

The 1959 Singapore General Election*

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The 1959 election marked a turning point in the constitutional and political development of Singapore. It was the culmination of what had happened since the restoration of British government in Singapore after the Second World War. After the war, the British returned to Malaya to re-establish their rule. But Singapore had seen the humiliating defeat of the British in the march of Japanese militarism. The myth of the invincible supremacy of the white colonialists was shattered. The mood and tempo of the times were increasingly different from that of the pre-war period. The call of the day was decolonisation and independence from colonial domination.

The 1959 Singapore constitution and election were the products of this desire for decolonization and struggle for self-determination. Through them, Singapore achieved internal self-government. Full independence was achieved later as part of the new Federation of Malaysia in September 1963, and subsequently, after separation from Malaysia, as the Republic of Singapore in August 1965.

The Background

From 1946 to 1959, Singapore went through various stages of constitutional development. When the British Military Administration was replaced by civil government in April 1946, the Straits Settlements ceased to exist constitutionally. Singapore became a Crown Colony by itself and was thus formally separated from the Malayan mainland.¹

Following the recommendations of the provisional Advisory Council set up after the war, a Legislative Council with nominated and elected seats was inaugurated on 1 April 1948. Elections for the popular seats were held in 1948 and 1951.² In 1955, under a new constitution based upon the recommendations of the Rendel Commission, election was held for 25 of the 32 seats of a new Legislative Assembly.³ In 1959, following successful constitutional negotiations in London, election was held for a fully-elected 51-seat Legislative Assembly.

The period from 1946 to 1959 was one in which elections grew in importance and complexities (see Table 1). First, there was the increase in the number of popularly

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¹ Singapore, Penang and Malacca were centrally administered by the British as the "Straits Settlements" since 1826. With Singapore as a separate Crown Colony in 1946, Penang and Malacca merged with the nine Malay states to form the Malayan Union, which was replaced in 1948 by the Federation of Malaya.

² State of Singapore, *Annual Report: 1960* (Singapore, 1962), pp. 22–25.

³ In order "to undertake a comprehensive review of the constitution of the Colony of Singapore", the Governor, Sir John Nicoll, appointed a Constitutional Commission in 1953 with Sir George Rendel as Chairman. The recommendations of the Commission were incorporated into the 1955 constitution. Vide Colony of Singapore, *Report of the Constitutional Commission, Singapore* (Singapore, 1954).

elected seats. It increased from 6 seats in 1948 to 9 seats in 1951, to 25 seats in 1955 to 51 seats in a fully-elected Legislative Assembly in 1959. The number of ex-officio and nominated seats, on the other hand, decreased from 13 in 1948 and 1951, to 7 in 1955, and none in 1959.

Secondly, there was the increase in the number of parties contesting the elections. In 1948, the only party contesting the election was the Progressive Party. The number of contesting parties increased to 2 in 1951, 6 in 1955, and 13 in 1959.

Thirdly, there was a great increase in the number of candidates in the elections. The figure jumped from 16 in 1948, to 22 in 1951, to 79 in 1955, and 194 by 1959.

Thus, by the time of the 1959 election, Singapore had experienced three general elections, each on a larger scale and with greater complexities than before. By 1959, the stage was set for a heated battle at the polls. However, more important than the changes in seats, parties and candidates, were the changes in the size and composition of the electorate, and the percentage of the electorate that actually voted in the elections.

TABLE 1
Electoral Progress in Singapore: 1948–1959

Year	1948	1951	1955	1959
Legislative Body*	LC	LC	LA	LA
Ex-officio & Nominated Members	13	13	7	0
Reserved Seats for Chambers of Commerce	3	3	0	0
No. of Elected Seats	6	9	25	51
Total No. of Seats	22	25	32	51
No. of Contesting Parties	1	2	6	13
No. of Candidates	16	22	79	194
Electoral Registration: Voluntary (V) or Automatic (A)	V	V	A	A
Voting: Voluntary (V) or Compulsory (C)	V	V	V	C
Size of Electorate	22,395	48,155	300,292	587,797
% of Electorate which Voted	60	52	53	89.4

Sources: The above table is compiled from official and newspapers reports.

* Either the Legislative Council (LC) or the Legislative Assembly (LA).

The electorates in 1948 and 1951 were formed by voluntary registration of voters. Under this system, the eligible voters would not be registered on the electoral roll unless they voluntarily took the initiative to apply formally for electoral registration. Thus, as compared to the eligible electorate, the registered electorate was very small.⁴ The registered electorates in 1948 and 1951 were 22,395 and 48,155 respec-

⁴ The eligible voters consisted of British subjects with at least one year residence in Singapore and British protected subjects born in the Federation, Sarawak, British North Borneo and Brunei. Vide Yeo Kim Wah, *Political Development in Singapore: 1945–55* (Singapore, 1973), pp. 251–253. As an indication of the small registered electorate, the Rendel Commission reported that only

tively.⁵ Moreover, the electorate was not reflective of the composition of the population. It was dominated by the English-speaking section of the population.⁶

The Rendel Commission dismissed voluntary registration of voters as a "failure", and its recommendation of automatic registration of voters as the more effective system was implemented in the 1955 election.⁷ Under automatic registration, all those who qualified to vote were automatically listed on the electoral roll. Thus, the 1955 election was different from the previous ones. It was on a larger scale. With automatic registration in 1955, the electorate jumped from 75,000 on voluntary registration to 300,292 on automatic registration.

The 1955 election, however, like those in 1948 and 1951, was held under the system of voluntary voting. The registered voter might or might not vote. Indeed, many did not. In 1955, only 53 per cent of the electorate voted.⁸ Therefore, despite automatic registration, the extent of the population's involvement in the 1955 election was still limited. This vitally affected the nature of politics and the election results, because the political powers of the Chinese-educated and the lower-income groups were not fully exerted at the polls, although they increasingly made their force felt in politics.

The situation was radically changed by the implementation of compulsory voting in 1959. The Commission of Inquiry on elections recommended in 1958 that compulsory voting be introduced as "the most important single measure that could lead to the elimination of ... corrupt practices".⁹ Under this system all voters on the electoral roll must vote, otherwise their names would be struck off the roll. Their names would only be relisted if valid reasons were given or a fine of five dollars each was paid. Hence, the percentage of the registered electorate that voted leapt from 53 percent in 1955 to 89.4 percent in the 1959 election.¹⁰

By the 1959 election, the introduction of both automatic registration of voters and compulsory voting exerted a decisive influence on the politics of Singapore. They determined the scale and nature of politics. Firstly, politics became mass politics in the real sense. There were no nominated seats. The whole of Singapore was divided into 51 constituencies for popular election, on a one-man-one-vote system. With automatic registration, the registered electorate was very much enlarged. With compulsory voting, an overwhelming majority (89.4 percent) of the electorate voted. This means that the representatives would be selected by the participation of an overwhelming majority of the multi-racial electorate. It was politics on a mass scale, where all the political forces were given full play.¹¹ Therefore,

23.3% of the eligible electorate of 300,000 was registered in 1954. Vide Colony of Singapore, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁵ State of Singapore, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–24.

⁶ In 1948, out of the total electorate of 22,395, there were only 5,627 Chinese, but 10,141 Indians, whereas in the total population of 961,856, the Chinese numbered 747,817 and the Indians numbered 71,928, Vide Colony of Singapore, *Proceedings of the Singapore Legislative Council, 1948* (Singapore, 1948), p. C58.

⁷ Colony of Singapore, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁸ State of Singapore, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–24.

⁹ In September 1957, a Commission of Inquiry was appointed by the Governor, Sir Robert Black, to inquire into allegations of corrupt practices during the Tanjong Pagar and Cairnhill by-elections to the Legislative Assembly in 1957. Many sweeping reforms based upon the recommendations of the Commission were introduced in 1959. Vide Colony of Singapore, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Corrupt, Illegal or Undesirable Practices at Elections* (Singapore, 1958).

¹⁰ *Sunday Times* (hereafter referred to as *Sun. T.*) 31.5.59.

¹¹ This must be qualified by the fact that the Malayan Communist Party was officially banned. It could only operate through front organizations or indirect influence.

in 1959, the party that could most effectively play mass politics would win the election. Secondly, the enlarged effective electorate was reflective of the population and was dominated by the Chinese voters.¹² In addition to automatic registration and compulsory voting, the introduction of the 1957 Singapore citizenship ordinance increased the size of the Chinese voters.¹³ By January 1958, 324,000 residents took out Singapore citizenship and became voters. The majority of these new citizens came from the 220,000 China-born Chinese. Thirdly, with the enlarged effective electorate, the ranks were swelled by the broad masses of voters from the lower-income groups. Therefore, the party that could best demonstrate that it was for the interests of the lower-income classes would win their votes. Thus in the 1959 election, the party which was most adept in mass mobilization and could best appeal to the Chinese-educated and the lower-income groups would win the election.

The 1959 constitution was the product of the 1957 negotiations held between the British and the second Singapore all-party mission to London.¹⁴ Under the new constitution, the stakes of the 1959 election were high. The victorious party that formed the government after the election to the fully-elected 51 member Legislative Assembly would not face the same crippling restrictions as the government under the Rendel Constitution.¹⁵ Although the British retained the right to suspend the constitution in an emergency, it was clear that under normal circumstances, the Singapore Government would have full internal powers, except for internal security, to carry out its programs. Thus, the political parties fought hard for the prize of forming the first government in self-governing Singapore.¹⁶ On nomination day, 25 April, 1959, 13 political parties fielded 194 candidates. Polling day was 31 May, 1959. Although nomination day was in late April, by February the major parties had already started their campaigns seriously with rallies and manifestoes.

The election is too broad a topic to be dealt with comprehensively here. Four themes or "battle fronts" over which the parties fought for the allegiance of the voters are selected for analysis. The approach is on the strategies adopted by the major parties and their impact on the electorate. The focus would be on the major parties: the Singapore People's Alliance (SPA), the People's Action Party (PAP), the Liberal Socialist Party (LS), and the United Malays' National Organization (UMNO)/Malayan Chinese Association (MCA).

The Choice: The "Corrupt and Incompetent" and the "Sincere and Able"

The question of party image was an important, and indeed decisive, issue in the election. This struggle for a good image amongst the electorate was fought mainly

¹² The 1957 Census showed that Chinese constituted 75.43 percent of the total population of 1,445,929. Vide Republic of Singapore, *Singapore Year Book: 1966* (Singapore, 1967), p. 73.

¹³ Under the 1957 citizenship ordinance, citizens of the Commonwealth and colonies were eligible for citizenship after two years' residence and aliens were eligible after eight years' residence. Vide Colony of Singapore, *Annual Report: 1958* (Singapore, 1959), pp. 297–298. For a detailed discussion of the citizenship issue, refer to Yeo Kim Wah, *op. cit.*, Chapter 4.

¹⁴ The first 1956 all-party mission to London was led by David Marshall, the Chief Minister of the Labour Front coalition government. Following the failure of the London mission, David Marshall resigned as Chief Minister and was succeeded by Lim Yew Hock, who led the second mission to London. The other members of the second mission were Abdul Hamid bin Haji Jumat, Chew Swee Kee, Lim Choon Mong and Lee Kuan Yew. Vide Colony of Singapore, *Report of the Singapore Constitutional Conference, 1957* (Singapore, 1957).

¹⁵ The Rendel Constitution provided for a form of semi-self-government in internal affairs. The ruling party in the Legislative Assembly was to a great extent handicapped in its exercise of power. For example, the three British-nominated ex-officio members of the Council of Ministers were in charge of finance, Attorney-General's office and internal security.

¹⁶ For example, the PAP fielded candidates for all 51 constituencies, whereas in 1955, under

between the People's Action Party (PAP) and the Singapore People's Alliance (SPA). Both parties adopted the strategy of smearing the other party as corrupt and incompetent while attempting at the same time to present itself as the only sincere and able party. This battle over images was based partly on past performances, future expectations and, above all, on how the issues were manipulated and publicized.

As against the performance of the PAP in the City Council for just over one year, the SPA was evaluated over its four-year rule in the wider arena of the Legislative Assembly. This greater scope and longer period did not inherently impose greater liability, but it did provide more opportunities for the SPA to show its ability or inability.

The SPA, through its actions or inaction, gave the PAP ample opportunities to paint it as being made up of a bunch of self-seeking and corrupt political adventurers, inefficient and interested only in lining their own pockets. The attacks of the PAP were epitomized in the scandal over the half million dollar political gift which the Labour Front/SPA¹⁷ received from a foreign source. It was indeed a heaven-sent "political gift" to the PAP.

The first shot was fired by Dr Toh Chin Chye, the PAP Chairman, who charged at a pre-election mass rally on the 15th of February 1959, that "that Income Tax investigations into a half million dollar account at the National City Bank of New York in the name of a Minister was quickly choked off . . . Americans are very slow in learning that those who can be bought for money are not worth buying".¹⁸ The United States Consulate-General and the General Manager of the American bank immediately denied involvement in any such deals. The SPA denounced this charge as "completely unfounded" and "as false as it is stupid".¹⁹ Subsequent events showed that although the charge did not present the full and accurate picture, it was not "completely unfounded" and definitely not "stupid", for it was the PAP's *coup de grace*. The SPA's house of cards collapsed with this blast.

Against the denials, Lee Kuan Yew, the PAP Secretary-General, publicly named the Minister to be Chew Swee Kee, the Minister of Education, and tabled the matter for debate in the Assembly.²⁰ After condemning the allegations as "political stunts",²¹ Chew later resigned from the Assembly on the eve of the debates "to clear the good name of the SPA" and "to contest in the coming election".²² With great relish, Lee Kuan Yew declared that by "absconding", Chew's "guilt was proved". He heartily "congratulated" Chew for his intelligence in getting money from the Americans, who "were a hard lot to get cash from".²³

From then on, the PAP grabbed every opportunity in the Legislative Assembly,

the Rendel Constitution, it fielded only four token candidates. The PAP declared that it would be fatal for any party to form a government under the restricted Constitution. Vide PAP, *The Sixth Anniversary Celebration Souvenir of the PAP* (Singapore, 1960), p. 14.

¹⁷ The actual amount involved in this controversy is \$701,593.47. Vide State of Singapore, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the \$500,000 Bank Account of Mr Chew Swee Kee and the Income Tax Department leakage in connection therewith* (Singapore, 1959), p. 2. The report would be referred to hereafter, report of the Chew Swee Kee Commission.

¹⁸ *Petir*, "The Tasks Ahead" Part I (Singapore, 1959), p. 2.

¹⁹ Statement by SPA General Secretary, Wang Tsun Hao. Vide *Straits Times* (hereafter referred to as *ST*) 17.2.59.

²⁰ *ST* 19.2.59.

²¹ *ST* 19.2.59.

²² *ST* 4.3.59. On Chew's intention to stand in the election, Lee Kuan Yew remarked, "I cannot understand the audacity of this man". Vide *ST* 5.3.59. On nomination day, Chew was not nominated.

²³ *ST* 5.3.59.

the press and rallies to propagate that the Chew affair “proved” that the SPA government was incurably corrupt and had sold Singapore to foreigners for a few thousand dollars. This captured the attention of the public. It was the talk of the town in the offices, homes, clubs, coffee shops and stalls, and was given greater coverage in the press than any other issue.²⁴ The SPA was put on the run. Right up to polling day, the PAP kept up the pressure on the SPA. The Commission of Inquiry appointed by the Governor to investigate the allegations was adroitly turned into a political forum by Lee Kuan Yew for the harassment of the SPA.²⁵

The episode had all the ingredients of a cloak-and-dagger spy story. This made it all the easier for the PAP to sustain public interest in the affair to the great embarrassment of the SPA. The Comptroller of Income Tax, G.T. Holloway, was away on long leave, travelling across America on a tour bus, and could not be traced for weeks. The Interpol was called in. His “disappearance” aroused a great deal of speculation.²⁶ The Commission’s hearings were dramatic. Despite the threat of penalty, Chew Swee Kee declared that as “a man of honour”, he would not divulge publicly the source of the foreign fund, which he had received on behalf of the Labour Front for fighting “subversion and communism”. Chew Swee Kee gave the name confidentially to the Commissioner only upon the Commissioner’s pledge that it would never be made public. This element of mystery made the whole affair even more exciting.²⁷

K. M. Byrne, PAP Central Executive Committee member who first obtained information about Chew’s tax file, named R. N. Stone, Acting Comptroller of Income Tax, as his informant. According to Byrne, Stone leaked the confidential information out of dissatisfaction against his superior officer who “was always playing around with those in authority”.²⁸ It turned out that Stone had died of “heart attack” three days after Toh Chin Chye’s first attack on the SPA.²⁹ Stone’s weeping widow turned up to deny this on behalf of her late husband who had been “cruelly wronged”.³⁰ The Commissioner placed the full responsibility for this “deplorable and scandalous” leakage on Byrne, who protected a living person by the “naming of a dead man”.³¹

The whole affair was added with more international intrigue when Chew was linked to Dr Liu Ssu Yeh, a businessman and ex-Minister of Finance in the Kuomintang government of China, and Archbishop Pau Yu Pin, who was the leader of the Catholic hierarchy in China till the fall of the Kuomintang.³²

The disclosure that one of the shareholders of the company in which Chew had invested the “political funds” was Kartini binte Abdul Mulok, the wife of the Deputy

²⁴ In the *ST*, for example, the proceedings of the Chew Swee Kee Commission of Inquiry received the record coverage of about 21 pages. The City Council Commission of Inquiry, by comparison, received about 10 pages of coverage.

²⁵ Mr Justice M. Buttrose, a High Court Judge, was appointed as the Commissioner by the Governor on 2.4.59, following the motion in the Legislative Assembly.

²⁶ One of the speculations was that Holloway would never return to Singapore. Vide *ST* 10.3.59.

²⁷ One strong speculation was that the money originated from the American Central Intelligence Agency. One LF official said this in confidence at an interview.

²⁸ Vide p. 7 of the report of the Chew Swee Kee Commission.

²⁹ Stone, aged 41, died of a “heart attack” on 18.2.59. Professor G. Ransome, Professor of Medicine at the University of Malaya, testified that Stone died of “cerebral haemorrhage”, and not of “heart attack”. He stated that it was not possible to determine if this was connected with the Chew Swee Kee affair. Vide *ST* 14.4.59.

³⁰ *ST* 14.4.59.

³¹ Vide p. 8 of the report of the Chew Swee Kee Commission.

³² *ST* 11.4.59.

Chief Minister and president of UMNO in Singapore, put the integrity and the *modus operandi* of the whole coalition government into question.³³

The facts of the case, as reported by the Commissioner, were that Chew had received political gifts of \$701,593.47, apparently on behalf of the Labour Front from a foreign source. The Comptroller of Income Tax, H. E. Holloway, had in the proper procedure decided that they were political gifts and were not liable to income tax. Therefore, it was not corruption in so far as the income tax officers had not improperly exempted the gifts from taxation.³⁴ But the PAP had moved from this definition of corruption to the wider one of political corruption in secretly accepting gifts from foreigners and thereby "selling out" Singapore to outsiders.³⁵ Chew Swee Kee was an official of the Labour Front (LF) when he received the "political gift". He later left with the majority of the LF members to join the new SPA when it was formed by Lim Yew Hock in November, 1958, and continued to serve as the Minister of Education. To all intents and purposes, the "new" SPA could not be totally dissociated from the actions of the old LF. The old LF leaders in the government, except for Francis Thomas, continued in office under the new SPA label. Through such personalities like Lim Yew Hock and Chew Swee Kee, who were the leaders of the government throughout the period, the public tended to hold the SPA responsible for the actions of the old LF. This was particularly so when the remnant of the old LF, led by Francis Thomas, dissociated itself from the former LF leaders in the SPA. The SPA tried in vain to deny its association with the old LF. By the time the Commission submitted its report four days before polling day, the SPA's reputation was irretrievably lost in the welter of spicy details and sensational disclosures skilfully manipulated by the PAP.

The SPA's image was further dented by the allegations of the former Chief Minister, David Marshall, that he was offered the management of \$500,000 of party funds by a major party if he switched sides,³⁶ and the charges by Francis Thomas, the former Minister of Communications and Works, that the government was playing dirty politics and was not rid of undesirable elements.³⁷ These allegations, all the more serious because they were made by those who had held top posts in the government, created further doubts and reinforced the PAP attacks.

The PAP tried every possible way of discrediting the SPA. It charged that the ministers in the government spent "an average of 200 days in every year travelling and seeing places abroad".³⁸ Another charge made by Byrne at a rally was that a minister was running a "brothel" in Geylang. He alleged that songstresses from Hong Kong and China had only to pass the night at this "brothel" to get an extension for their period of stay in Singapore.³⁹

The PAP, in general, attacked the SPA as having let down the people after their assumption of office. Lee Kuan Yew, for example, declared that: "If after you have been elected, you forgot what you said at the elections, whatever you say next time

³³ The Deputy Chief Minister, Dato Hamid Bin Haji Jumat, was also the Minister of Local Government, Lands and Housing.

³⁴ Vide pp. 2-7 of the report of the Chew Swee Kee Commission.

³⁵ The issue of foreign manipulation through acceptance of foreign funds by political parties was featured prominently in the 1972 general election in Singapore.

³⁶ ST 8.3.59. Later, K. M. Byrne alleged at a Commission hearing that David Marshall told him that Lim Yew Hock offered Marshall management of \$500,000 as well as sharing of the premiership by rotation if Marshall closed down the Workers' Party and joined the SPA. Vide ST 8.4.59.

³⁷ ST 14.3.59.

³⁸ Allegation by Yaccob bin Mohamed, PAP candidate for Bukit Timah, at a rally. Vide ST 19.4.59.

³⁹ *Nanyang Siang Pau* (henceforth referred to as *NYSP*) 27.5.59.

will never be believed. You can only cheat the people once'.⁴⁰ The whole inefficiency of the government, said the PAP, was typified by the delayed opening of the Constitution Exposition which was alleged to have been held back because the government pavilion was not ready on time.⁴¹ The PAP asserted that the only alternative to another term of rule by this corrupt and incompetent SPA was the PAP.

All the PAP leaders kept hammering on the theme that the PAP was the only party with the ability and sincerity to lead Singapore in self-government.⁴² The PAP claimed that its administration of the City Council showed that it was capable and was dedicated to the welfare of the people.⁴³

The SPA was generally kept on the defensive in this battle of images. But it was not idle. First, it went on the offensive in the Chew Swee Kee affair by playing up the controversy over the leakage of confidential information from the Tax Department to the PAP.⁴⁴ The major blast of the SPA offensive, however, was aimed at the record of the PAP administration in the City Council. In the 1957 City Council election, the PAP won 13 out of a total of 32 seats. The PAP had no absolute majority, but with the division of the non-PAP Councillors, a PAP member, Ong Eng Guan, was elected Mayor at the first meeting in December 1957. Ong was re-elected as Mayor at the end of 1958. Ong played the leading role in building up the image of the PAP through the City Council. The SPA, together with the other parties, however, attempted to drag the name of the PAP down the drain by charges of corruption and abuses in the City Council. The SPA's calculations were that this would help to balance or outweigh the SPA's liability in the Chew Swee Kee affair. PAP was charged with corruptly appointing its supporters to posts in the City Council.⁴⁵ Charges were raised over the tenders of some Council contracts.⁴⁶ There were also charges that hawkers were kept clear of a street as a special favour for Lee Kuan Yew and his law partners who parked their cars there.⁴⁷ But these charges did not spark the fireworks as the Chew affair did.

To increase the pressure on the PAP and in response to PAP provocations,⁴⁸ the SPA coalition government "castrated" the City Council by transferring certain vital functions of the City Council to the control of the Minister of Local Government, Lands and Housing on the 27 March, 1959⁴⁹ and engineered the setting-up of a

⁴⁰ *ST* 30.5.59.

⁴¹ Lee Kuan Yew made this allegation. Vide *ST* 27.1.59. The Constitution Exposition was organized by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce to mark the coming inauguration of the new Constitution for a self-governing Singapore.

⁴² A typical example is the speech of Chan Choy Siong, PAP candidate for Delta, at a rally. She stressed that only the PAP could give a "clean and sincere" government to the masses. *Sin Chew Jit Poh* (henceforth referred to as *SCJP*) 20.5.59.

⁴³ A typical example is that of Lee Kuan Yew's speech at a rally on 15.2.59. Vide *ST* 16.2.59.

⁴⁴ SPA Assemblyman, Lee Choon Eng, was responsible for the motion to investigate this leakage of information. This was incorporated as the third term of reference for the Commission of Inquiry. Vide *ST* 19.3.59.

⁴⁵ Vide *ST* 27.1.59 and 4.2.59. Jek Yuen Thong, PAP member and an ex-political detainee was appointed as Secretary to the Mayor. Vide *ST* 14.1.59 and *The People* Vol. I No. 2 (Singapore, 1959), 4.

⁴⁶ Vide *ST* 13.3.59, 1.5.59 and 16.5.59.

⁴⁷ *ST* 2.5.59.

⁴⁸ One of the provocations was that the PAP rejected the request of the Minister of Local Government, Lands and Housing for a verbatim report of the Council meeting held on 13.3.59. The opposition councillors staged a walk-out at this meeting. According to the government, this was mandatory under Section 70 of the Local Government Ordinance. Vide *ST* 24.3.59.

⁴⁹ Functions transferred to the Minister were that related to the appointment of officers, the making of provident funds rules, disciplinary action, the delegation of power to employees and emergency powers of the Mayor and supplemental budgets. Vide *ST* 28.3.59.

Commission of Inquiry, which was appointed on the same day⁵⁰ as the Buttrose Commission on the Chew Swee Kee affair, to “inquire into the working of the City Council . . . and report whether there have been any irregularities or improprieties”.⁵¹ This, the SPA hoped, was its trump card against the PAP.

But this attack of the SPA got off to a bad start because it made the mistake of appointing S. H. D. Elias as the Commissioner for the Inquiry. This provided the PAP with the opportunity to make a dramatic appeal to the Chief Justice against his appointment on the grounds that Elias was biased and hostile to the PAP.⁵² Although the Chief Justice dismissed the appeal of the PAP,⁵³ Elias withdrew. This was a great embarrassment for the SPA. J. F. McWilliam, a District Judge, was appointed to replace him. Thus, the PAP won in the first round of this fight.⁵⁴

At the hearings, the PAP was well aware that it was put in the spotlight. But the PAP fought back, and through the skilful representation of its lawyers and witnesses, turned the Commission into another channel for discrediting its SPA opponents. First, the PAP tried its best to cut down P. C. Marcus, the Chief administrative Officer of the City Council who had switched from supporting the PAP to opposing it and implicitly supporting the SPA.⁵⁵ Marcus was charged with corruption. He was accused of “borrowing” a car from a company that was involved with the City Council, of practising nepotism in trying to get his nephew a Council job, of getting his post through scheming and of abuses in the issue of passes to a stadium. It was important for the PAP to drag Marcus down in the public eye because he had emerged in the past weeks as the chief opponent of the PAP in the City Council.⁵⁶ The PAP got the most out of the Commission when it dug into the “mysterious” meeting between Marcus and Khoo Teck Puat, a manager of a local bank, and the overdraft account of Marcus at the same bank.⁵⁷

Thus as the hearings proceeded, the Commission became more and more a weapon of the PAP rather than its “guillotine”. Just before the election, the government postponed the hearings indefinitely. This gave Lee Kuan Yew the opportunity to declare that: “Six days of inquiry have shown that there was no corruption in the City Council . . . Just when we want to cross-examine the Minister of Local Government Lands and Housing, and the banker Mr Khoo, the inquiry is postponed. From these facts one can see that the SPA government is corrupt and inefficient. Whatever they do, they don’t do well”.⁵⁸

Thus through the skilful manipulation of issues, especially the two Commissions of Inquiry, the PAP came out best in this battle in the strategy of “exposing” the other party as corrupt and incapable and presenting itself as sincere and able. The Chew Swee Kee affair was particularly decisive. The whole image of the SPA was destroyed in the fiasco of the Chew Swee Kee affair. The scandal gave the picture that the SPA was corrupted to the core.⁵⁹ Despite the counter-attacks of the SPA,

⁵⁰ The date was 2.4.59.

⁵¹ *ST* 18.4.59.

⁵² *ST* 18.4.59. The PAP stated that Elias, a member of the old City Council, was biased because of the attacks of the new PAP City Council on the old Council.

⁵³ *ST* 28.4.59.

⁵⁴ *ST* 29.4.59.

⁵⁵ Marcus was a founder member of PAP and the brother-in-law of K. M. Byrne. Vide *ST* 21.5.59.

⁵⁶ *ST* 16.5.59, 20.5.59 and 21.5.59.

⁵⁷ *ST* 16.5.59.

⁵⁸ *NYSP* 23.5.59.

⁵⁹ Comment of Sir William Goode, who was the Governor of Singapore in 1959, at an interview with the author. Lee Kuan Yew also singled out the Chew Swee Kee affair as an important factor in the election. He said that it “brought things to fever pitch”. Vide Lee Kuan

the PAP was able to present an image of itself as a clean, sincere, and competent party to the masses. The PAP victory in this battle of images certainly swayed the fence-sitters to cast their votes for the PAP.⁶⁰

The Champions of Democracy versus the Bogey of Communism

The SPA, which was hard pressed by the PAP attacks in the battle over party images, tried to put the PAP on the run by smearing it as an agent of communism. The SPA, LS and UMNO/MCA calculated that their strategy of branding the PAP as a communist organization and of invoking the spectre of communes, hardship and dictatorship under PAP rule would alienate the voters from the PAP and frighten them into voting for their parties. The SPA, LS and UMNO/MCA, despite their own rivalry, were at least to a certain extent united in this strategy of presenting themselves as the “champions of democracy” to slay the PAP “bogey of communism”. This became a major theme of the campaign.

The LS called upon all the freedom-loving and democratic people to wake up in time and crush the PAP. E. K. Tan, the Secretary-General of the LS, warned against a new and sinister form of “imperialism” which played “to the tune of international communism”. He charged that the PAP would lower an “attap curtain”, suppress all freedom and make Singapore a totalitarian state. If the PAP came into power, he warned, there might come a time when there would be only 51 candidates for the elections, all of them standing on a PAP ticket. He pledged that the LS, if returned to power, would form a permanent commission on civil rights to protect the public against any abuse of power by the government. The LS claimed that Singapore would “be plunged into an abyss of darkness” if the PAP came into power. All should, therefore, “unite together to get rid of the darkness with the torch” of the LS.⁶¹

UMNO warned that men would be no better than robots if the PAP won the election. Instead of food, the PAP would force on the people propaganda labelled “Made in Peking” or “Just arrived from Moscow”.⁶² Dato Abdul Hamid charged the PAP for instituting “a people’s court and a Gestapo system in the City Council”.⁶³ He warned Muslims that “Islam is against Communists and their fellow travellers”.⁶⁴

The SPA declared that it was a true democratic party that would build “a true paradise of democracy” in Singapore.⁶⁵ The PAP, the SPA warned, would only bring about a “Lallang Curtain” around Singapore. The people of Singapore would be organized into communes and forced into slave labour with only “ten cents or twenty cents pocket money” per day.⁶⁶ The state would be ruled by “a political boss or dictator, a pocket-size Hitler controlling every department, every school and later the Universities”.⁶⁷ This was shown by the “arrogant and unprincipled” actions of the “power-made” PAP politicians in the City Council.⁶⁸ Peter Lim,

Yew, *Battle for Merger* (Singapore, 1961), p. 31.

⁶⁰ Lee Bah Chee supports this contention in an interview with the author. Lee was a Liberal Socialist City Councillor and candidate for Tiong Bahru in the 1959 election.

⁶¹ *NYSP* 15.5.59 and 16.5.59. *ST* 19.4.59, 20.7.59, 12.5.59 and 23.5.59.

⁶² *ST* 6.5.59.

⁶³ Dato Abdul Hamid’s speech in the Legislative Assembly. Vide *ST* 6.5.59.

⁶⁴ Dato Abdul Hamid was supported by the Chief Kathi, Haji Ali bin Haji Said, who said that Muslims should defend their religion if it was endangered by communism. Vide *ST* 25.3.59.

⁶⁵ Speech of Eric Wee, SPA candidate for Serangoon Garden, at a rally. Vide *NYSP* 15.5.59. Also vide *NYSP* 20.5.59 and 22.5.59 for speeches of other SPA leaders on this theme.

⁶⁶ *ST* 17.2.59 and 25.2.59. Also vide *The People* Vol. I No. 2 (Singapore, 1959), 3.

⁶⁷ Speech of Thio Chan Bee, the SPA candidate for Tanglin, over Radio Singapore. Reported in *The People* Vol. I No. 3 (Singapore, 1959).

⁶⁸ *The People* Vol. I No. 2 (Singapore, 1959), 4.

the Deputy Secretary-General of the SPA, and other party leaders, stressed again and again that the fight “today . . . is for freedom and survival”. If the PAP came into power, Singapore would return to the misery and terror of the Japanese occupation.⁶⁹ Lim Yew Hock, the Chief Minister, declared that lightning could only exist when there was darkness in the sky, and similarly the PAP could only “thrive by bringing darkness to Singapore”.⁷⁰ As proof of the ruthless tactics of the PAP and its communist connections, Lim Yew Hock produced letters threatening his personal safety. One letter with bullets and the PAP symbol threatened that Lim would be “finished off” if he did not withdraw from the election.⁷¹ Another letter was supposed to be sent by the “Committee of the People of China in support of the Movement in Singapore and Malaya”.⁷²

The SPA pledged that it would uphold the five freedoms: freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom from fear and freedom from want.⁷³ The SPA claimed that it was the only party that could ensure the survival of these five freedoms.

The PAP was put on the defensive in this battle, under the constant fire of the other major parties. The attacks were made against the background of arrests of PAP leaders in 1956 and 1957 for “subversive” activities,⁷⁴ and the publication in 1957 of a government paper in the Legislative Assembly on the communist threat in Singapore. Amongst those arrested were prominent PAP leaders like Lim Chin Siong, Fong Swee Suan and Devan Nair. The government paper stated that the PAP was very much penetrated by the supporters of the Malayan Communist Party.⁷⁵

The PAP during this period comprised the moderate and the extremist groups.⁷⁶ The moderates were in a delicate position.⁷⁷ They had to demonstrate to the public at large that they were not “subversives” as the other parties had charged, without alienating the important support of the extremists. They needed whatever support that the extremists could marshal for the party. During this crucial period of intensive electoral campaign, the moderates, led by Lee Kuan Yew and Toh Chin Chye, must present to the voters a united and cohesive party. Indeed, the extremists contributed greatly to the success of the party in terms of dedicated campaign workers and appeal to the Chinese-educated and the trade union members.⁷⁸

⁶⁹ Speech of Peter Lim over Radio Singapore on 6.5.59. Vide *ST* 8.5.59. Other examples are: Speech of L. Rayner, SPA candidate for Ulu Pandan, as reported in *NYSP* 29.5.59, and editorial, *The People* Vol. 1 No. 3 (Singapore, 1959).

⁷⁰ The lightning over a circle is the symbol of the PAP. Vide *ST* 6.5.59.

⁷¹ *ST* 6.5.59.

⁷² *Sun. T.* 17.5.59 and *NYSP* 17.5.59 and 26.5.59. Both Lee Kuan Yew and Toh Chin Chye dismissed the allegations as publicity stunts. Vide *NYSP* 18.5.59 and 26.5.59. Lim accused the PAP of threatening the voters. He declared that he would be proud to go to jail under a PAP regime. Vide *ST* 23.4.59 and 8.5.59.

⁷³ *The People* Vol. 1 No. 2 (Singapore, 1959), 1.

⁷⁴ The PAP leaders were arrested under the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance in 1956 and 1957.

⁷⁵ Colony of Singapore, *The Communist Threat in Singapore* (Singapore, 1957). The allegations were rejected by the PAP in 1957. Vide PAP, *Petir* Vol. 1 No. 10 (Singapore, 1957), 3.

⁷⁶ Vide Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for Merger* (Singapore, 1961) and S. Rajaratnam, “PAP’s first 10 Years”, *PAP’s 10th Anniversary Celebration Souvenir* (Singapore, 1964). For the purpose of this study, the communist open front leaders, their followers and all those who were in favour of more radical left-wing policies, are to be classified generally as “extremists”.

⁷⁷ The moderates were led by leaders like Lee Kuan Yew, Toh Chin Chye, Ong Eng Guan, Goh Keng Swee, S. Rajaratnam and Ong Pang Boon.

⁷⁸ The extremists were responsible for winning the support of the Middle Road trade unions

The moderate PAP leaders were at great pains to explain that the PAP was not a communist party, but stood for a “democratic, non-Communist socialist Malaya”. They stressed the distinction between the PAP and the communists and stated openly that the ultimate fight would be between the PAP and the communists.

Lee Kuan Yew declared at a rally:

In this fight the ultimate contestants will be the PAP and the MCP — the PAP for a democratic, non-Communist, socialist Malaya, and the MCP for a Soviet Republic of Malaya. It is a battle of ideals and ideas. And the side that recruits more ability and talent will be the side that wins.⁷⁹

Lee Kuan Yew assured the voters at an earlier rally that the PAP would be strong enough to resist the influence of the communist forces. He named the communists as one of the three forces the new government would have to reckon with.⁸⁰ The PAP declared that its stand was positive. It would fight “only those who obstruct us in achieving a democratic socialist Malaya” and not be negative by starting off with being “anti-Communists”, falling into international power politics and supporting “reactionaries” like Syngman Rhee and Chiang Kai Shek.⁸¹

The PAP stressed that it was for democracy. It pledged that it would hold elections after its term of office expired even if the PAP won all fifty one seats. The PAP was different from the communist party, which would hold on to power until it was overthrown by force.⁸² But the other parties dismissed the PAP’s distinction between “non-Communist” and “anti-Communist” as fiction. PAP’s “socialism” was branded as a form of communism.⁸³ Unless the PAP was prepared to be openly “anti-Communist”, it must be treated as a Communist party. To be “non-Communist” was just as evil as being communist.⁸⁴

One of the PAP’s declared aims was merger with the Federation of Malaya. It, therefore, tried its best to fight back the charges that it was a communist organization, and denied that it would be a “Communist Trojan Horse” for the subversion of the Federation. This was not only to win over those voters who might fear “communist dictatorship” through a PAP government, but also for the more important purpose, in the long run, of winning the confidence of the Government of the Federation of Malaya for eventual merger.⁸⁵

A running exchange of charges and counter-charges between the PAP and the *Straits Times*, the major English-language daily newspaper, developed into a significant issue in the election. The other major parties joined the *Straits Times* to attack the PAP in this controversy over the freedom of the press, linking it with their overall strategy of branding the PAP as being a ruthless and dictatorial communist organization.

to the side of the PAP. They were adept in working up support for the PAP amongst the Chinese-educated section of the electorate.

⁷⁹ Lee Kuan Yew at Clifford Pier rally. Vide *NYSP* 27.5.59. MCP stands for the banned Malayan Communist Party.

⁸⁰ *ST* 2.3.59. According to Lee, the other two forces the new government had to face were the powerful British vested interests and the vested interests in the Federation of Malaya.

⁸¹ Vide *ST* 5.5.59 and 23.4.59.

⁸² Jek Yuen Thong’s speech over Radio Singapore. Vide *NYSP* 23.5.59.

⁸³ Speech of Eric Wee, SPA candidate for Serangoon Garden. Vide *ST* 6.5.59.

⁸⁴ Speech of Wee Soo Bee, Vice-Chairman of LS. Vide *ST* 27.5.59. Speech of Dato Abdul Hamid, Chairman of Singapore UMNO. Vide *ST* 13.5.59.

⁸⁵ Vide editorial, *ST* 26.5.59. The issue of merger and the “Communist Trojan Horse” was raised long before the election campaign by Lim Yew Hock at a talk to the South-East Asia Foreign Correspondents’ Association on 6.8.58. Vide *ST* 7.8.58.

The *Straits Times*, before May 30, 1959,⁸⁶ was generally critical, if not openly hostile, to the PAP, while it was generally sympathetic to the SPA. For example, the *Straits Times* supported the government's suspension of the vital functions of the PAP administered City Council,⁸⁷ editorially sided with the anti-PAP parties in their controversy with the PAP over the issue of communism⁸⁸ and criticised the PAP for being obsessed with "isms" to the neglect of "bread-and-butter" problems.⁸⁹ To the PAP, the *Straits Times* served as a convenient target. By attacking the *Straits Times*' pro-British and pro-English-educated stand, the PAP won the vital votes of the Chinese-educated.

Lee Kuan Yew accused "those blooming scoundrels in the *Straits Times*" who were "scooting away to Kuala Lumpur", of misleading the English-speaking community by distorting the news.⁹⁰ S. Rajaratnam, an ex-journalist in the *Straits Times*, charged that the paper was owned and manipulated by "powerful vested British interests" and "freedom of the press" to the *Straits Times* meant freedom for these vested interests and not for the people of Singapore.⁹¹ Dr Goh Keng Swee declared that the PAP believed very much in press freedom, but foreign-owned papers must be subjected to certain limitations. He pointed out that "no government of England, Australia or New Zealand" would tolerate a daily newspaper that was owned by three Chinese of foreign origins and adopted a policy that was consistently against that of the government.⁹²

The issue assumed greater importance when Lee Kuan Yew threatened that "any paper that tries to sour up or strain relations between the Federation and Singapore after May 30 will go in for subversion".⁹³ He was particularly referring to the "distorted" report in the *Straits Times* of 15 May that he offered thirteen seats in the Assembly to the UMNO/MCA through Tengku Abdul Rahman, the leader of the Federation, on the condition that the Federation should agree to eventual merger with Singapore.⁹⁴ The Tengku had subsequently rejected this outright as a "cheap offer", and the anti-PAP parties played this up to embarrass the PAP.⁹⁵

L. C. Hoffman, the editor-in-chief of the *Straits Times*, hit back at the PAP in a series of front-page editorials. He bitterly criticised the PAP for threatening to use the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance (PPSO) against the press. He said that the PPSO was meant only for dealing with the communist subversives. He denounced the threats as "bully boy tactics" and declared that he was not a "bird of passage" as Lee alleged and would stay put in Singapore even if the PAP came into power. The PAP could not be democratic if it used this threat. It must, he said,

⁸⁶ After the PAP's landslide victory in the election, the *ST* turned over a new leaf and was very much more favourable to the PAP in its comments and reports. K. M. Byrne predicted: "I am sure that after May 30, it (the *Straits Times*) will salaam to the PAP". When asked what would be done to the *ST* after the election, Lee Kuan Yew replied: "It depends on what the *ST* does". Vide *ST* 21.5.59.

⁸⁷ Vide, for example, editorial, *ST* 28.3.59.

⁸⁸ Vide, for example, editorial, *ST* 17.12.58.

⁸⁹ Vide, for example, editorial, *ST* 31.1.59.

⁹⁰ *ST* 16.4.59. The *ST* for example, was accused of giving misleading information about proposed PAP rallies while giving good publicity to that of the SPA. The *ST* had planned to move its head office to Kuala Lumpur in May 1959.

⁹¹ *ST* 30.4.59.

⁹² Dr Goh Keng Swee, PAP candidate for Kreta Ayer, at a political forum at the University of Malaya. Vide *ST* 27.5.59.

⁹³ *ST* 21.5.59.

⁹⁴ *ST* 15.5.59.

⁹⁵ *Sun. T.* 17.5.59.

choose between democracy and totalitarianism.⁹⁶ Protests were made to the Commonwealth Press Union in London and Hoffman flew to Berlin to address the International Press Institute which sent an observer to Singapore.⁹⁷ Thus even before coming into power the PAP had taken issue with the press.⁹⁸

The anti-PAP parties made full use of this hostility between the PAP and the *Straits Times* to reinforce their campaign that the PAP was a dictatorial communist organization.

Thus, in this battle over democracy and communism, the PAP bore the brunt of the attacks. The PAP was put on the defensive by the constant and intensive attacks of the SPA, LS and UMNO/MCA. On the surface, the PAP appeared to have lost out on this. But on deeper analysis, this is questionable. The anti-PAP parties had placed much of their hopes and efforts on this issue. They had put many of their eggs in this basket. But such exposition on democracy and communism were abstractions that were not that immediate and concrete to the people. Talks like civil rights and the five freedoms might appeal to some sections of the English-educated, but would have very negligible impact, if at all, on the Chinese-educated. Indeed, if "democracy" was represented by people like Chew Swee Kee who pocketed American money and the rock 'n roll, the Chinese-educated, with their cultural background, would only be driven into supporting the PAP. Moreover, the Chinese-educated probably felt indirectly attacked by the charges levelled against the PAP. This was due to the feeling, not totally without grounds, amongst the Chinese-educated that they were generally suspected to be "subversive" or pro-communist.⁹⁹ It was a fact that many of the English-educated and some of the British officials seemed to equate the Chinese-educated with the "subversives". Therefore, such attacks on the PAP would only evoke sympathy for the PAP "under-dog". Since the Chinese-educated constituted the majority of the enlarged electorate, the strategy of the anti-PAP parties could have back-fired to some extent. But it must still be admitted that a significant section of the right-wing and conservative voters must have heeded the warnings of the anti-PAP parties and cast their votes against the PAP, thereby contributing to the total of 45.4 per cent anti-PAP/non-PAP votes.

The Politics of Merger

At the time of the 1959 election, Singapore was on the threshold of internal self-government. The goal after the attainment of self-government would be complete independence from the British. Merger with the Federation of Malaya appeared at that time to be the fastest and most peaceful route to independence and the solution to the economic problems of Singapore. Thus, the parties played up merger into a major election issue, hoping that the electorate would, in consideration of the long-term interests of Singapore, vote them in on the promise of merger.

⁹⁶ *ST* 20.5.59, 22.5.59 and 28.5.59. Editorial in *ST* 21.5.59.

⁹⁷ Vide *ST* 27.5.59 and *The Times* (London, 1959) 20.5.59. Speech of L. Rayner, SPA candidate for Ulu Pandan. Vide *ST* 22.5.59.

⁹⁸ In 1971, the PAP government accused several newspapers of indulging in "Black Operations" or working for foreign agents. An English-language daily, *The Eastern Sun*, closed down voluntarily after the government disclosed that the paper's management had accepted 4 million dollars from communist sources in Hong Kong. The *Singapore Herald*, another English-language daily, closed down under pressure. It was charged with being manipulated by some foreign agents. The government also detained four executives of the *NYSP*, a Chinese daily, on charges of foreign manipulation and communalism.

⁹⁹ This, for example, was pointed out by Chan Sun Wing, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, in his speech to the new Legislative Assembly. Vide *Petir*, Vol. III No. 2 (Singapore, 1959).

E. K. Tan of the LS stated that his party would work for the formation of "The United States of Malaya, North Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak".¹⁰⁰ The economy of Singapore and Malaya would prosper only through merger.

The PAP was whole-heartedly for merger. This was one of its main aims since its founding in 1954. The anti-colonial struggle was seen in a Pan-Malayan context. The PAP campaigned unequivocally that it was for eventual merger with Malaya. It pointed out that Singapore could obtain full independence either through the use of all possible means of political struggle against the British in Singapore or through the concerted demand of a united Malayan nation by merger with the Federation. The PAP preferred to go by the more peaceful and "safer" way of merger. The PAP, as a positive indication of its ultimate aim for merger, had in its electoral programs the cultivation of a "Malayan" outlook amongst Singaporean and the use of Malay as the national language of Singapore.

The SPA and the UMNO/MCA, declaring themselves to be for merger, tried to use this issue to their advantage and manipulate it into attacks against the PAP. UMNO/MCA pointed out that Singapore, which was small and densely populated, needed the land and the resources of the Federation. It campaigned on the basis that it had better chances of bringing about a merger with the Federation because of its links with the ruling alliance party in the Federation.¹⁰¹

The SPA, strongly supporting merger, attempted to use it as a bait to win votes on the ground that it had the support of the Federation leaders. Merger, which was "Singapore's only salvation", could only be brought about by Tun Lim Yew Hock because of the trust he enjoyed and the "connections" he had with "important people" in the Federation. Tun Lim warned that stability in Singapore depended on whether a new government would be able to co-operate with the government in the Federation. He strongly attacked the PAP as being responsible for straining the relations between the Federation and Singapore by its "antics".¹⁰²

The PAP was in a delicate position. It did not wish to antagonize the Federation leaders with whom it had tried to cultivate trust and friendship as part of its plan for eventual merger. Yet the Federation leaders were openly supporting UMNO/MCA and the SPA. The Federation Minister of Education, Mohamed Khir Johari, stated publicly that Singaporeans were "lucky to have Tun Lim as leader". He hoped Lim would lead Singapore "forever and ever". He stated, rather prophetically, that if the people of Singapore rejected Tun Lim, the Federation would gladly have him.¹⁰³ Tengku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister of the Federation and President of UMNO, openly warned that the pro-PAP members of Singapore UMNO would be expelled if they stood as independents in the election. He implicitly endorsed the proposal that UMNO/MCA joined the SPA in an anti-PAP front.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ E. K. Tan, the Secretary-General of the LS, said this at a political forum at Nanyang University. Vide *Sin Chew Jit Poh* 14.5.59. The first public authoritative Malayan proposal for a Federation of Malaysia was made by its Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman, on 27 May 1961. Singapore, led by the PAP government, negotiated for a merger agreement which was put to a referendum in September 1962. The Federation of Malaysia, consisting of the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo (renamed Sabah), was formed on the 16 September 1963.

¹⁰¹ The Singapore UMNO and MCA were branches of UMNO and MCA in the Federation.

¹⁰² Speech of Lim Yew Hock at Finlayson Green rally. Vide *ST* 21.5.59.

¹⁰³ Speech of Khir Johari in Singapore at a celebration to mark the conferment of the title of "Tun" on Lim Yew Hock by the Federation government. His "prediction" came true. Lim, after a period as Leader of the Opposition in the Singapore Assembly, was appointed as Deputy Secretary (Special Duties) in the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later served as Malaysian High Commissioner to Australia.

¹⁰⁴ Comments of Tengku at Singapore airport. *ST* 6.4.59.

The SPA and the UMNO/MCA naturally welcomed the political support of the Federation government leaders. Tun Lim said that the visits of the Tengku would benefit the people of Singapore, but would be resented by “subversives”.¹⁰⁵ The PAP, on the other hand, was alarmed by this open support of the Federation leaders for its opponents, particularly the SPA. But it could not launch a vigorous attack on the “interference” of the Federation leaders because of its declared aim for merger and its desire not to further alienate the Federation leaders.

The PAP was further embarrassed by the outright rejection by the Federation leaders of the PAP proposal for a common market with the Federation in exchange for a joint Singapore and Federation control of the port of Singapore. The Federation Minister of Commerce and Industry and President of MCA, Tan Siew Sin, declared that the PAP did not know what it was talking about. He said that one could not have the free port and the common market at the same time.¹⁰⁶ PAP could not have the cake and eat it.

The matter was further complicated by reports that Lee Kuan Yew offered to give thirteen seats to UMNO/MCA by withdrawing the PAP candidates. The Tengku rejected outright this reported offer as a cheap move. He declared that he would not “sell” out his honour.¹⁰⁷ This greatly embarrassed the PAP. Lee denied that he ever made such an explicit offer. He picked up this incident as another proof of the distortion of news by the *Straits Times* and warned that the PAP would use political detention against anyone in the press who deliberately tried to “sour up” the relationship between Singapore and the Federation.¹⁰⁸

The PAP appeared to be in a vulnerable position over this issue of merger. However, it fought back at the SPA. This was done by ridiculing the SPA leaders as being totally subservient to the Federation leaders to the neglect of the core interests of Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew declared that merger could not be achieved by Tun Lim Yew Hock by running to the airport to receive the Tengku like a “messenger boy”. He explained that the Federation UMNO leaders were not fully committed to merger because of their fear that the balance of power of the various races would be upset by the inclusion of Singapore, which was predominantly Chinese in population.¹⁰⁹ The PAP stated that Lim Yew Hock was favoured by the Federation leaders because he was a more pliable man than the leaders of the PAP.

Thus the PAP stressed that as against the “subservient” SPA, it was the only party that would be able to protect Singapore’s interests and negotiate honourably for a favourable merger agreement. By attacking the SPA directly, the PAP tried to discredit the SPA in the public without exacerbating the relation between the PAP and the Federation government.

In the battle over the issue of merger with the Federation, the PAP again was generally put on the defensive because of the hostility of the Federation leaders to its proposals. The PAP must have lost votes on this. But, on the other hand, it counter-attacked its arch opponent, the SPA, successfully as being subservient to the Federation leaders. A pliable SPA would not be able to protect the interests of Singapore. This probably appealed to the bulk of the Chinese population who had reservations on the Malay-dominated leadership of the Federation.

Thus in this issue the PAP lost as well as gained votes. It would be difficult to assess accurately the impact of this issue on actual voting. But if the PAP’s stand

¹⁰⁵ *ST* 17.2.59.

¹⁰⁶ *ST* 23.3.59.

¹⁰⁷ *Sun. T.* 17.5.59.

¹⁰⁸ *ST* 19.5.59, 21.5.59 and 22.5.59.

¹⁰⁹ Lee Kuan Yew at Clifford Pier Rally. Vide *ST* 9.5.59.

appeared to be more attractive to the Chinese, especially Chinese-educated voters, then the PAP would on the whole have won rather than lost support on this issue as the Chinese constituted the bulk of the electorate.

The Politics of the Rice Bowls

In 1959, Singapore was at the cross-roads of its economic development, beset with mounting economic problems. Alongside the other more sensational issues, this bread-and-butter problem held the attention of the electorate. It became a major issue of contention in the election.

The major parties acknowledged that the twin problems of Singapore's economy were the high birth rate of the population and the high level of unemployment. On the 220 square miles of the island, the 1½ million population increased at the rate of 62,000 or 4.1 per cent a year.¹¹⁰ It was estimated that an average of 30,000 persons per year would enter the labour market to look for jobs in the period 1959–1963. There was general realisation that the entrepot trade alone would no longer be able to meet the demand for employment. Singapore must industrialize rapidly. Thus the task of the parties was to convince the electorate that their respective parties could best solve the economic problems and lead Singapore to greater prosperity.

The LS pledged that Singapore would attain full employment under its leadership. It proposed the immediate establishment of a Joint Industrial Development Council for Singapore and the Federation of Malaya as a first step towards achieving "economic self-sufficiency on a pan-Malayan basis". The LS would encourage capital from foreign countries to invest in Singapore. But its aim was eventually to rely on Singapore's own capital. Foreign capital would be replaced gradually and on terms of "mutual benefit".¹¹¹

The LS undertook to develop and expand the entrepot trade. The harbour facilities would be expanded and a national shipping corporation would be set up for ship-building. The local fishing industry would be assisted and the tourist trade encouraged in order to increase the national income. A central state bank would be established to help finance the industrialization program. The housing program would be expanded for the home-ownership through a "co-operative" movement.¹¹²

The PAP stressed that the immediate need was for the establishment of a common market with the Federation. Goods produced in the Federation and Singapore would then be mutually exempted from the tariffs of the two territories. Both would gain from this. There could be demarcation of the spheres of activity and regions of specialization. Prosperity of the whole of Malaya was indivisible. In return for a common market, the PAP offered the Federation joint control of the port of Singapore. But to PAP's embarrassment, the Federation rejected the proposal.¹¹³

Foreign capital would be given all the encouragement and assistance they needed to establish factories in Singapore. But the PAP did not expect that foreign capital would flow in on the scale needed and disagreed strongly with the other parties that the survival of Singapore depended on foreign capital. It asserted that initially there were more than adequate resources available locally. But large sums of the local capital were invested by the government, banks, local authorities and companies in unprofitable projects overseas.¹¹⁴ Dr Goh Keng Swee, the PAP spokesman on

¹¹⁰ Republic of Singapore, *Singapore Year Book: 1966* (Singapore, 1967) p. 73. Singapore's total population in 1959 was 1,579,600.

¹¹¹ Vide *ST* 6.4.59, 24.4.59 and 28.4.59.

¹¹² Vide *ST* 6.4.59, 24.4.59, 28.4.59 and 4.5.59.

¹¹³ *ST* 24.3.59.

¹¹⁴ Petir, *The Tasks Ahead* Part I (Singapore, 1959) pp. 19–27. Dr Goh Keng Swee estimated

economic matters, charged that the SPA government invested tens of millions of dollars in loans to pay for water, gas, electricity and transport of cities in England, Africa and the West Indies, while Singaporeans did not have enough water, gas and electricity because of the shortage of funds. The PAP declared that it would make sure that a part of the Singapore investments overseas would be channelled back into local industries. The PAP stressed that the main efforts for economic development would have to be made by Singaporeans. It would be foolish to sit back and hope that “benevolent” foreign capitalists would come around to take up the responsibility of developing the economy.¹¹⁵

The PAP forthrightly declared that Singaporeans must undergo a period of austerity and hard work so that capital could be accumulated for industrialization and other uses. There must be an increase in private savings, both voluntary and compulsory. It strongly stressed that compulsory savings must play an important role in generating economic growth. The PAP government would, on its part, cut down administrative expenditures. The PAP asserted that there must be sacrifices on the part of citizens, for without sacrifices the economy would collapse and the pressure of the population would press the standards of living.

The PAP pledged to set up an Economic Development Board as a statutory body with an initial capital of 100 million dollars. The Board would appraise industrial projects, plan for the short-term and long-term development of industries and co-ordinate technical training program. Although entrepot trade could not be depended upon to provide sufficient employment for the growing population, the PAP stated that “no sane government would want to destroy the foundations” on which the economy rested. It pledged that the free port status of Singapore would not be modified unless for the most compelling reasons.¹¹⁶

The PAP declared that the SPA’s housing program had failed miserably, providing only an average of 2,000 units per year for the people. The PAP would build low-cost houses to meet the increasing demand. Satellite towns with all the modern amenities would be built.¹¹⁷

The PAP, though socialist in ideology, believed in free competition for the economy. It had dismissed nationalization of land and companies as not practical in the context of Singapore. Private enterprise would be given maximum encouragement and government participation in industries would be within the framework of free competition.¹¹⁸

The PAP charged the SPA government with economic mismanagement. Dr Lee Siew Choh, the PAP candidate for Queenstown, accused the SPA of depleting the government assets from \$200 millions in 1954 to \$83 millions in December 1958. He alleged that \$400,000 were spent on ministerial “pleasure trips”.¹¹⁹

As against the PAP’s call for austerity and savings, the SPA promised full employment without austerity and hardship. Lim Yew Hock stated that the problems of unemployment and housing could be solved simultaneously by a SPA government. To meet the short-term unemployment, he pledged that the SPA would embark on a bold program of public housing and public work construction. To meet long-term unemployment, the SPA would vigorously promote industrialization, emulating the successful industrial development of Hong Kong. The SPA strongly supported free enterprise as part of its stand on freedom and condemned trade control and

the amount of Singapore’s overseas capital to be \$800 million.

¹¹⁵ Speech of Dr Goh Keng Swee over Radio Singapore. Vide *ST* 13.5.59.

¹¹⁶ Petir, *The Tasks Ahead Part I* (Singapore, 1959) pp. 19–27.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 29–31.

¹¹⁸ PAP, *Petir* Vol. I No. 19 (Singapore, 1958).

¹¹⁹ *Sun. T.* 3.5.59.

nationalization of industries.¹²⁰

But the main thrust of the SPA's campaign on the economic issue was directed towards discrediting the PAP's economic program. It played up the "politics of the rice bowls", stressing time and again that a PAP government would ruin the economy and break the rice bowls of the people. There would be mass unemployment and severe austerity. The SPA charged that the PAP was out to "squeeze money from the people of Singapore". The people would have to go back to eating "ubi kayu" (tapioca) as during the Japanese occupation.¹²¹ The people's life savings would be taken away by the PAP in exchange for worthless paper bonds. The SPA hoped that such attacks on the PAP would reinforce its strategy of branding the PAP as a dictatorial communist party that would bring about hardship to the people. The LS joined the SPA in adopting this line of attack on the PAP.

The SPA made a big issue of the flight of capital from Singapore. To be fair, the decline in foreign investments and movement of capital away from Singapore were generally due to the usual uncertainties during election time and particularly to the doubts and apprehension of the business community over the possible economic actions of a left-wing PAP government. The SPA repeatedly accused the PAP of frightening capital away from Singapore. It accused the PAP of being totally hostile to foreign capital, warning that the PAP would drive Singapore into economic bankruptcy.¹²² The LS joined in to blame the PAP for the flight of capital. It warned that the "anti-capitalist" policies of the PAP would cause mass unemployment and immense hardship for the people.¹²³

The PAP dismissed the charges that it was responsible for chasing away capital as ridiculous. It pointed out that the firms moved to the Federation because the Federation had increased import taxes on industrial goods from Singapore. It accused the SPA as being responsible for the industrial ebb with its poor and unhealthy economic policies.

In terms of programs, the PAP and the LS presented a broad line-up of economic policies. The PAP had the most comprehensive and coherent set of programs. But this issue was not fought merely on the economic rationality or merits of the policies presented. The issue was inextricably meshed with the controversies over merger with the Federation of Malaya and the fight between "democracy" and "communism". The SPA and LS stressed the fact that the PAP's proposal for a common market was rejected by the Federation leaders. They concentrated on playing up the fear that a "communistic" and "dictatorial" PAP government would ruin the economy and impose severe hardship on the people. The PAP strenuously denied this. But on the whole it appeared that the business sector and the conservative voters were really fearful of what a PAP government would do and they probably voted against the PAP. Indeed the PAP's uncompromising call for austerity and savings added to their fear.

However, some of those who feared the PAP's possible economic actions might have heeded the PAP's warning that it would be better to allow for peaceful and constitutional reforms through the PAP than let changes be brought about by violent upheavals. They would, conceivably, vote for the PAP.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Statement by Dr K. R. Chou, the Economic Advisor to the SPA. Vide *The People* Vol. I No. 3 (Singapore, 1959).

¹²¹ Editorial, *The People* Vol. I No. 3 (Singapore, 1959). *ST* 12.5.59 and 2.5.59. *NYSP* 17.5.59 and 26.5.59.

¹²² Vide *ST* 5.5.59 and 8.5.59. *NYSP* 20.5.59.

¹²³ Speeches of LS speakers at rallies. Vide *ST* 23.3.59, 2.5.59, 4.5.59 and 7.5.59. *NYSP* 18.5.59.

¹²⁴ The warnings were issued by Lee Kuan Yew. Vide *Sun. T.* 3.5.59 and *ST* 5.5.59.

The Results

The PAP scored a landslide victory in the election, winning 43 of the 51 seats in the Legislative Assembly. The SPA won 4 seats, UMNO/MCA won 3 seats and the Independents won 1 seat. (See Tables 2 and 3 and Appendix Diagram 1.) Although the general expectation was that the PAP would win the election, the overwhelming majority of the PAP victory was unexpected. It exceeded even the fondest hopes of the PAP supporters.¹²⁵ In terms of the number of seats won, it was a big blow to the Independents and all the parties besides the PAP. They managed to secure only 8 seats. It was a particularly crushing defeat for the LS and the 8 minor parties.¹²⁶ None of them won a single seat.¹²⁷

With the compulsory voting, a record 89.4 per cent of the electorate of 587,797 cast their votes. Although the PAP obtained 53.4 per cent of the votes, it won 84.3 per cent of the seats in the Assembly. The SPA with 20.4 per cent won 7.8 per cent of the seats and UMNO/MCA with 6.3 per cent won 5.9 per cent of the seats. The UMNO/MCA, therefore, obtained a generally fair share of the seats in relation to their total numbers of votes. But the LS was the worst off. With 8.1 per cent of the votes, the third highest percentage after the PAP and the SPA, the LS did not secure even a single seat.¹²⁸

The PAP won the election by a combination of correct strategies, a relatively strong party organization and the failings of its opponents. In the battles over the issues of party images, "democracy" versus "communism", merger and economics, the PAP had employed generally correct strategies against its opponents. On these fronts, the PAP had on the whole emerged as the strongest party. Above all, in terms of the whole electoral campaign, the PAP excelled in the techniques of mass mobilization and was the most successful in attracting the support of the Chinese voters and the broad or lower classes. Success in these three aspects clinched the victory for the PAP.¹²⁹

In terms of mass mobilization, the PAP had greater manpower because of the large pool of voluntary helpers from the trade unions and the Chinese schools. This manpower was particularly useful for canvassing from door to door and for crowd control at the numerous rallies. Right from February, it held a series of pre-election rallies and during the electoral campaign, rallies were held simultaneously throughout the island. Its satirical sketches at rallies were popular with the crowds. It had more broadcasting time on radio because it fielded the most candidates. Of all the parties, the PAP made the best use of the publicity media. It made sure that its work in the City Council was fully publicized. The PAP set up an Information Bureau at the City Council to give maximum publicity to the work of the PAP

¹²⁵ The PAP government was sworn in on 4 June 1959 with Lee Kuan Yew as the Prime Minister.

¹²⁶ The 8 minor parties were the Workers' Party (WP), the Labour Front (LF), the Citizens' Party (CP), the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), Party Ra'ayat (PR), Katong United Residents' Association (KURA), the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP), and the Singapore Malay Union (SMU).

¹²⁷ Out of the total of 194 candidates, 73 lost their deposits. None of the 51 PAP candidates lost their deposits. The SPA lost 3 deposits out of its 39 candidates. UMNO/MCA lost 5 out of 13. Of all the parties, the LS lost the record of 20 out of 32 candidates. The 8 minor parties lost a total of 21 deposits. The Independents lost 24 deposits. (See Table 2.)

¹²⁸ The youngest member of the Legislative Assembly was the PAP Member for Chua Chu Kang, Ong Chang San. Ong, aged 22, was a shop assistant. The oldest was the 61 year old Goh Chew Chua, the PAP Member for Tampines. Goh was formerly a clerk. The average age of the Assemblymen was 35 years and 1 month. There were five women members in the 51-seat Assembly. Four were from the PAP. Vide Table 3 and *ST* 1.6.59.

¹²⁹ The importance of these three aspects was discussed under "Background".

TABLE 2
Result of 1959 Singapore General Election:
Breakdown of Votes

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	% of Contested Seats Won	Total Votes Received	% of Total Vote	% of Assembly Seats Won	No. of Candidates who lost deposits
1 PAP	51	43	84.3	281,891	53.4	84.3	NONE
2 SPA	39	4	10.3	107,755	20.4	7.8	3
3 LS	32	0	0	42,805	8.1	0	20
4 IND	34	1	2.9	37,411	7.1	2.0	24
5 UMNO/MCA	13	3	23.0	33,041	6.3	5.9	5
6 WP	3	0	0	4,127)		0	2
7 LF	3	0	0	3,414)		0	2
8 CP	5	0	0	3,210)		0	5
9 MIC	2	0	0	2,092)	3.5	0	1
10 PR	4	0	0	2,006)		0	4
11 KURA	2	0	0	1,759)		0	1
12 PMIP	3	0	0	1,011)		0	3
13 SMU	3	0	0	749)		0	3
TOTAL	194	51	—	521,271	98.8	100	73

TOTAL ELECTORATE: 587,797
 VOTE CAST: 527,919 (89.4% of total electorate)
 SPOILT VOTES: 6,648 (1.2% of votes cast)
 TOTAL OF NON-VOTES: 239,380

Sources: Singapore Information Services, *Singapore Government Press Statement (HC/INFS JN 4/59 2.6.59)*
 Singapore, 1959

Singapore Information Services, *Singapore News Summary* Vol. VI No. 10 (31.5.59)

Abbreviations: PAP (People's Action Party); SPA (Singapore People's Alliance); LS (Liberal Socialist); IND (Independents); UMNO/MCA (United Malay's National Organization/Malayan Chinese Association); WP (Workers' Party); LF (Labour Front); CP (Citizens' Party); MIC (Malayan Indian Congress); KURA (Katong United Residents' Association); PMIP (Pan-Malayan Islamic Party); SMU (Singapore Malay Union).

administration. When standpipes, for example, were installed by the City Council, reporters and photographers were invited to cover the events.¹³⁰ Posters, films and banners were used to publicize the Council's work.¹³¹ Despite the controversy between the PAP and the *Straits Times* and the usually hostile comments of the *Straits Times*, the publicity of the PAP's programs in the *Straits Times* was not less than that of the others.¹³² The Malay, Tamil and Chinese press were on the whole impartial in their reporting and comments.¹³³

The SPA did not make full use of many of the privileges of a ruling party. The government machinery was not fully utilized to propagate the government policies and achievements, nor was there any special efforts to develop quasi-government mass organizations. The community centres, for example, were not fully used as a channel for government propaganda or a means for marshalling support amongst the community leaders.¹³⁴

In terms of attracting the Chinese-educated, the PAP was far more successful than the rest of the parties.¹³⁵ The PAP realized from the very beginning that it must go all out to win the crucial support of the Chinese-educated. It strove hard to reach out to the "Chinese-educated world — a world teeming with vitality, dynamism and revolution".¹³⁶ The SPA, with the government's arrests of many Chinese-educated trade unionists and its actions against the Chinese schools, was stuck with the odium of being anti-Chinese education.¹³⁷ The actions alienated the Chinese-educated and further strengthened the support of the Chinese-educated for the PAP.

The Chinese-educated had not until the 1950s participated actively in the politics of Singapore. Under the colonial administration, the Chinese-educated were the out-castes, with the English-educated enjoying all the privileges and getting the best jobs. With the enlarged electorate and compulsory voting the Chinese-educated were given unprecedented power to influence the political future of Singapore.¹³⁸ The actions of the PAP against the *Straits Times* and its blatantly anti-colonial

¹³⁰ This matter was brought up at an SPA rally. Vide *ST* 2.3.59.

¹³¹ *ST* 23.3.59. Two Opposition City Councillors protested against the screening of the films in the cinemas as propaganda for the PAP. Vide *ST* 9.1.59.

¹³² Lim Yew Hock complained that the *ST* was giving more publicity to the PAP than the SPA. Vide *ST* 5.5.59.

¹³³ The Malay press, except for the usual pro-UMNO tendency, gave the PAP adequate publicity and was at times sympathetic to the PAP. For example, it gave favourable comments on the PAP's proposal for a common market with the Federation. Vide editorial, *Utusan Melayu* 25.3.59. The Chinese press stressed repeatedly in numerous editorials that it was impartial. Vide *NYSP* 20.2.59; *SCJP* 20.4.59 and 27.4.59. They were generally impartial, but gave good publicity to the PAP. In particular the Chinese press harped on the importance of not jeopardizing the entrepot trade. This was due to the connection between the Chinese press management and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce which held strong views on the protection of the entrepot trade. Vide *SCJP* 3.2.59 and 25.3.59.

¹³⁴ After the PAP assumed power, the PAP government made full use of all these government facilities.

¹³⁵ Being successful in attracting the votes of the Chinese-educated need not automatically be equated with Chinese chauvinism. Indeed, the PAP always tried to present a multi-racial image and stressed on the creation of a "Malayan culture". The PAP was aware that Chinese chauvinism or communalism must not be openly played up if its plan for merger was to succeed.

¹³⁶ Lee Kuan Yew, *Battle for Merger* (Singapore, 1961), p. 17.

¹³⁷ Sir William Goode stated at an interview with the author: "Lim Yew Hock ... carried the odium of doing these things".

¹³⁸ Sir William Goode stated at the interview that "... You have the PAP and the people with the quality of the present PM (Lee Kuan Yew) who were appealing to the Chinese-speaking. And for the first time, you had big rallies of the Chinese-speaking. We never had that before".

postures and policies, particularly in the City Council, appealed to the Chinese-educated.¹³⁹ The PAP leaders made it a point to denounce the English-educated as being a privileged group¹⁴⁰ and the civil service, which was almost entirely staffed by the English-educated, as being generally colonial.¹⁴¹ These attacks identified the PAP with the interests of the Chinese-educated. They saw the PAP as the party which would help them to raise their political and economic status in society.

The PAP, realizing that the broader or lower-income groups constituted the mass of the electorate, made special efforts to win their votes by stressing that it was fighting for their interests and branded the other parties as being the stooges of the capitalist class. The SPA was vehemently attacked by the PAP as being backed by “big business” and “local compradoes” and was their political stooge.¹⁴² Similarly, the LS was attacked by the PAP as a capitalist party with leaders belonging to the “propertied classes.”¹⁴³

The SPA and the LS both condemned this PAP’s “exploitation” of the class issue. They charged that this was part of the communistic PAP’s “class struggle” which would ruin Singapore.¹⁴⁴ And the SPA committed the mistake of openly stating that it represented the “petty bourgeois” and white collar classes “which constituted the bulk of the voting population”.¹⁴⁵ It made special appeals to the middle class for support.¹⁴⁶ Lee Kuan Yew replied that only “buffoons and clowns” could claim that they could win the elections with the support of the “petty bourgeois”. He said the working class and the farmers were the more important sections of the electorate.¹⁴⁷

The PAP during its administration of the City Council tried its best to demonstrate to the people that they cared for the welfare and interest of the lower classes. Standpipes, rain shelters and clinics were given priority. The Mayor, Mr Ong Eng Guan, tried to show dramatically that he was on the side of the taxi-drivers and the hawkers.¹⁴⁸ He was particularly popular with the masses. Thus, with the support of the lower classes, the PAP was assured of a victory.

Although the confrontation at the polls was between the 51 PAP candidates and the rest, “the rest” was a divided and squabbling lot.¹⁴⁹ All the attempts to

¹³⁹ The PAP administration of the City Council, for example, banished the mace of the council as a relic of imperialism and refused requests for special street lighting for the visit of Prince Philip of Britain. Vide *ST* 13.2.59 and 21.2.59.

¹⁴⁰ Although the PAP declared that the English-educated would have to give up its special privileges in a post-colonial Singapore, it stated that the English-educated would still have an “honourable role” in helping to bring about peaceful reforms in the society. Vide *ST* 29.5.59.

¹⁴¹ Lee Kuan Yew, however, did assure the civil servants that if they were prepared to carry out the biddings of the government in power honestly, efficiently and loyally, they had nothing to fear of the PAP. Vide *ST* 14.5.59.

¹⁴² *ST* 15.2.59, 16.2.59 and 23.5.59.

¹⁴³ Lee Khoo Choy’s speech. Vide *NYSP* 25.5.59. Chan Choy Siong’s speech. Vide *ST* 27.5.59.

¹⁴⁴ Speeches of E. K. Tan. Vide *ST* 13.4.59 and 12.5.59.

¹⁴⁵ Statement of SPA on “Why the SPA must win” in *The People*. Vide *ST* 15.5.59.

¹⁴⁶ Speech of Wang Tsun Hao, Secretary-General of SPA. Vide *NYSP* 14.5.59.

¹⁴⁷ Vide *ST* 16.4.59.

¹⁴⁸ LS City Councillor, Lee Bah Chee, stated at an interview with the author that the PAP administration of the City Council definitely paved the way for the PAP success at the election. He said that PAP used the City Council to build up its support amongst the masses.

¹⁴⁹ As far back as in June 1958, Lim Yew Hock, then leading the old LF, proposed the formation of a grand United Socialist Front to fight the PAP. This front was eventually named the Singapore People’s Alliance which was formed in November 1958. The SPA was supposed to absorb the LF, LS and WP into its ranks. But although some members of the LF, LS and WP did join the SPA, these parties continued as separate parties.

coalesce the parties that were opposed to the rapidly growing PAP came to nothing. This division of the anti-PAP forces contributed indirectly to the success of the PAP. It would not be possible to estimate the number of seats the PAP would have lost if there had been a united anti-PAP front. But it was beyond doubt that even with a united anti-PAP front, the PAP would still have won the mandate to form the next government. What was in question was the margin of majority in the Assembly. This was borne out by the fact that the PAP won 30 of its 43 seats by absolute majorities. (See Table 3.)

The attempts towards a united anti-PAP front not only did not bring positive results, but further confused the voters and lowered the credibility of the parties concerned. The parties blamed each other for the failure to form the united front. The SPA vehemently attacked the LS as a bunch of "bankrupt" and "self-seeking" politicians.¹⁵⁰ The LS, on the other hand, attacked the SPA as an incapable and "opportunistic" party that "changed its signboard every now and then".¹⁵¹ UMNO/MCA also attacked SPA for its "insincerity".¹⁵² Indeed the various parties "slapped their own faces", making a mockery of the united front against the PAP.¹⁵³ The PAP made much fun of this in their campaign. Toh Chin Chye ridiculed the anti-PAP front as a "motor-car with many drivers".¹⁵⁴

The internal splits within the parties opposed to the PAP weakened their parties considerably as well as marred their public image. This was made worst by the frequent shifting and movement of leaders from one party to another. These "musical chair" movements confused the voters and raised doubts as to the sincerity and ability of the parties concerned. UMNO, LS and SPA were all afflicted with internal squabbles.

Lim Yew Hock, in a way, helped the moderates in the PAP by conducting two "spring cleaning" exercises for the PAP in 1956 and 1957. In the 1956 party conference, the extremists were able to obtain four out of the twelve seats of the Central Executive Committee (CEC). With increasing strength, the extremists were trying to ensure that the new constitution being drafted would allow the branches complete control in the party and provide branch committee to nominate members to the CEC. However, many of the extremists, including three of those on the CEC, were detained by Lim Yew Hock in a purge which was accompanied by riots and arsons. This put a temporary stop to the extremists' attempts to change the constitution and capture the PAP. But in the 1957 party conference, the extremists captured six of the twelve seats in the CEC. The moderates led by Lee Kuan Yew and Toh Chin Chye refused to take office. Again Lim Yew Hock happened to be conducting another purge against "subversives" and five of the six extremist members of the CEC were detained. The moderates again regained control of the party with the timely "intervention" of Lim Yew Hock.¹⁵⁵ With the end of this crisis, the threatened

¹⁵⁰ Speech of Eric Wee, SPA candidate for Serangoon Gardens. Vide *ST* 4.5.59. Also Lim Yew Hock's attack on the LS over Radio Singapore. Vide *ST* 30.5.59. For other examples, vide *NYSP* 29.5.59 and *SCJP* 25.5.59.

¹⁵¹ Speech of E. K. Tan. Vide *NYSP* 19.5.59. L.S. pamphlet "Who Split the Democratic Forces" reported in *ST* 26.5.59. Speech of M. Karthigesu, LS candidate, over Radio Singapore. Vide *ST* 11.5.59.

¹⁵² Speech of Wong Foo Nam, Chairman of MCA Singapore. Vide *SCJP* 25.5.59. Also statement by UMNO Siglap Branch attacking SPA for supporting an Independent candidate against the UMNO candidate. Vide *NYSP* 26.5.59.

¹⁵³ Speech of Lee Khoo Choy. Vide *SCJP* 25.5.59. Also speech of Chan Choy Siong over Radio Singapore. Vide *NYSP* 27.5.59.

¹⁵⁴ Speech of Toh Chin Chye over Radio Singapore. Vide *Petir* Vol. II No. 5 (Singapore, 1959).

¹⁵⁵ The pro-communist extremist members on the 1956 CEC were Lim Chin Siong, Devan

split within the party was avoided. With the removal of the main leaders of the extremists, the moderate leaders were able to assert fully their control and leadership of the party. Thus from the end of 1957 to the 1959 election, the party was relatively free of internal divisions which were submerged for the time being. The leadership, therefore, could concentrate fully on preparing for the coming election and present a united party to the electorate. The extremists, after their failures to capture the party leadership, were content to work for a party victory under the leadership of the moderate leaders. The extremists hoped that a party victory would lead to the release of their leaders detained by the SPA government.¹⁵⁶ Their plan was to capture the party after it assumed power. In this way, they hoped to capture control of the government through control of the party.¹⁵⁷

As against the PAP's 53.4 per cent of the total votes, about 45 per cent or 239,380 voted for non-PAP or anti-PAP parties or Independents. The fear of the PAP as a communistic and ruthless party, the fear of mass unemployment and the relative helplessness of the PAP on the merger issue must have driven these voters to cast their votes against the PAP. UMNO beat the PAP at Geyland Serai, Southern Island and Kampong Kembangan partly because of its special appeal to the Malays in these Malay-dominated constituencies. To some extent the support of Tengku Abdul Rahman must have persuaded some voters to cast their votes for UMNO. The SPA probably won the four constituencies of Joo Chiat, Cairnhill, Tanglin and Mountbatten partly on the support of the higher and middle classes which dominated these four constituencies. In Farrer Park, where the PAP faced four Independents, A. P. Rajah beat the PAP on the strength of his long association with the constituency. But he won only by a narrow margin of 245 votes.

This issue of the timely arrests of the extremist PAP leaders leads to the question of the role of the British colonial authorities. Some authors assert that Lee Kuan Yew was Britain's "chosen" man for Singapore. In particular, Sir William Goode, the last British Governor of Singapore, was said to be directly responsible for these arrests and was a source of special information for Lee.¹⁵⁸ It is true that the British played a part in these arrests as under the Rendel constitution they were in charge of internal security. But it must be noted that the arrests had the concurrence of the Lim Yew Hock government.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, from the British point of view, the arrests were not to pamper or safeguard any "chosen" leader, but to block any communist attempt to capture the PAP, which increasingly appeared to both the British and

Nair, Chia Ek Tian and Goh Boon Toh. In 1957, when the moderates refused to take office, Tan Chong Kin became the party Chairman and T. T. Rajah the Secretary-General for a short period. Vide Pang Cheng Lian, *Singapore's PAP: Its History, Organization and Leadership* (Singapore, 1971), pp. 25–27.

¹⁵⁶ The PAP leaders made an issue of the detention of their members. During the campaign, Dr Toh Chin Chye declared that if elected, the PAP would not assume office until its members in jail were released. Vide *ST* 22.5.59. Toh further suggested that the Governor could release the detainees before the new constitution became operative as a way out of possible constitutional difficulties. Vide *ST* 30.5.59. Eight of them were eventually released.

¹⁵⁷ Lim Chin Siong and the extremists tried unsuccessfully in 1961 to capture the government by winning the support of the majority of the PAP members of the Legislative Assembly. They left the PAP and formed the Barisan Socialis. Vide Pang Cheng Lian, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–15.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Bellows, *The People's Action Party of Singapore: Emergence of a Dominant Party System* (Yale University South East Asian Studies, Monograph Series 14, New Haven, 1970), p. 35 and T. J. S. George, *Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore* (London, 1973), p. 43.

¹⁵⁹ Sir William Goode stated at an interview with the author: "We would not have dreamed of carrying through an operation of that sort without having the support of the Council of Ministers and Chief Minister of the day. If we had to do something like that against their will, then they would have resigned and it would have been a clear break".

the general observers to be the party that would win the coming election. The British were only acting in their self-interest.

Since the start of the electoral system in Singapore, the 1959 election is the most fiery and protracted one. It marked the close of a successful chapter in the anti-colonial struggle with the attainment of internal self-government and signalled the start of the final phase of the fight to attain complete independence through merger with the Federation of Malaya. It is significant that it was through this election that the PAP first came into power. The PAP used this mandate to build up its strength and image and laid the foundation for victories in the three subsequent general elections in 1963, 1968 and 1972. Hence, the 1959 election decisively influenced subsequent events. It is a significant milestone in the history of Singapore.

TABLE 3
The 1959 Singapore General Election:
Breakdown of Electoral Majorities

<i>Party</i>	<i>Total No. of Seats Won</i>	<i>Seats Won With absolute majorities</i>	<i>Seats Won with simple majorities</i>
PAP	43	30	13
SPA	4	—	4
UMNO/MCA	3	2	1
IND	1	—	1
Total	51	32	19

DIAGRAM 1
Breakdown of Votes received by Parties and Independents

