the context of Singapore politics, this approach was a success. Three Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) candidates, and one WP candidate were returned, the best performance since the BS boycott. Both parties, however, have suffered from internal strife. As pointed out in chapter three, Chee Soon Juan took over as leader of the SDP and forced Chiam and his supporters to form a new party, the Singapore People's Party. Consequently, the SDP lost all seats in the next election. In 2001, the WP MP, Low Thia Khiang, took power from Jeyaretnam who had been secretary-general since 1971. In the former case, it was a mitigated critic being ousted by a regime critic and vice-versa in the latter.

Chiam has since tried to form and lead an Opposition coalition, called the Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA). It included the SPP, National Solidarity Party (NSP), Singapore Justice Party and Singapore Malay National Organisation. The other parties agreed that, as founding Chairman, Chiam could not be removed from the post until the General Election scheduled for 2007. He also wields veto powers over any decision made by the council or executive committee running the SDA and the power to appoint top officials including the secretary-general and vice chairman.<sup>25</sup> The successor Chairman will not enjoy these powers. Chiam obviously intended to prevent another coup against him, but cited the need for stability for this new Opposition grouping.<sup>26</sup> Again,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., see chapter two.

<sup>25</sup> Ahmad Osman, 'Chiam: Now, Dominant Leader of the United Opposition Parties', in *Straits Times* (21 July, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, 'Malay based SNF won't join Alliance', in *Straits Times* (27 July, 2001).

differences in approach have prevented other parties joining; for example, the Singapore National Front objected to joining because the SDA did not cite it in its constitution which championed Malay rights.<sup>27</sup> Also, the other larger Opposition parties, the WP and SDP refused to join the SDA, citing the need to strengthen their own parties. Low and Chee both rejected the notion that it was in response to Chiam's powers as Chairman.<sup>28</sup> Although the SDA fared well at the 2001 General Election (having Chiam returned and Steve Chia from the NSP elected as an NCMP) it is difficult at this early stage to determine whether the Alliance will successfully unify the Opposition in the future to the point where it can challenge the PAP.

## 5.3 THE NMP SCHEME

The previous chapter analysed the NMP scheme in terms of the PAP's latent rationale to use it as a means to maintain power in Singapore. As briefly described above, the Opposition has been unable to make any serious impact on the PAP, and in the process advance the development of relative autonomy and democratic participation. Further, it is unlikely that Opposition parties will be able to do this in the future without first a resurgence against the PAP taking place. However, the prospects of a unified Opposition challenging the PAP to make such moves is not probable. Therefore, it is significant to identify other possible contenders to advance the development of relative autonomy and democratic participation. The remainder of this final chapter will be an attempt to develop the argument that NMPs are in the best position – in the short term – to push for any such change, even if only minimal.

### 5.3.1 A SHIFT IN ATTITUDES

It is evident that since the introduction of NMPs into Parliament, there has been a change in the attitudes of individual NMPs; or more specifically the manner in which they comment on particular bills of a political nature, and the way they make political

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> G. Sivakkumaran, 'WP, SDP to stay out of Alliance', in *Straits Times* (3 August, 2001).

commentary. This shift has occurred largely as a corollary of a shifting political atmosphere, and the emergence of a more accepting attitude within the PAP and the media towards the scheme.

This shift was referred to indirectly in the previous chapter. It was noted that PAP leaders have argued that the performances of the NMPs have outshone those of the Opposition in the House. It was evident that by the closing stages of Eighth Parliament in 1996, the NMP experience was being seen as a success by the PAP. Indicative of this was the increase in the number of NMPs from six to nine. From the end of the Eighth Parliament and through the Ninth Parliament it was apparent that NMPs took a more critical line against the PAP. This is not to say that NMPs reached the level of Opposition MPs, but they were critical during several discussions of a political nature.<sup>29</sup> There are several reasons why this occurred, and they are worth elaboration here.

Firstly, it is obvious that from the scheme's introduction in 1990, there was opposition towards it, not only from the Opposition members, but also from PAP MPs. This was primarily the reason for introducing a 'sunset clause'.<sup>30</sup> Hence, the scheme was still in its early days of operation, and thus it would have been inadvisable for NMPs to take too critical a stand against the PAP. Other factors also contribute to the fact that NMPs were less critical in this term. Firstly, the Eighth Parliament hosted the largest contingent of Opposition MPs since the First Parliament (1965-8) of independent Singapore, soon after which all BS MPs boycotted. Although four Opposition MPs could not make any serious impact on the political landscape, the PAP would have definitely been wary of their presence and concerned that it could have been a precursor to an increased Opposition presence. Under this circumstance, it would have been self-defeating for NMPs to oppose the PAP in the House. Another reason was simply the fact that the Eighth Parliament did not witness the number of bills of a political nature that came through the Ninth Parliament. Also worth noting is that during this term, although there were four

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<sup>29</sup> This term was referred to in the previous chapter. 'Political nature' means bills or topics of discussion, which have a bearing on democracy, the Opposition, elections and other political issues in Singapore.

<sup>30</sup> The sunset clause granted each new Parliament the right to vote on whether they wanted NMPs to sit for that term.

Opposition MPs, none were regime critics, and hence none ‘provoked’ the House as did Jeyaretnam, who would enter the Ninth Parliament as an NCMP.

It is not being argued that during this Parliament, NMPs did not involve themselves in debates of a political nature; nevertheless at times they were critical of the Government. Two instances stand out. The first (as mentioned in the previous chapter) occurred in 1994, when NMPs Walter Woon and Kanwaljit Soin both criticised the PAP for amending the President’s powers vis-à-vis the Government.<sup>31</sup> Another instance occurred in 1995, following the Lim episode. In January 1995, author and part-time lecturer Catharine Lim was ‘publicly rebuked and belittled for reminding Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of a campaign promise of a “kinder, gentler” government’.<sup>32</sup> In an article printed in the *Straits Times* she argued that Goh departed from a consultative and consensual style of government, and returned to the authoritarian style of Lee Kuan Yew. Following Goh’s reaction, three NMPs actively questioned the Prime Minister on whether the Government permitted citizens to ‘actively debate the merits of Government policy’.<sup>33</sup> Woon, Lee Tsao Yuan and Kanwaljit all expressed concern over the manner in which Lim had been treated for her remarks, and encouraged the PAP to allow more debate on such topics.

Towards the end of the Eighth Parliament in 1996, a bill was introduced to increase the maximum number of MPs in a Group Representation Constituency (GRC) from four to six. The bill was not received well by the Opposition for the obvious reasons that it put them at a disadvantage. Larger GRCs mean that Opposition parties are forced to find more candidates and spend more time and money to contest. With the limited resources and possible candidates that the Opposition has, this furthers their difficulties.

During the second reading of this bill three NMPs rose to speak; Woon, John de Pavya and Imram Mohamed. Each viewed the amendment from differing standpoints, but

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<sup>31</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 63. No. 5. Col. 434-8, & 444-5.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Lingle, *Singapore’s Authoritarian Capitalism: Asian Values, Free Market Illusions and Political Dependency* (Barcelona: Edicions Sirocco, 1996). p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 63. No. 11. Col. 1015-21.

Imram in particular was quite critical. This event was a watershed in the NMP experience; it was the first real instance where an NMP took a strong political position against the PAP. Each NMP will be dealt with in turn.

Woon conceded that enlarging GRCs in such a manner was controversial, but warned that it should not be dealt with from a 'party political standpoint', but rather how it would affect Singapore and its future.<sup>34</sup> Therefore he did not accept that larger GRCs worked directly against the Opposition. Rather, he took a 'double-edged sword'<sup>35</sup> approach. In the case where a Government performs poorly, than larger GRCs provide more opportunities for the Opposition to be seen as an alternative. If the Opposition is in control of a GRC, they will have been exposed to the responsibilities of administration through its Town Council necessary to prove their ability to govern. In a 'super' GRC it will be even more beneficial as it will be administration on a larger and possibly more independent level.<sup>36</sup> In Woon's words, it would serve as an 'self-contained town'.<sup>37</sup> Hence the risk for the PAP is that it is liable to suffer heavily if a GRC falls. He also made the point that the difficulty in finding six Opposition candidates (one of whom must be from a minority ethnic group) should not be seen as something completely inhibiting the Opposition. The Opposition should use the PAP approach and emphasise a strong, charismatic figure to lead the ship. Woon also argued that GRCs are beneficial on two counts. Firstly, they ensure representation from minority ethnic groups. Second, they strengthen the foundation of good government because they work against one-issue political parties, such as environmental parties.<sup>38</sup> Hence, Woon took a line which in large measure supported the PAP, but did show consideration for the plight of the Opposition.

John de Payva, on the other hand, took a line far more consistent with the PAP. He showed no concern for the Opposition, arguing that Singaporeans are more concerned with improving their lives and their families lives, and not with matters pertaining to

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<sup>34</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 66. No. 9. Col. 790.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 793.

<sup>36</sup> Super GRC is a term referring to this emergence of GRCs consisting of six constituencies. See Anonymous, "'Super GRCs' will favour Stronger Parties", in *Straits Times* (18 October, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 66. No. 9. Col. 794.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 791-3.

human rights and democracy.<sup>39</sup> de Pavya took a tripartite approach<sup>40</sup> supporting larger GRCs, because they provide further political stability. Hence this is in favour of workers in Singapore, he argued, because political stability is essential to economic growth and prosperity.<sup>41</sup>

Imram, on the other hand, expressed several concerns over the amendment. His primary consideration was that larger GRCs had a negative impact on Singapore's parliamentary democratic system because they 'restrict the right of the people to elect precisely who they want'.<sup>42</sup> Imram also warned that an increase in the size of GRCs would have an impact on Opposition parties, particularly smaller ones:

... it is quite obvious that the smaller political parties and independent candidates will be disadvantaged by larger GRC size [*sic*] and the reduction in the single-member constituencies.<sup>43</sup>

Here, an NMP shows concern for the plight of the Opposition, and this is one of the first instances where this has occurred. In the next sitting of Parliament in November 1996, Woon asked a question about the Singapore Broadcasting Authority Internet guidelines. Woon's inquiry followed a line supporting relative autonomy and democratic participation. He asked about the rationale in the guidelines, which stated that any matter tending to 'bring the Government into hatred or contempt, or which excites disaffection against the Government' should not be permitted.<sup>44</sup> He was concerned over who would make such a decision in the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA), asking 'Who in the SBA? Is there a committee or is it a single person? Is there going to be a group of persons'?'<sup>45</sup> Woon was concerned that such decisions would be made by only the PAP

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., Col. 800.

<sup>40</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, tripartitism is an approach to industrial relations in Singapore where Government, Business and Labour work together for stability and economic progress.

<sup>41</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 66. No. 9. Col. 797-8.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Col. 805.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Col. 806.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., No. 10. Col. 859.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Col. 860.

minister in charge. Woon was also concerned about whether there would be an appeals process. His last question on the topic was:

Sir, will the Parliamentary Secretary then confirm that it is not the Government's intention to curtail discussion and free expression on the Internet?<sup>46</sup>

The Ninth Parliament saw several NMPs take more of an active interest on issues of a political nature, which would support relative autonomy and democratic participation. Three reasons indicate why this was so. Firstly, there were a large number of bills that were introduced which were of a political nature, including, the Political Films bill. These topics were not as controversial as other topics of a political nature in the Eighth Parliament. The two motions discussed in chapter three on Chee Soon Juan<sup>47</sup> about his dismissal from the National University of Singapore and his comments on the Judiciary would seem too controversial for NMPs to take a non-PAP stand on. The films bill would not be.

Secondly, Jeyaretnam sat as an NCMP for best part of this Parliament and raised several motions of a political nature. Thirdly, the 1997 General Election brought a reduced voter percentage for the Opposition – down from close to 40 to 35 percent – which also lost two seats in the process. Hence, unlike during the Eighth Parliament, the PAP would not have been overly concerned about the possible future threat caused by the Opposition.

### **5.3.2 WHY NMPs ARE WELL POSITIONED**

It is essential to first generally outline why NMPs are well positioned to push for relative autonomy and democratic participation, and describe the manner in which they do before analysing such cases in the Ninth Parliament where it has occurred. As established in the previous chapter, NMPs are defined by the Government as 'non-partisan' and this is essential to their existence as legislators. Through the Ninth Parliament, NMPs have

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Col. 860-1.

<sup>47</sup> Secretary-general of the SDP and regime critic.

opposed particular bills in principle because they deviate from the principles of 'liberal democracy' and 'human rights'. Other times, they have raised questions during Question Time along these principles again. When they do this, it is difficult for the Government to repudiate them because they are 'non-partisan' (as defined by the Government). They cannot simply be rejected like the charges from the Opposition. They cannot be told to keep out of politics, because it was the PAP itself that brought them into the political process. The NMP scheme is in essence a PAP 'baby'.

It is also of added difficulty for the PAP to reject outright challenges from NMPs because, as noted in the previous chapter, PAP ministers have talked up their performances in the House, Lee Kuan Yew's own words are worth repeating:

If we can get in opposition people of the calibre of the Nominated MPs, I say Singapore is better off. At least, I respect them. I can join in the argument.<sup>48</sup>

At other times, the PAP has directly used the non-partisan image of NMPs to legitimise certain initiatives. The increase in the size of GRCs discussed previously is a case in point. PAP MP Choo Wee Kiang was very pleased that Walter Woon had taken the position he had, saying 'in Singapore we have a very neutral Nominated MP who speaks with great sense and reason. It is a great asset to our whole political system.'<sup>49</sup>

NMPs are very clever in the way they deliver their punches, basically, never below the belt. When they oppose a bill for the reason that the PAP is strengthening its hand politically, they will not say; "the PAP is strengthening its hand"; rather, they use a less confrontational expression, for instance; "with this bill, some Singaporeans feel that the PAP is strengthening its hand". This is extremely important. The language used by those who oppose the PAP must be moderate if they are to be considered mitigated critics. Another point from the debate to increase GRC size supports this. Although Imram was

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<sup>48</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 63. No. 8. Col. 815.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 66. No. 9. Col. 807.



critical of the increase GRC size, and warned that this may adversely affect the Opposition and independent candidates, he still framed his criticism in mitigated terms:

Finally, Sir, many people believe that the proposed Bill is really intended to diminish the opposition's chances in the election. This may not be the Government's intention for introducing the amendments, as the Prime Minister has confirmed earlier. However, it is quite obvious that the smaller political parties and independent candidates will be disadvantaged by larger GRC size [*sic*] and the reduction in the single-member constituencies.<sup>50</sup>

With this said, evidence of NMPs pushing relative autonomy and democratic participation can now be examined. The first such case to examine is a motion raised by NMP Shriniwas Rai in 1998. The motion called for a 'Less Adversarial Parliamentary System' and was seconded by NMP Lee Tsao Yuan. Rai focused on the fact that although debate is healthy, Parliament should try to avoid conflict as much as possible.<sup>51</sup>

Sir, how do we go about bringing a change in the thinking [*sic*] and mindset? I would appeal to the ruling party and hope to persuade them to consult the opposition parties in Parliament whenever major issues – I emphasis 'major issues' – are discussed. When the ruling party is prepared to listen to views from the public, why not political parties in Parliament?<sup>52</sup>

Although he signified the importance of the Opposition, he clearly remained mitigated as he followed up with:

The opposition parties in Parliament must give constructive views that will help policy and not to oppose the policy just because it is a Government policy... Opposition for the sake of opposition is negative and futile.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Col. 806.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Vol. 69. No. 1. Col. 108.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., Col. 114.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Cols. 114-5.

And again:

Sir, there is a feeling among some members of the public that some Members of the PAP treat the opposition with contempt... Success sometimes brings some degree of intellectual superiority.<sup>54</sup>

Further in his speech, Rai made a plea common to the Opposition, for Proportional Representation (PR). Rai argued that even with its pitfalls of possibly leading to racial politics – which is central to why the PAP has rejected it in the past<sup>55</sup> – a maximum of 10 percent of seats in the House should be elected through PR. Or, he suggested, if not this, then at least to enlarge the NCMP scheme.<sup>56</sup>

The Government did not support the motion because, as Wong Kan Seng argued, the Parliament is naturally adversarial and will have to remain so, but of course, in a civil manner.<sup>57</sup> However, it should be noted that Wong's response was far less critical and severe towards Rai than if it was Jeyaretnam who raised it.

In 1999, Rai also made a call to establish an independent election commission, which was again rejected.<sup>58</sup> An area where NMPs have commented regularly concerns freedom of speech and the media in Singapore. Several instances can be cited to support the claim that NMPs have pushed for a freer press in Singapore. Within this area, Zulkifli Baharudin and Simon Tay spoke on numerous occasions with other NMPs also contributing from time-to-time. On 31 July 1998, Jeyaretnam raised a motion titled 'Removal of Fear in People's Lives'<sup>59</sup> where he argued that the PAP uses fear to rule Singapore. Again he called for the abolition of the Internal Security Act and other forms

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Col. 115.

<sup>55</sup> See Ibid., Vol. 57. No. 8. Col. 407. Goh here rejected Dr. Lee Siew-Choh's call for PR arguing it would lead to racial politics. Both Lee Kuan Yew and Goh also rejected PR when they introduced the NCMP and NMP schemes respectively.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Vol. 69. No. 1. Col. 119.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Col. 141.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Vol. 70. No. 11. Cols. 1208-9.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Vol. 69. No. 4. Cols. 675-716.

of coercion not authorised by Parliament. He argued that individuals and groups feared joining and supporting the Opposition due to concern over how the PAP would treat such individuals and groups.

Zulkifli made some relevant comments in his speech on the motion, using mitigated language. Early in his speech, he said:

... I believe it is not that there is fear in people's lives in Singapore, as Mr Jeyaretnam puts it, although there is indeed a fear amongst many Singaporeans to speak their mind. There is a perception that public criticism of official policies is not welcomed, brought about by a legacy of the past.<sup>60</sup>

The last piece of this extract refers to the PAP's attitude towards pro-Communist civil groups, however, he urged that this attitude must change, and also recognised that in some regards it had. Fear, for Zulkifli, refers more to the perceived Government lookout for 'dissenters' and out of respect for Singapore's preventive detention laws. Also, the existence of 'red tape' covering a wide range of registration and licensing laws for societies, organisations of public meetings and publication of newsletters. These he argued:

tend to discourage citizens' initiatives and do little to demonstrate the increasing tolerance of differing views.<sup>61</sup>

Zulkifli maintained that attitudes within the populace must be changed to encourage them to speak out. Also, he argued that the Government should 'change its mindset and paradigms'.<sup>62</sup> Then, pointing to the Cathrine Lim episode, he supported a claim of this thesis, that the manner of language used by those who are critical, must be mitigated:

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Col. 686.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Col. 687.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Col. 689.

Cathrine Lim is an accomplished professional writer. If even her words and motives can be misconstrued, then what hope do other Singaporeans have of getting their points across? I think this is what alarms Singaporeans. You have to be careful in what you say, should you not be misunderstood.<sup>63</sup>

Zulkifli finished by discussing the ISA, pointing out that although ‘extreme’, it remains necessary in a society like Singapore’s which has only recently emerged from a communist threat. However, he did argue that a stronger level of Judicial review, possibly a Tribunal made up of High Court Judges, should be introduced for ‘checks and balances to have a higher level of transparent judicial scrutiny and make the Executive more accountable for their actions’.<sup>64</sup>

Simon Tay followed, echoing similar concerns to Zulkifli, particularly that the ISA should remain, however, he said ‘I think an amendment to allow a judicial review of its abolition should be considered in the future’.<sup>65</sup> He also mentioned that individuals are cautious to speak up:

... not so much because they fear detention or jail, but because of smaller concerns, about not being in someone’s good books, in being in a black book.<sup>66</sup>

What is essential, for Tay, was the need to build up ‘Singapore’s heartware’, to build Singapore’s civil society, he stated that ‘[t]o encourage this, I urge the Government to be more tolerant and have a greater acceptance of differing points of view.’<sup>67</sup> Like Zulkifli, he signified the importance of being, what I label, a ‘mitigated critic’:

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Col. 689.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Col. 692.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Col. 695.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., Col. 693.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., Col. 693.

People must trust that the Government will listen fairly and act fairly. The Government, on its part, must trust that citizens will exercise their rights to speech responsibly. This trust is not automatic. It is earned. There is no free licence.<sup>68</sup>

Fundamentally, Tay encouraged:

... the Government to exercise a greater kindness, a greater caution, a greater restraint, to reply with the aim of persuasion and to remember that the Government can intimidate even if it does not intend to.<sup>69</sup>

The final NMP to speak on the motion was Rai, who, like the previous two NMPs, argued that the ISA should not be removed, however, further judicial discretion should be introduced.<sup>70</sup> The three NMPs did not support the motion, which called the ISA to be abolished.

In February 1998, the second reading of the Films (Amendment) Bill saw Zulkifli, Simon Tay, Claire Chaing and Rai virtually side with Opposition concerns. The Bill was two-tiered, the latter part of which was of a political nature. The first part prohibited the trade in obscene films. The second prohibited the import, making, distribution and exhibition of party political films. The four NMPs expressed concern over the second part. Zulkifli argued that such a bill, which prohibits communication between parties and their electorate, was unnecessary. Taking a stand, which argued that Singaporeans want and are entitled to a greater awareness of issues of state and politics, Zulkifli made the point that political films were one such way to accommodate this.<sup>71</sup>

He dismissed the need for such a law on numerous levels due to the existence of other legislation. Firstly, it would not have a bearing on the level of politicking because the amount of money spent by a candidate is already capped. Concerning racial matters, the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Col. 695.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Col. 696.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Col. 698.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., Vol. 68. No. 4. Col. 483.

ISA and Religious Harmony Act<sup>72</sup> served to prevent politics moving down this road. Defamation laws are also in place to prevent candidates lying to the electorate.<sup>73</sup> Zulkifli also made the point that the bill defined 'party political film' 'extremely broadly' and that '[t]he amendment is sweeping and vague.'<sup>74</sup> Possibly, non-political party organisations may come under its purview if they make films directed towards a political end in Singapore. Even Government advertisements could be banned. In his concluding remarks, Zulkifli stated that

the Bill would deny the opposition parties one way to reach out to citizens and inform them about their political platforms. Although this Bill affects both the PAP and the opposition parties equally, there is a general perception that the PAP already has many ways of reaching the public. The television companies and the Radio Corporation of Singapore are Government-owned. The newspapers maintain pro-Government editorial policies, for opposition parties, video tapes are perhaps one tiny way to redress this imbalance. To deny them, Sir, of this small opportunity, is unnecessary.<sup>75</sup>

Tay also pointed out that although he supported the first part of the bill, he could not support the second either in principle or in particulars. Like Zulkifli, he suggested out the ban is stated 'too broadly'. Although the bill applies to all political parties equally, those parties which do not have representatives in the House will suffer from less exposure. Tay made the point that:

[t]here is also the consistent public perception that the media in Singapore is pro-Government. Several surveys have shown that the public thinks this is so. In this context, this equal law will have unequal impact [*sic*].<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The Religious Harmony Act prevents religious leaders interfering in politics. It was introduced as a response to the detention under the ISA of 'Catholic Marxists' in the late 1980s.

<sup>73</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 68. No. 4. Col. 483-4.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 484.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 485.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 487.

Tay saw such a bill as signifying a level of political immaturity. In his words, the bill 'shields citizens like children, rather than prepares them to be mature and discerning'.<sup>77</sup>

Claire Chiang expressed some concerns over the second part of the bill also, in that through its ambiguity, the bill could 'create a situation which is what is not expressly prohibited is also not permitted.'<sup>78</sup> This bill therefore could be threatening to civil society and she urged the Government tighten its definition of 'political party film'. Nonetheless, her level of objection did not reach that of the previous two NMPs to speak, or that of the next NMP, Rai. Like the first two speakers, Rai warned that

there will be criticisms of this Bill from some quarters, especially the Western press. I think there will be some criticism by Singaporeans that this Bill is going to silence the opposition.<sup>79</sup>

Again, he also argued that definitions in the Bill were too wide, and that it might send the wrong signal to Singaporeans that 'we are becoming less tolerant of political dissent.'<sup>80</sup>

Defamation laws have also been dealt with by NMPs, again Simon Tay and Zulkifli. On 26 November 1998, Jeyaretnam raised a motion

That this House, recognizing that in a true democratic society, every citizen should have the basic right to comment on and criticise the conduct of public officials in the discharge of their public functions and duties, resolves that a Commission be appointed to examine and recommend what changes should be made to the law of defamation to give every citizen this basic right to exercise without fear.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Col. 488.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Col. 498.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Col. 500.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., Col. 500.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., Vol. 68. No. 11. Col. 1728.

This motion was significant because Simon Tay supported it.<sup>82</sup> However, it should be noted, and thus explained why the motion was quoted above in full, that although Jeyaretnam is a regime critic, this motion was worded in far more mitigated terms. Tay supported the idea that defamation laws in Singapore ‘can have unintended consequences that it can chill free speech’.<sup>83</sup> He urged that greater leniency should be granted to honest mistakes, and that a cap should apply to the size of damages awarded.<sup>84</sup> This point is particularly important, as bankruptcy through liable suits, is a method by which the PAP uses to neutralise Opposition figures. Hence he argued that a commission would be useful to find a balance between defamation laws and freedom of speech.

Zulkifli also supported the idea of reviewing defamation laws, but not in a commission. Again, the balance between freedom of speech and defamation should be reconsidered. He also pointed out that when discussing this topic, it often revolves around politicians, how defamation laws impact on civil society should also be of concern.<sup>85</sup>

The last debate to be dealt with pertains to media directly in Singapore. It is again from a motion raised by Jeyaretnam, on establishing a non-Singapore Press Holdings controlled newspaper in Singapore.<sup>86</sup> Claire Chiang did not support the motion, but did recognise that ‘we must encourage an environment which enables a competition of ideas.’<sup>87</sup> Hence she urged the Government to permit a competitor English newspaper against the *Straits Times*. Although she recognised the fact the *Straits Times* had published many ‘alternative’ views from Singaporeans on a range of Government issues over the past few years, the introduction of a non-SPH newspaper was beneficial to the ‘competition of ideas’.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Col. 1746.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., Col. 1742.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., Col. 1745.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., Col. 1747.

<sup>86</sup> Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) is the body that at that time controlled newspapers in Singapore under the Government.

<sup>87</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 69. No. 13. Col. 2125.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., Col. 2125-6.



Zulkifli gave his 'qualified support' to the motion that a licence be granted to a newspaper company outside the SPH and to reducing management shares and special holding rights under the Newspaper and Printing Press Act.<sup>89</sup> He did not agree that all Government controls be abolished, particularly those which precluded foreign ownership and control of local news organisations.<sup>90</sup> The level of control over local newspapers, however, he argued, had:

brought about an undesirable consequence that the Board of Directors and, through them, the editors who are appointed by the Government being generally perceived as biased or pro-Government.<sup>91</sup>

Zulkifli contested the PAP notion that if restrictions were lifted, racial, religious and regional sensitivities may be affected, arguing that other existing legislation would prevent such an occurrence, and that most media professionals in Singapore have already internalised such sensitivities.<sup>92</sup> Although media controls were originally introduced for national security concerns, he asked if indeed this was the way they were applied today, and warned that in the future they may be used to eschew public accountability over Governmental decisions.<sup>93</sup> With these considerations in mind, Zulkifli raised five issues trying to persuade the Government to review current laws:

- A new privately owned newspaper should be introduced and left to market forces to determine if there is a niche for a second or third English paper;
- Competition can bring diversity of views and creativity and efficiency;
- Ideas must find conflict with others;
- Debate is a necessary value in the search for solutions to common problems; and,
- The current media suffers unfairly some credibility problems on domestic issues, particularly when criticising the Opposition, it is often regarded as politically

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<sup>89</sup> This law allows the Government to own a specified number of shares in Singapore Newspapers.

<sup>90</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 69. No. 13. Col. 2126.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 2127.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, Cols. 2127-8.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 2128.

motivated, hence an alternative newspaper can do much to remove this credibility gap.<sup>94</sup>

Hence, Zulkifli stated that '[c]onsidering the state of our society, Sir, we can and should have an independent press, though not necessarily unregulated.'<sup>95</sup>

Considerable time has been spent in this chapter describing the occasions where NMPs have voiced their concerns over notions of freedom of speech and control of the media. This is I believe, an important issue because the notion of having NMPs in the House is for them to speak freely and contribute to debates about the governing of Singapore. It could therefore be seen as a contradiction if NMPs had not taken such a line.

Even if NMPs had not been critical in debates of a political nature, during the Ninth Parliament, there was an evident willingness on their behalf to contribute to such debates, particularly those referred to above. NMPs therefore have shown signs that, although they do not have an electoral mandate, they are still willing to participate in such debates.

It is also interesting to note that NMPs have a level of influence because many have specialised areas of interest and expertise. For instance, Simon Tay constantly spoke about the environment, regional affairs, the rule of law (constitutional law), and human rights and civil society. These are his areas of his research, and he has been involved in civil society and environmental groups. Zulkifli Baharudin often spoke about civil society, media regulation and freedom of the Press. Again he has been engaged in civil society, he was also involved with the Feedback Unit's group studying Mass Media. Lee Tsao Yuan is an economist and former head of the Institute of Policy Studies. She spent considerable time discussing cost of living issues. Kanwaljit Soin formed the Association of Women for Action and Research and spoke at length on Women's issues. These individuals provided critical and knowledgeable arguments for their areas of involvement. Fortunately, they never isolated themselves to these areas, for by doing so, they could

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., Cols. 2129-30.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Col. 2131.

have risked being seen as one-dimensional, or bureaucratic, Parliamentarians. On this point of specialisation, as discussed in the previous chapter, Walter Woon was able to pass into law his Maintenance of Parents Private Motion, and Kanwaljit Soin had a major influence over the Women's Charter Amendment Bill.

Returning to NMPs' willingness to comment on issues of a political nature, this has not been confined to the chamber of Parliament. In lectures and in media interviews, several NMPs have made political commentary demonstrating their willingness to be involved, at least as commentators, on political issues. Some of these NMPs, however, such as Simon Tay and Walter Woon, who are Law academics, must not be seen in this regard as contributing because they are only NMPs.

In the lead-up to the 2001 General Election, the *Straits Times* surveyed several 'political observers' on how Super GRCs would affect the Opposition's chances. Three NMP's views were included. Chandra Mohan said that 'this will certainly favour the ruling party, especially if you have heavyweight ministers to head these super-GRCs'.<sup>96</sup> Thomas Thomas and Zulkifli both disagreed, arguing that the creation of larger GRCs was a practical necessity given the growing population.

In January 2000, the Think Centre, an 'independent political-research initiative' organised a forum titled 'Non-partisanship: Politics Without Punishment'.<sup>97</sup> Of the four speakers, two were then current NMPs: Zulkifli again and Goh Chong Chia, and a former NMP: Chia Shi Teck. The speakers dealt with the issue of the role of NMPs in a political sense and the possible development of a two-party system. Both Zulkifli and Goh argued that although the NMP scheme is useful, it must be a transitional one so as a strong Opposition and two-party system can emerge. Zulkifli remarked

At the end of the day, it takes people who have been NMPs or been in civil-society groups to actually get into the political arena and decide for themselves whether

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<sup>96</sup> Anonymous, "'Super GRCs' will favour Stronger Parties'.

<sup>97</sup> Irene Ng, 'NMP scheme 'is useful but should be Transitional'', in *Straits Times* (29 January, 2000). p. 67.

they want to join the ruling party or the opposition, without which, I don't think we can see a truly strong two-party emerging in Singapore.<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, the existence of NMPs, he argued, negatively affects the Opposition because they occupy 'the same space as NMPs'. Goh argued that for a democratic system to work, the ruling party must be checked, and that it was necessary for a shadow government with alternative policies to be ready to assume political control if the Government falters. Each of the three NMPs talked down the influence of the scheme vis-à-vis a two-party system. Chia argued that the effectiveness of NMPs was nullified by their apparent lack of a mandate. Goh also saw the role of NMPs as a possibly transitional one towards a two-party system. Zulkifli pointed out that

For the more serious and committed members of civil society, they have to make a choice to join the ruling party or the opposition. I don't think they can make a very large difference by joining the NGOs or even being NMPs.<sup>99</sup>

In 1999, Lydia Lim interviewed three outgoing NMPs, Rai, Chuang Shaw Peng and Lee Tsao Yew, who each urged the Government to find new ways to consult Singaporeans and suggested new Parliamentary initiatives to do so.<sup>100</sup> Rai suggested that members of the public be allowed to file questions through the Clerk of Parliament to be answered during Question Time. Rai pointed out that Singaporeans felt the Government was still not prepared to listen to alternative views, adding that 'there was some truth in it'.<sup>101</sup> Lee argued that if younger and better-educated Singaporeans were consulted, they would feel they had a stake in Singapore's future. Chuang argued that more time should be set aside between the second and third reading of a Bill so as people can give their views. Each maintained that the NMP scheme had worked well, and that NMPs had been able to engage ministers in debates and initiate discussion on key issues. He also argued that the NMP scheme should again be expanded to 12-15 members to hear more alternative

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>100</sup> Lydia Lim, 'Open up Avenues for others to Speak', in *Straits Times* (24 September, 1999), p. 51.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

voices in Parliament. This idea of increasing the number of NMPs to between 12 and 15 was supported by another NMP, Gerard Ee.<sup>102</sup>

In 1999, Chua Mui Hoong interviewed nine MPs, including NMP Simon Tay about the legislative process.<sup>103</sup> Tay made the comment that there should be a 'twin-track' approach to legislation. More time and debate for laws pertaining to social issues, such as health care and the environment, and a fast-track process for business-related legislation.

Walter Woon was yet another NMP who regularly made political commentary. In August 1996 he spoke to 300 Singapore Tertiary students at a Singapore Student Symposium organised by the Singapore International Foundation.<sup>104</sup> He encouraged the students to take advantage of the fact that they have more freedom of expression, because if they do not, the next generation of leaders may give them less room. If the PAP were to garner only 55 percent in the next General Election, he suggested, conservatives within the party may push against greater liberalisation. However, if people spoke up more, the PAP would be less likely to do so. Of course, he pointed out that it should be done in a responsible and honest way, and that discussion should not threaten the stability of the country or touch on racial and religious sensitivities. Woon also criticised the notion that PAP wards would receive public transport and housing upgrades ahead of Opposition wards:

It is immoral ... The Government should not hold infrastructure projects hostage to how you vote ... it is not PAP money.<sup>105</sup>

In an interview conducted in November 1997 by Koh Buck Song, which largely revolved around how the budget would be affected by a dissolved Parliament, Woon made comments about the Opposition's chances in the Election. Woon stated that 'I do not think the PM is worried about the opposition. They are in such a disarray, they would be

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<sup>102</sup> Irene Ng, 'Have NMPs earned their Parliamentary Spurs?', in *Straits Times* (7 July, 1999). p. 62.

<sup>103</sup> Chua Mui Hoong, 'Are Laws being Passed too Speedily?', in *Straits Times* (27 March, 1999). p. 68.

<sup>104</sup> Dominic Nathan, 'Freedom of Expression: Use it or you may Lose it', in *Straits Times* (20 July, 1996).

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

lucky to hold on to what they have'.<sup>106</sup> He was also asked on how he thought the Opposition would do:

The PAP could lose two to eight seats. Potong Pasir [Chiam See Tong] and Hougang [Low Thia Khiang] are sure: the Senior Minister [Lee Kuan Yew] has even 'blessed' the incumbents. They could also lose in GRC, if (businessman and former NMP) Chia Shi Teck stands. If he can find five other acceptable guys, he can have a decent shot at it.<sup>107</sup>

It is important to note that the NMP scheme gives Civil Society a voice. The Association of Women in Action and Research, and Roundtable have had successful nominations in the past. The Roundtable, a non-partisan political discussion group, lists one of its activities as 'encourages and supports its members who seek to be Nominated Members of Parliament.'

The NMP scheme therefore may be a way for 'mitigated' civil society groups to be involved in the political process. A double-case involving the Roundtable's commentary on election practices is interesting. After the 1997 General Election, the Roundtable wrote a letter to the *Straits Times* critical of PAP practices against the Opposition (whilst trying to remain non-partisan).<sup>108</sup> The group pointed out that the result was a clear mandate for Goh Chok Tong as leader of the PAP and Prime Minister. However, they listed several concerns about the PAP's ploy of tying funds for upgrading with electoral support, basically, those constituencies which returned PAP candidates would be first in line. The Roundtable argued that these funds were not raised by the PAP but from 'national coffers'. The linking itself was not logical because a citizen's vote in a Westminster system is to decide who represents them in Parliament, not a referendum on a single municipal issue. The group argued that there were far more equitable methods of determining order in upgrading. The group also criticised the notion of 'package' politics

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<sup>106</sup> Koh Buck Song, 'What happens to the Government if Parliament is Dissolved on Jan 5?', in *Straits Times* (02 November, 1996).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

used by Goh who argued that PAP policies came as a package. This was a way to gloss over issues and did not provide citizens the opportunity to signal their opinions towards particular policies and actions taken by the PAP. Hence the group argued that:

as a result, the election was won convincingly, but not on sweet ground ... [which] may lead to a situation in which the PAP has the full constitutional right to govern, but lacks moral authority.<sup>109</sup>

The PAP's response, written by cabinet member Lim Boon Heng labelled the Roundtable 'a small critical group' and suggested that:

perhaps members of The Roundtable felt that they, the PAP critics, had the sole right to determine the agenda for the General Election.<sup>110</sup>

Such a reaction to a civil society group whose criticism did largely remain 'non-partisan' was somewhat over stated. Simon Tay, after becoming an NMP pointed this out in Parliament. In his speech on Jeyaretnam's motion to remove fear in people's lives, discussed above, Tay encouraged the PAP to exercise greater kindness, caution and restraint and recognise that even if unintended, it can intimidate. Tay cited the example of Lim's reply to the Roundtable's letter stating that

the PAP is free to disagree with our analysis ... The point I want to bring up today is not about whether we were right or wrong in our analysis, but the reply of the government. Mr Lim Boon Heng responded to us substantively on the points we raised. Only, I would say, on three words, there was a sense of what people might think of as intimidation. The first, he called us 'PAP critics' rather than simply a commentator or critic of politics as a whole. Second, there was a very vague promise to take us on, and I do not think he meant to take us on in Parliament. The

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<sup>108</sup> Simon Tay & Zulkifli Baharuddin, 'A look back at the 1997 General Election', in *Straits Times* (10 January, 1997). p. 62.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>110</sup> Lim Boon Heng, 'On the General Election', in *Straits Times* (17 January, 1997). p. 59.

third was that he question marked our non-partisanship, that somehow we were coloured as being predominantly against the PAP.<sup>111</sup>

In the aftermath of the 2001 General Election, the Roundtable again criticised the PAP.<sup>112</sup> Firstly, the group found it unrealistic that 18 of the 25 ‘rookie’ PAP candidates were elected unopposed on nomination day. The Roundtable criticised the ruling party through the tactics it used to ‘almost legislate the opposition into oblivion’ through the domination of GRCs and the ‘constant redrawing of electoral boundaries’ which has seen marginal seats wiped off the political map. The group argued that this ‘is seen by some Singaporeans to work against the opposition’.<sup>113</sup> Election deposits had reached an extremely high level at \$13 000. The Roundtable therefore made five proposals:

- To establish an independent electoral commission;
- To seek voter endorsement for uncontested candidates in the form of a referendum requiring 25 percent support; or,
- To possibly hold by-elections in walkover constituencies;
- To decrease the size and number of GRCs, concurrently re-increasing the number of Single Member Constituencies; and,
- To have longer campaign periods, possibly 15 instead of nine days.

Lee Kuan Yew replied to this letter in an interview, but unlike Lim’s retort in 1997, Lee Kuan Yew did not portray the Roundtable as ‘PAP critics’.<sup>114</sup> He only criticised them by saying they made arguments on a theoretical basis, and that the system in Singapore had to deal with the practical. Between these two events, during the Ninth Parliament, two NMPs were successfully nominated by the Roundtable, Zulkifli and Chandra, another, Simon Tay, is also a member. With this in mind, it would have been far more difficult for

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<sup>111</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 69. No. 4. Cols. 696-7. The second point about ‘taking us on’ was worded by Lim as: ‘we are ready to engage them’. Tay may have possibly overplayed this point.

<sup>112</sup> Lam Peng Er, et. Al, ‘Lack of Competition will hurt PAP and Nation’, in *Straits Times* (10 November, 2001).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Asad Latif, ‘Textbook Western-style Democracy not for S’pore, say SM Lee’, in *Straits Times* (12 November, 2001).



the PAP to dismiss the Roundtable, as it had done in 1997, because in essence, it would have been criticising NMPs, and thus the scheme, for not being non-partisan.

The final point to note in discussing why NMPs are well positioned is in their relationship with the media. It is commonly known that the media treats the PAP and Opposition parties quite differently in its reporting and commentary due to its close relationship with the ruling party. However, NMPs present a different class for the media to report on. The media in Singapore has painted NMPs in a favourable light and given considerable attention to them because they are non-partisan as defined by the PAP. They pose no direct threat to the ruling party. It is the PAP that has set the NMP scheme up as non-partisan, and has lauded their performances as such. PAP MPs have also pointed out that NMPs receive better media attention than MPs. During the motion to include NMPs in the Ninth Parliament, PAP MP Tan Chen Bock argued that although no concern raised in Parliament by NMPs was not similarly raised by regular MPs,

The way these topics were brought up differed because of difference in style, presentation and emphasis, NMPs, being smaller in number, captured the attention of the media.<sup>115</sup>

In 1994, PAP MP Peh Chin Hua stated that

... the reporters of a certain newspaper seem to favour the Nominated MPs, giving the people the wrong impression that the work performance of NMPs is more outstanding than the Elected MPs.<sup>116</sup>

Be that as it may, the point being made here is that favourable media representation positions NMPs well to push for relative autonomy and democratic participation. They do not suffer the stigma placed on the Opposition, particularly regime critics. In fact, the

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<sup>115</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 67. No. 5. Col. 424.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 63. No. 8. Col. 794.

media has been apt at placing the performance of NMPs above that of the Opposition in Parliament. Garry Rodan makes this point:

Journalists have seized on the comparison between elected and nominated MPs to emphasis the poor calibre of the government's opponents, echoing a recurrent PAP theme. As one enthusiastic endorsement from a journalist put it in the *Straits Times*: 'If indeed this is indicative of the contribution of future NMPs relative to their opposition counterparts, Singaporeans ought to ponder if they will be served better with more NMPs'.<sup>117</sup>

As does Thio Li-Ann:

The notoriously pro-establishment press has closely scrutinised the performance of the opposition MPs in Parliament and has been quick to point out the superior performance of the NMP, particularly with respect to parliamentary censure and scrutiny ... the English-language *Straits Times* has been astute in pointing out the success of the NMP scheme in terms of the quality of detailed and coherent arguments NMPs have been able to offer, thereby raising the level of debate in Parliament.<sup>118</sup>

### 5.3.3 THE OPPOSITION AND THE NMP SCHEME

It has been pointed out that the participation of NMPs in the legislative process takes attention away from the Opposition, because they occupy a similar space. It has also been pointed out that a latent rationale for the PAP government to introduce the scheme was for this very reason. However, viewed within the context of the argument presented in this chapter, the NMP scheme can be viewed as a positive addition for the Opposition.

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<sup>117</sup> Rodan, 'State-Society Relations'. p. 104.

<sup>118</sup> Thio Li-ann, 'Choosing Representatives: Singapore does it her own way'. In Graham Hassall & Cheryl Saunders (Eds), *The People's Representatives: Electoral Systems in the Asia-Pacific Region* (NSW: Allen & Unwin 1997). p. 54.

Credibility is a problem faced by the Opposition in Singapore, yet NMPs do not suffer this because their entry into Parliament requires them to be nominated on meritocratic and non-partisan grounds. The non-partisan nature of NMPs has been used by the PAP to legitimise some of its policies. One such instance, as discussed above, is when Walter Woon supported the enlargement of GRCs contending the view that they inherently disadvantage the Opposition. During the second reading of that constitutional amendment bill, PAP MP Choo Wee Khiang showed his admiration for Woon's stand:

Because in Singapore we have a very neutral Nominated MP who speaks with great sense and reason. It is a great asset to our whole political system.<sup>119</sup>

If the PAP can use what NMPs say to support its policies, then it is only natural that Opposition parties would use the non-partisan nature of NMPs when they do not support the PAP, or, more importantly, when they push for relative autonomy and democratic participation. In some instances, this has occurred. The motion raised by Jeyaretnam on having an independent newspaper in 1999 was discussed above showing that two NMPs, Zulkilfi and Claire Chiang were supportive of his move, more so Zulkilfi. Jeyaretnam started his closing remarks with:

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am most grateful for the views that have been expressed in this House this afternoon and particularly, I welcome the views that have been expressed by the two NMPs.<sup>120</sup>

Outside Parliament, the NSP has used the words of NMPs in its newsletters, *The Solidarity*. For instance, in an article on freedom of speech the party used Kanwaljit to support their argument:

To paraphrase NMP, Dr. Kanwaljit Soin (in Parliament), 'to be truly Singaporean, we must feel that we have a right to participate in debates – on policies, issues and trends affecting Singapore and Singaporeans.'<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 66. No. 9. Col. 807.

The party also used Kanwaljit to support an article on Gender issues.<sup>122</sup> Walter Woon is another NMP the NSP has used. They supported his call for a referendum on ministerial salaries, which was rejected by the PAP.<sup>123</sup> The WP and SDP have been less willing to use what NMPs say to support their arguments. This may be in response to their objection to the scheme.<sup>124</sup> However, the SDP has been willing, in its newsletter *The New Democrat*, to give considerable space across two issues to an interview with former Deputy Prime Minister Toh Chin Chye in 1984 where he expressed his disillusion with how the PAP had changed since it came to power.<sup>125</sup> Although having a former DMP criticise the PAP is far more valuable than from an NMP, it is still important for the Opposition, with its limited resources and availability to information from the state, to use as much as possible in the political game. In the instances above where the Opposition did use what NMPs said to support their arguments, they did not stress the point that this was commentary from what the PAP defines as 'non-partisan' individuals.

### 5.3.4 DIFFICULTIES IN THIS APPROACH AND CONCLUSION

Before discussing the central difficulties with the approach suggested in the chapter, it is worth discussing smaller issues which may impact on the effectiveness of NMPs pushing for relative autonomy and democratic participation. As discussed in chapter three, after the 1997 General Election, the PAP decided to withdraw the \$500 allowance for NMPs and NCMPs to hire legislative assistants. Wong replied that they did not have as heavy a

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., Vol. 69. No. 13. Col. 2145.

<sup>121</sup> Anonymous, 'The Right to Debate', in *The Solidarity* (Vol. 2, 1995). p. 5.

<sup>122</sup> Cited in Anonymous, 'Women and Participation', in James Gomez (Ed), *Publish and Perish: The Censorship of Opposition Party Publications in Singapore* (Singapore: National Solidarity Party, 2001). p. 208. This book is a collection of articles from *The Solidarity*.

<sup>123</sup> Anonymous, 'The PAP Government: What has become of it?', in Gomez (Ed), *Publish and Perish*, p. 80.

<sup>124</sup> In its party manifesto for the 1997 General Election, the WP advocated the abolition of the NMP scheme, cited in Derek da Cunha, *The Price of Victory: The 1997 Singapore General Election and Beyond* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997). p. 127. The SDP and WP MPs have continued to vote against having NMPs in the House when the motion is called at the beginning of each new Parliament.

<sup>125</sup> Anonymous, 'Dr. Toh Chin Chye Speaks Out: Part I', in *The New Democrat* (Issue No. 1, 1996). pp. 1 and 4. And, Anonymous, 'Dr. Toh Chin Chye Speaks Out: Part II', in *The New Democrat* (Issue No. 2, 1996). p. 2.

workload as regular MPs (for instance, they have no constituency work).<sup>126</sup> This obviously will affect their effectiveness as legislators.

Another issue is that the PAP may be unwilling to allow critical NMPs extended periods in the House. Lee Tsao Yuan, who has been widely lauded for her contributions to Parliament applied for a third term, but was rejected. She was however, 'not disappointed' about it.<sup>127</sup> It is, however, possible to read too far into this decision. If Lee was granted a third term, her period in the House would have been longer than the period of one Parliamentary term. It has developed as convention that NMPs can be re-appointed only once.<sup>128</sup> It must be noted that those who have been critical, in the mitigated sense of course, have generally been re-appointed, Lee herself, Walter Woon, Kanwaljit Soin, Simon Tay and Zulkifli Baharudin all sat twice. So it is difficult to suggest that the PAP has been unwilling to continue with mitigated critics.

The NMP scheme is liable however, to lose credibility for two particular reasons. Firstly, the inclusion of Proposal Panels may see the selection process manipulated. However, it is complicated to suggest at this point that such a manipulation has occurred. Members of the public are still able to nominate individuals. Generally speaking, the proposal panels introduced in 1997 do not drastically alter the backgrounds of individuals appointed. The inclusion of three new panels in 2002 again does not appear to threaten the NMP scheme, but rather with a social services proposal panel broadens its scope somewhat.

The second issue is the idea proposed by Lee Kuan Yew of the possibility of former NMPs standing for the PAP. Some NMPs believed this to have negative consequences, but others did not completely dismiss it. Nonetheless, no NMP has yet stood for the PAP. If in the future one does, it may discredit the scheme and weaken its 'non-partisan' stand. If NMPs do stand for the PAP in the future it will not necessary weaken the scheme. PAP MPs do not 'toe the party line' in the conventional sense. Several MPs, particularly Tan

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<sup>126</sup> *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, Vol. 67, No. 9, Cols. 693-7.

<sup>127</sup> Cited in Lydia Lim, 'Voice of the Younger Generation', in *Straits Times* (24 September, 1999), p. 60.

<sup>128</sup> the only instances where NMPs were re-appointed a second time was in the months leading up to the 1997 and 2001 General Elections, and they only served to keep the quota of NMPs full in that short period

Chen Bock, have shown a high level of independence in Parliament, only to a mitigated extent of course. This approach taken by several MPs stems from the fact that for an extended period, no Opposition figure sat in Parliament. Even after the Opposition made a return, their presence has not been that dominant to necessitate PAP MPs being called back into line. Hence, PAP MPs have had to serve as proxy opposition to the Government.

This idea of allowing PAP MPs to deviate from the party line has also been reinforced recently. After the 2001 General Election the PAP decided to allow its party whip to be lifted on more issues so as to generate more vigorous debate, this however does exclude matters affecting the Budget, the Constitution, no-confidence motions and issues of critical national importance such as security.<sup>129</sup> Keeping this in mind, it would be difficult to imagine an NMP joining the PAP without taking advantage of this, however, this is something yet unknown.

Electoral support may be considered a measure in determining the effectiveness of NMPs, however unsound. One such case then does present itself. A one term NMP Chia Shi Teck (1992-4) stood unsuccessfully as an independent candidate in 1997. Chia tried to establish a GRC team made up of independent candidates but was unable to secure a suitable minority candidate and was forced to stand alone in Chua Chu Kang constituency. In May 1996 Chia spoke of how Independent MPs could serve as 'good sparring partners' for PAP MPs and would not threaten 'good government'.<sup>130</sup> To gain acceptability from mainstream Singapore, Chia labelled his quest a 'proposition' rather than opposition and argued that his decision to stand in the election was also responsible for the disarray which the Opposition, particularly the SDP, found itself in. Although Chia was a prominent personality he failed to make any significant headway in the election, garnering 14.06 percent of the valid vote. This may be construed as a disapproval of NMPs as parliamentary candidates by the electorate, however, other factors should be considered.

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<sup>129</sup> Li-Ann Wee, 'PAP MPs to vote freely on School Reforms', in *Straits Times* (17 November, 2002).

<sup>130</sup> da Cunha, *The Price of Victory*, p. 25.

Although he had been an NMP, Chia only sat for one NMP term, and as an NMP would not be considered one of high profile. Although it was noted that he made significant contributions in Parliament, in no way did he reach the level of Walter Woon or Kanwaljit Soin. It is an understatement that independent candidates have fared poorly in General Elections in Singapore and seen within this context, Chia's result is not surprising. As Chiam See Tong realised after two unsuccessful attempts as an Independent in the 1970s, the backing of a political party is invaluable.

Single Member Constituencies (SMC) after the 1991 General Election also took on a new significance. In that election, SMCs were still in the majority, with 21 as opposed to 15 GRCs. In 1997, only nine SMCs existed, as opposed to 15 larger GRCs. The Politics around SMCs had changed as a RESULT of 1991. Four SMCs fell to the Opposition in that year, were as to this point, no GRCs have fallen. Hence the PAP's attitude to SMCs changed. In 1997, the party started placing 'heavyweight backbenchers' in SMCs, this included Low Seow Chay in Chua Chu Kang.<sup>131</sup>

It is also significant to note that Chia issued a press statement on 6 November 1996 confirming that he intended to stand as an independent and two days later he revealed that he was attempting to put a team of independent candidates together to contest a GRC.<sup>132</sup> This was only two months out from the General Election on 2 January 1997 and at that stage it was obviously not his intention to stand in Chua Chu Kang. Although he did receive publicity from being an NMP, for the short time that he was one, it could never substitute for grassroots campaigning. Winning a seat against the PAP takes a major effort within that constituency. Realistically, it is not unreasonable for non-PAP candidates to lose a number of elections before they have a realistic chance of winning. Jeyaretnam and Chiam, arguably the two most popular Opposition figures in Singapore since the BS boycott, took ten and eight years respectively before they became elected.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

On top of that, the election in Chua Chu Kang was a four-cornered fight, always detrimental to the Opposition because PAP protest votes are therefore divided.

The final, and possibly most significant factor to explain why Chia did so poorly, was that he had nothing to match the PAP's vote for upgrading strategy. He suggested this also as a reason for his failure, noting that:

at the counting at the polling station, I could see from my votes that people in private estates, who had no upgrading to worry about, gave me their support. Whereas from those in older estates that need upgrading, my votes were disastrous.<sup>133</sup>

Had Chia been successful, the preceding discussion would have shed a positive light on how NMPs have been able to gain electoral support and how it supports the thesis. However, electoral support, or a lack of it, is not necessarily a factor for the argument and is to a certain extent irrelevant. I am not making the point that NMPs are popular enough to win elections, to do so one does not necessarily need *to be popular*, so much as *to be a politician* with party backing. The point that I am making is that because NMPs are seen as 'non-partisan' and accepted by the PAP, they are well positioned to push for relative autonomy and democratic participation, which to a certain extent, they have done. The fact that a former NMP lost an election does not discredit this.

In conclusion, two concerns will be addressed: the argument stated in this chapter appears to contradict that of the previous chapter; on the question of how effective NMPs can be. I shall deal with them in turn. The last chapter painted a very particular image of NMPs, as this chapter has also done. The predicament is that both portrayals appear to be at odds with each other. Put simply, how can NMPs push against the power of the PAP and at the same time be a method of that very same power. I have attempted to deal with this earlier by trying to establish a weak watershed in the scheme's short history. It begins with the PAP starting to acknowledge NMPs as of a higher calibre than the Opposition in

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<sup>133</sup> Cited in Ibid., p. 27.



Parliament through the middle to latter stages of the Eighth Parliament. It becomes most evident in the second reading of the constitutional amendment to enlarge GRCs in the twilight stages of the Eighth Parliament. By the Ninth Parliament, changes in approaches and attitudes of NMPs have manifested and it is within this Parliament that we see considerations for relative autonomy and democratic participation being expressed. NMP Simon Tay has also made reference to such a possible change:

Some commentators have suggested that the NMPs are co-opted by the Government and do not possess the independence that is characteristic of civil society. Events from 1998 have tended to question this aspersion. In a number of cases, NMPs have voted against government Bills. One example relates to a government move to ban the making of 'political films'. Most recently, one NMP has supported a motion by the Opposition, to review the defamation laws of Singapore. Again, to date, no action has been taken to limit these actions by NMPs.<sup>134</sup>

It is important to understand that the scheme was intended to be a method of control, and whilst it has been successful, it is also becoming more. The scheme, through the individuals in it, is emerging as something different than a method used by the PAP. The individuals in the scheme remain central to the continuation of this push, if we maintain, as Tay has pointed out, that agency and subtle resistance in everyday acts is something important.<sup>135</sup>

To turn now to the second problem I envisage. As stated above, Zulkifli and Goh Chong Chia have argued that the scheme should be seen as transitional towards a two-party system in the future. Although this chapter has pointed out how well positioned NMPs are, it should not be over-stated. The PAP's domination over the political scene means that anyone who intends to make serious political change must do so through that very party. It is difficult to sustain the argument that NMPs are the harbingers of democracy in

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<sup>134</sup> Simon S. C. Tay, 'The Future of Civil Society: What next?', in Derek da Cunha (Ed), *Singapore in the New Millennium: Challenges Facing the City-State* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2002)..

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Simon Tay, conducted on 04/04/2002. Also see *ibid.*, pp. 83.

Singapore, which is not a thesis supported here. How affective NMPs may be in persuading the PAP towards relative autonomy and participatory democracy is something also difficult to gauge, and will depend more on the PAP's willingness to do so. At this point, it must be recognised that NMPs have not been overly effective in persuading the PAP to change its policies.

How far this PAP willingness exists is also difficult to fathom. In early 2002, First Deputy Prime Minister and virtual 'PM in waiting' Lee Hsien Loong made some relevant comments. He said that political space in Singapore will be opened up gradually to address the demands of the younger generation. He spoke of encouraging 'a liberalisation of thought processes and a focusing of minds to get Singaporeans engaged in the environment and society which they belong to'.<sup>136</sup> This opening would be progressive, making people feel more comfortable to speak up. Of course, he mentioned no specifics regarding attitudes towards the Opposition and democracy as such. How much this can be accepted as a commitment to democracy should be viewed with some scepticism. Chua Beng-Huat has made some relevant comments.<sup>137</sup> He argued that the PAP has held out the 'utopian' image of a stable democratic society. This is a vision of society which will be reached in the 'final' analysis. According to Chua, it is used within the governing ideology of the PAP on a principle level and is set against pragmatism. Pragmatic elements of the governing ideology allow the PAP 'to rationalise, from conception to implementation, state activities on a routine basis'.<sup>138</sup> Both are connected for the PAP, because the latter serves as necessary steps and bridges to the realisation of the utopian vision, even if they contradict this vision. The relevant point he makes is that this 'final' state of affairs may never be arrived at 'because it is a permanently receding horizon towards which the political realm moves'.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Cited in Grace Sung, 'Govt to Open up Political Space Gradually', in *Straits Times* (9 February, 2001).

<sup>137</sup> Beng-Huat Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* (London: Routledge, 1995). pp. 57-8.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57. This final analysis may be broadly equated with relative autonomy and democratic participation. For Chua it is democratic society with all that are conventionally taken as its desirable attributes with the embodiment of a political culture in which individuals are respected as such and granted certain freedoms and the collective good is balanced with individual preference.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

NMPs in no way have the political weight to move the PAP towards this ‘final’ state of affairs, which may never emerge, however, they do have the ability to pressure the PAP to make steps in this direction. Also, as discussed above, they have the ability to publicly highlight deficiencies within the political system along this line, and are at least seen as credible to the extent that they embody the meritocratic principles of the PAP – without which they would not have become NMPs – and are minor political players involved in the legislative process. They have been skilled in actively situating themselves in this role by remaining mitigated critics with a non-partisan appearance. The process towards relative autonomy and democratic participation will not happen in the short term. The one way it could happen in the short-term is, as Lee Kuan Yew has forewarned, in the event of a ‘freak election’. It is commonly understood that Singaporeans recognise the fact that the PAP is the only party able to govern Singapore, yet many vote against it as a way of keeping it in check.<sup>140</sup> Under this scenario, it is possible that the PAP could be voted out of office unintentionally with ‘less than able individuals’ being elected to govern. It was pointed out in this chapter that the Opposition has tried to initiate relative autonomy and participatory democracy. Nevertheless, it is without guarantee that a government made up of these same Opposition figures would do so once in power. It is the nature of Opposition politics that certain platforms are not realised once in government through either changes of attitude or administrative and other political barriers. Political barriers do of course present a major difficulty to such a Government with the relationship between the PAP and the state. Such an eventuality will remain only in the abstract if the Opposition continues with its by-election strategy of standing in under half of the Parliamentary seats to ensure the PAP is elected to Government.

Hence, it is only within the long-term that any change will occur. NMPs are well positioned within that time to push in its direction, and are, until the Opposition becomes a viable political player, possibly in the best position to do so through their image, partly constructed by the PAP itself. NMPs’ effectiveness may also be measured, as shown above, in how they may assist the Opposition in gaining credibility in Singapore and thus becoming a viable political player.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 22.



# CONCLUSION

This thesis was not intended to reveal new dimensions of Singapore politics, rather it is meant as a contribution to the knowledge on politics in Singapore, particularly regarding the relationship between the PAP and the numerous Opposition parties and the associated process of co-optation and depoliticisation that characterises the PAP's maintenance of political hegemony. It has done so with the intention of examining this relationship from a theoretical perspective hitherto unused in the Singapore. Lukes' analysis of power arguing that power can be seen to be operating when *A* attempts to manipulate the interests of *B*.

In the case of Singapore, as elaborated on in the second chapter, the People's Action Party (PAP) has attempted to manipulate the interests of Singaporeans to sustain itself as the ruling party, which it has succeeded in doing since 1959. The deliberate blurring of political lines between 'PAP', 'Government', 'regime' and 'state' and active 'depoliticisation' of Singapore has worked to integrate the PAP as the centre-piece of Singapore politics. It has projected itself as the 'national movement' identifying itself with the nation at large. The party is so integrated into the 'regime' and 'state', that criticism of the party can be construed as criticism of Singapore. This is a central dilemma faced by 'regime critics' among Opposition figures. These individuals find political existence difficult in Singapore because their criticism of the PAP is contentious enough for the ruling party to suggest they are not legitimate Opposition figures. Only mitigated critics are 'accepted' by the PAP.<sup>1</sup>

The case studies that form the subject of this thesis were initiated by the PAP as a response to popularity shifts away from the ruling party through the 1980s. The Non-Constituency MP scheme was intended to 'informally' co-opt<sup>2</sup> Opposition electoral

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<sup>1</sup> Yet this acceptance is of course at the barest level.

<sup>2</sup> Informal co-optation refers to an unacknowledged form of co-optation with no agreement.

candidates in an effort to draw electoral support away from the Opposition. It was also intended to de-legitimise the Opposition as a viable political player in Singapore.

The second case study, that of the Nominated MP scheme, revealed a far more complex political group with a new potentiality the Opposition does not possess. It was first argued that this scheme was yet another PAP initiative to informally co-opt individuals. Its intention was to again de-legitimise the Opposition whilst at the same time legitimise the ruling party. Individuals who would enter Parliament through the NMP scheme would be 'non-partisan' (but of course be pragmatic enough to recognise the sensible policies of the government).

The final chapter, though, suggested that as a result of the success of the NMP scheme, and the independence of the individuals who participated within it, it was well placed to advance 'relative autonomy' and 'democratic participation' as envisaged by Lukes. By the mid-1990s NMPs were starting to make political commentary which did not necessarily concur with PAP ideology. Because the NMP, unlike Opposition figures, are seen as 'non-partisan' and because the media in Singapore is quite supportive of them, they are the best placed group in Singapore to make such advances and possibly bring Singapore out of a situation where *A* attempts to manipulate the interests of *B*.

I recognise how difficult it actually is for NMPs to make any such advances, however, it is evident from a consideration of their motions and speeches made in Parliament, that to a certain extent they are attempting to do so. Unfortunately, what must also be recognised is that no other group is in this position. The Opposition parties in Singapore are in a very weak situation, and even with a recent change in Head of Government from Goh Chock Tong to Lee Hsien Loong, it is unlikely that the Opposition will be able to make any political inroads over the next decade.

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