

# Sacrificing Democracy in the Name of Prosperity: The Tradeoff Between Politics and Economics in Singaporean Development

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*As a small city-state in Southeast Asia, Singapore has always been politically vulnerable. In order for it to have any international political significance, Singapore has had to capitalize on its status as a centrally located trade center, billing itself as a free market paradise to attract foreign investment and therefore assure its place in the world. However, this unwavering focus on a strong economy has led the regime, controlled for the last 40 years by the patriarchal People's Action Party, to sacrifice democracy and political freedom in the name of economic growth. This paper examines the tradeoffs Singapore has faced between a strong economy and the development of democracy. Specific regime policies are analyzed as to their effects on political freedom and democracy, and the prospects for the development of true democratic institutions, according to democratic theorist Robert Dahl, are evaluated.*

## INTRODUCTION

Democracy is, first and foremost, a political concept. And the basic concern of politics is power. In an attempt to prescribe how power is to be used and controlled, thinkers establish universal principles such as freedom, justice, and pluralism to illuminate the legitimate ends of power. However, universal political principles are not always realistic: often, more basic economic necessities such as survival, growth and order take precedence. One cannot have a just society if the society dies out. However, no one wants to live in an unjust, coercive society even if it is economically successful.

Clearly, when economic interests conflict with basic political principles, a balance must be struck. This paper examines this dynamic within the city-state of Singapore, which has consistently sacrificed democratic political principles to economic interests since it began its modernization after World War II.

The experience of Japanese occupation during the war instilled a culture of vulnerability in Singaporeans. The key to

avoiding another takeover was to become an important international player, but due to its small size and population (the main island of Singapore is only 26 miles long and 14 wide, with a population of about 3,300,000 (Statistics Singapore 2001, online)), Singapore could not become a military power. The government's solution was to make Singapore economically important, to give other nations with vested interests a motivation to look out for its well being. Consequently, a dichotomy exists between economics and politics in Singapore: in order for it to have international political significance, economics must take priority. It is the purpose of this paper to examine how Singapore has sacrificed political freedom in order to gain economically and thus ensure its continued political existence.

When looking at the consequences of changes in Singapore's political and socioeconomic environment, normative conclusions are inevitable. A system level criterion must be used in order to judge whether certain policies are politically favorable or unfavorable. For the purposes of this paper, the nebulous term "democracy" will be the basis for such judgements. Given the tenor of the international community, with its general commitment to democratic ideals, representative government, and governmental legitimacy, this is justified. Finally, while there is no universal conception of democracy, policies will be judged according to their intent and actual effect on the political situation in order to determine whether they advance or inhibit democracy. To make this process more rigorous, I have used Robert Dahl's ideas of democratic "polyarchy," defined as "a set of political institu-

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tions that, taken together, distinguish modern representative democracy from all other political systems, whether non-democratic regimes or earlier democratic systems” (Dahl 1989, 218). In addition to the criteria of polyarchy, Pierre Schmitter’s and Terry Lynn Karl’s extension of Dahl’s polyarchic ideal will be used to determine whether Singapore’s regime can or cannot be considered democratic.

Structurally, the paper focuses first on historical circumstances, with a description of the economic policies and development that established Singapore’s place in the international arena. Afterwards, the focus is on the political situation, and how developments in this area have affected democracy in Singapore. The focus is on developments since Singapore’s liberation from Japan in 1945, since it was in this political vacuum that the dominant forces shaping modern Singapore arose.

### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE BIRTH OF THE PEOPLE’S ACTION PARTY AND ESTABLISHING A SINGAPOREAN STATE

There were two important developments that occurred between 1945, when Britain reclaimed Singapore from the Japanese, and 1965, when Singapore became an independent nation. The first development saw the People’s Action Party become the dominant political force in Singapore. The second development was the failed attempt to unite Singapore with its larger neighbor Malaya, in order to decrease its international vulnerability and open up its markets to Singaporean business.

On the first issue, Singapore had traditionally been ruled by the Progressive Party, whose colonial politics subordinated Singaporean interests to those of Britain. Beginning in the 1950s, a sudden increase in unionization and the politicization of the working class (of whom the majority were ethnic Chinese) led to the emergence of credible left-wing parties, which wrested power away from the status quo Progressives. The People’s Action Party (PAP), directed by party chief (and future Prime Minister) Lee Kuan Yew, came to dominate Singaporean politics through its moderate, anti-colonial stance and its effective socioeconomic policies.

In the 1959 election campaign, the PAP offered a constructive program of economic and social reform, promising to “tackle the problems of education, labor, trade unions, social security, housing, rural development, health and the status of women” (Turnbull 1989, 263). They also pledged to unite Singapore with the Malayan Federation, and these promises resulted in the PAP winning 43 of the 51 assembly seats (Turnbull 1989, 263), for the first time giving Singapore a strong working majority in parliament.

This brings up the second major development: the PAP wanted to merge with the Malayan Federation because this would afford Singapore political security while at the same time improving the economy by creating a much larger market. The economic program put forward by Finance Minister

Goh Keng Swee “was based upon achieving a common market with the Federation and encouraging industrialization in conjunction with private, and if need be foreign, capital” (Turnbull 1989, 266). Swee noted that “the political reason for the merger has a strong economic basis,” because “major changes in our economy are only possible if Singapore and the Federation are integrated as one economy” (Turnbull 1989, 267).

A major obstacle to the merger came when radicals within the PAP opposed to the merger split to form the Barisan Sosialis. The new party quickly became a potent political force, as two-thirds of organized labor and forty-three unions immediately pledged their support (Turnbull 1989, 272). To measure public opinion, the government held a referendum on the merger in September 1962. Seventy-one percent of the electorate supported the proposals, while twenty-five percent showed their disapproval by returning blank or spoiled votes (Turnbull 1989, 273). The PAP waited for the 1963 election, thinking that the voters would give the party some mandate for policy.

Before this election, the PAP emphasized its effective economic and social policies. Chief among these was the buildup of community centers, which provided recreation facilities, literacy classes, radio/television, along with social services, housing, education and health facilities. The PAP saw these tangible benefits to the population as proof of its viability as a ruling party. However, it also used every legal means (and some extra-legal) to disadvantage the Barisan and guide the election in its favor, such as excluding imprisoned Barisan leaders from running for office by requiring in-person application, freezing the funds of “hostile” unions, and withdrawing the registration of seven Barisan-dominated unions (Turnbull 1989, 277).

In the end, however, the 1963 election was a clear victory for the PAP – it won 37 of the 51 seats. This marked the advantages afforded to the PAP from the system of single-member constituency voting districts without proportional representation: the PAP won 73 percent of the seats while receiving less than 47 percent of the total vote (Turnbull 1989, 278). Additionally, half of the Barisan’s executive committee was jailed by the Internal Security Council for supporting a communist rebellion in Brunei. After the election, there was nothing to stand in the way of the merger. So in August 1963, Lee declared Singapore free from British rule, and in September the Federation of Malaysia was born.

Afterwards, Lee and the PAP rushed into federal politics. Malay leaders were apprehensive, however, believing that Singapore’s majority ethnic Chinese politicians were rallying the mainland Chinese to their cause, flaring ethnic tensions. In 1965, faced with the possibility of race riots, federation leaders decided that Singapore could not be a part of Malaysia, and Singapore’s forced independence was proclaimed on 9 August 1965.

Due to the political and military vulnerability of the small island, Singaporean independence was perceived as a

“foolish and absurd proposition” (Drysdale 1984, 249). Nevertheless, it was in this hostile international environment that the PAP would lead Singapore to become one of the most economically successful nations in the world.

## THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

From 1965 on, two general types of policies have affected the political and economic situation in Singapore: first, those policies that were initially taken after independence to provide a favorable climate for investment, and second, those policies that provide for the continuous dominance of the Singaporean government by the People’s Action Party. The latter are sometimes contrary to democracy, but nonetheless keep the environment primed for economic growth. Attention will be given to both types, with a discussion of the democratic merits of specific policies throughout.

### THE FIRST STAGE:

#### ATTRACTING FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Following independence, it was clear that Singapore’s prevailing economic strategy of import substitution industrialization (in which fledgling native industries are given protectionist advantages to help them establish themselves in the world economy) was failing, due to a lack of natural resources, insufficient market demand, and unfavorable scale economies. As a small, relatively weak city-state, Singapore needed a strong economy to help ensure its survival. Thus, the government switched to an export oriented strategy. This included four elements: 1) abandoning protectionist policies in favor of free trade, 2) large scale public investments in education (human capital) and infrastructure (physical capital) to increase Singapore’s attractiveness to foreign investors, 3) decreasing labor unrest, so that foreign investors would not be scared away by a volatile political situation, and 4) a smaller welfare state was necessary in order to convince investors that a transition to communism (and thus the expropriation of their property) was out of the question. If all went according to plan, foreign direct investment (FDI) would pour in, establishing a strong export sector and jumpstarting the domestic economy.

Towards the first goal of free trade, Singapore’s situation as an independent city-state located on major trade routes allowed the PAP to emulate the economic policy of similarly situated Hong Kong. The PAP established Singapore as a “Ricardian free port,” after nineteenth-century classical economist David Ricardo, who showed that “in normal circumstances, any country or region allowing unrestricted international trade would prosper more than under any other approach to trade policy” (Lingle and Wickman 2000, 61). Free trade made foreign firms more competitive in the domestic economy, providing a more viable investment environment. However, this alone would not induce the necessary foreign investment.

In order to attract large-scale foreign capital to their free

trade paradise, the government undertook investments in the two resources they could provide for investors: the people and the infrastructure. Top priority was given to “modernizing the educational system” (Lingle and Wickman 2000, 62) in order to enhance the stock of human capital and attract foreign investors looking for a productive labor force. The Singaporean educational system was effective at producing “loyal workers with good literacy, well prepared to follow and interpret...complicated instructions” (Lingle and Wickman 2000, 62), an indispensable resource for attracting high value industries such as technology.

Also essential was the build-up of infrastructure, largely in transportation. Singapore’s basic economic activity was organized around the ports, and the government undertook huge investments in the port infrastructure to lower transportation costs and increase the amount of traffic its ports could handle (Lingle and Wickman 2000, 62). Because of this infrastructure, in addition to the distinct locational advantages afforded to firms by Singapore’s central position in Southeast Asia, “thousands of private companies could trade with the rest of the world,” making the island an ideal recipient for foreign direct investment (Lingle and Wickman 2000, 62).

A third major policy concern was the high unemployment rate, which reached 8.9 percent in 1966 (Huff 1994, 291). Singapore had to instill investor confidence, meaning its reputation for labor disputes and strikes had to go. In December 1965, the government declared that “the excesses of irresponsible trade unions...are luxuries which we can no longer afford” (LePoer 1991, 59). The situation worsened in 1968, when Britain announced it would withdraw from its military bases in Singapore within three years. The economic consequences were sobering: British spending accounted for approximately 25 percent of Singapore’s GNP (S\$450 million/year), and the bases employed some 21,000 Singaporeans (LePoer 1991, 59). There seemed little chance of absorbing the large-scale unemployment that was to come.

Faced with crisis, the PAP called for an election of confidence to provide a new mandate for policy: the 1968 election resulted in the PAP winning every parliamentary seat with more than 84 percent of the vote (Turnbull 1989, 295). “With this new authority...the government passed far-reaching labor legislation, designed to transform confrontation into cooperation and provide an attractive climate for investment” (Turnbull 1989, 295). Aiming to curb labor disputes and increase productivity, the new laws allowed longer hours, reduced holidays, restricted overtime and bonuses, and decreased white-collar workers’ fringe benefits. However, they also provided compensation for the masses of workers, including sick leave and retrenchment payments, and increased employer contributions to Singapore’s social security system, the Central Provident Fund (which also acted as a store of financial capital the government could use for fiscal policy purposes) (Turnbull 1989, 295). These new policies made 1969 the first strike-free year since the PAP came to power (Turnbull 1989, 295).

Lastly, 1969 saw the tightening of welfare eligibility criteria, which when combined with the decreasing unemployment rate (it dropped from 8.9 percent in 1966 to 7.3 in 1968, and to 6.0 in 1970 (Huff 1994, 291)) meant that Singapore's welfare spending drastically declined. The numbers receiving welfare subsidies fell from more than 22,000 in 1966 to less than 11,000 in 1970 (Turnbull 1989, 305). The policies had the intended effect on investor confidence: "when it became clear that Singapore leaders had totally abandoned socialism, direct foreign investment poured into the country" (Haas 1999, 23).

Singapore's export oriented strategy was a success because it "wed Singapore's human capital with foreign investment, all under the umbrella of governmental supervisory bodies" (Haas 1999, 42). The new economic policies were responsible for the huge influx of FDI into Singapore's manufacturing sector. While the 1967 increase in FDI grossed \$64 million, after the move to export promotion, increased education and infrastructure spending, and the new labor and welfare policies, Singapore posted a 1968 increase of \$151 million. This continued with a \$146 million increase in 1969, which was then doubled by 1970's \$395 million increase (Huff 1994, 416). The results of these increases can be seen when looking at Singapore's growth rates.

**Table 1**  
**Real Annual Average Growth Rates in Manufacturing**  
**(Excluding Petroleum)**

	<u>1960-67</u>	<u>1967-73</u>
Direct exports	10.4%	31.8%
Output	12.0%	22.7%
Value added	12.2%	26.7%

Source: Huff 1999, Table 11.10

In addition, Singapore's average annual real GDP growth rate increased from 5.7 percent over the period 1960-1966 to 13.6 percent from 1966-1969 (Huff 1994, 302).

#### INCREASES IN SOCIAL WELFARE

It was through this spectacular economic growth that the government was able to make leaps and bounds in social welfare. Beginning in 1964, the Housing and Development Board sold apartments on favorable terms to low income citizens, and as a result of the improving economic situation, many middle class citizens were able to purchase their own homes. "Slums, squatter shanties and dilapidated kampongs in the outskirts of town gave way to new townships of modern housing estates," with their own "shopping centers, schools, markets, clinics and recreational facilities" (Turnbull 1989, 303). In 1968 the Environmental Health Act was passed to curb pollution and to promote cleanliness in physical surroundings. Infrastructure and public utilities were expanded to provide for the growing population: "by the early 1970's nearly 95 percent of the population had a piped water supply and in 1980 the whole island was linked to the main sewerage system"

(Turnbull 1989, 303). Health standards were raised, and by the 1970s Singapore's infant mortality and life expectancy rates were better than some Western industrialized nations. Diseases such as smallpox, cholera, diphtheria and polio had virtually disappeared as a result of public vaccination and immunization programs.

To curb population growth, the Singapore Family Planning and Population Board was established in 1966. Beginning in 1972, it promoted a two-child family policy (supported by tax incentives and penalties), liberalization of abortion laws, etc. The birth rate declined drastically, and for a time Singapore had a zero population growth-rate. By the 1980s, however, officials were reevaluating their stance as the birth rate fell below the replacement level.

In 1978, Singapore adopted new policies to bring in even more FDI and help open up the economy to more international business. "All restrictions on capital flows...were abolished, as were capital gains taxes, inheritance taxes, and wealth taxes. Foreign companies operating in Singapore were granted major tax relief," and "the government issued a solemn promise that no foreign company...would be nationalized" (Lingle and Wickman 2000, 64-5). This shift had huge effects on the locational advantages Singapore afforded to foreign investors/firms: the free flow of capital boosted investor confidence and lowered risk, while the new personal tax policies gave individual portfolio investors incentive to put their money in Singaporean firms. The new business tax policy meant that firms could operate at lower costs in Singapore than elsewhere. Additionally, education reform was undertaken to ensure human capital improvements and further entice investment. When taken together, these policies contributed to a nearly ten-fold increase in foreign investment in Singapore between 1978 and 1981 (Lingle and Wickman 2000, 65). This abundance of foreign capital led to explosive growth in the export sector: merchandise exports nearly doubled from S\$23 billion to S\$44 billion, with manufactured exports seeing the same trend (Huff 1994, Table A.3).

As a result of continuing economic success, Singaporeans enjoyed an ever-increasing standard of living. From 1960 to 1990, the average annual rate of real GDP growth was 8.7 percent (Huff 1994, 14). According to the 'rule of seventy-two,' incomes would double about every eight years: meaning that in 1990, the average Singaporean enjoyed a real income almost four times as high as her 1960 counterpart. From the early 1960s to 1995, Singapore's per capita income rose from less than US\$2,000 to about US\$25,000 (Lingle and Wickman 2000, 55). By 1994, this rapid increase had put Singapore's standard of living ahead of its former colonial master, Great Britain, in terms of per capita income (Lingle and Wickman 2000, 55).

Considering these vast improvements in welfare, it's not hard to imagine the trust the Singaporean people put in the government and the PAP especially. Indeed, "the leaders' dexterity in exploiting good fortune and turning set-backs into opportunities, which had won them the early battles,

gave them a stranglehold on power in more stable times" (Turnbull 1989, 305). Lee noticed this tendency as early as 1965, when he remarked that Singapore had too great a concentration of executive power, needed to "liberalize the constitution," and make the "executive authority less inhibitive to the legislature and the judiciary" (Turnbull 1989, 306). This statement is characteristic of the early Lee, before the PAP had sacrificed its commitment to democracy and social equality in the name of economic prosperity. After a healthy economy was established, Lee and the PAP took drastic measures to keep their stranglehold on power, and ensure that their vision for Singapore would not be betrayed.

### THE SECOND STAGE: THE TRANSITION FROM PAP GUIDANCE TO SOCIAL CONTROL

The PAP's spectacular success in the early years of independence instilled an egotistic paternalism in the political leadership, who felt it their duty to retain control of the government and guide Singapore down the proper path. The discussion in this section will look at these developments in four areas: 1) institutional developments in the judicial sphere, 2) PAP control of the political process and the Parliament, 3) government infringement on civil liberties, notably the press, and 4) the government's attempts at social engineering.

Many of the actions taken by the PAP in these four areas seem offensive to anyone who possesses strong democratic sensibilities. However, to provide a more rigorous framework for the evaluation of these policies, Robert Dahl has outlined seven conditions that must be met in order for modern procedural representative democracy, or "polyarchy" to exist (Dahl 1989, 221):

1) *Elected officials*. Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.

2) *Free and fair elections*. Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.

3) *Inclusive suffrage*. Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.

4) *Right to run for office*. Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government, though age limits may be higher for holding office than for the suffrage.

5) *Freedom of expression*. Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined, including criticism of officials, the government, the regime, the socioeconomic order, and the prevailing ideology.

6) *Alternative information*. Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by laws.

7) *Associational autonomy*. To achieve their various rights, including those listed above, citizens also have a right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups.

I will apply these standards to the situation in Singapore

throughout this analysis. Dahl considers the institutions of polyarchy as necessary but not sufficient conditions for the "highest feasible attainment of the democratic process," with many gradations of democracy possible (Dahl 1989, 222). However, this essay is necessarily a normative analysis, constituting value judgements that Singapore apologists would rather ignore: "no one claims that Singapore is a Western-style democracy, except in terms of a narrow definition that requires free elections" (Neher 1999, 51). Singaporeans believe that they have a democratic government, "reflecting the procedural components of elections, a functioning parliament, and a modicum of civil liberties" (Neher 1999, 51). Furthermore, apologists claim that Singaporeans don't want a Western-style "polyarchic democracy," because data suggest that most Singaporeans feel they are less capable of handling personal freedom than the political elite (Neher 1999, 48).

Nevertheless, because many people both in Singapore and elsewhere are interested in seeing a more democratic regime develop, it's important to understand how the PAP reacts to challenges to its dominance. A good starting point is the 1981 Anson District by-election, because it presented the first serious challenge to PAP dominance, and as a case study, the reactions of the PAP demonstrate its attitudes towards pluralism and democracy.

### THE 1981 ANSON ELECTION

In this election, Workers' Party candidate J.B. Jeyaretnam was elected to parliament with 52 percent of the vote. This shocked the PAP, which had held every seat since the 1968 election. In its eyes, elections were "a means to express passive dissatisfaction, not to elect opposition members" (Turnbull 1989, 319). Said Minister of Culture Rajaratnam, "the role of an opposition is to ensure bad government" (Turnbull 1989, 319).

The PAP initially responded to the election with intimidation: editors of the local press were instructed not to cover the activities of opposition parties. The opposition was undaunted, so the PAP took more drastic measures. In 1985, Jeyaretnam was charged with making false declarations of his party's accounts. He was initially acquitted by Senior District Judge Michael Khoo, known as "one of the ablest and most intellectually honest judges to grace the bench" (Seow 1999, 110). As a result of his unwelcome decision, Khoo was immediately transferred to an administrative position in the Attorney General's office as punishment (Seow 1999, 110).

Afterwards, Chief Justice Wee allowed the prosecution to appeal, with the caveat that another judge hear the case. The result was predictable: Jeyaretnam was found guilty and convicted. His appeal to Britain's Privy Council (the highest court in Singapore's legal system, and the most impartial) was denied (Seow 1999, 110). However, the court did decrease his prison sentence from three months to one, while adding a compensating fine that was sufficiently high as to disqualify him from sitting in parliament (Seow 1999, 110).

While his court battle was proceeding, Jeyaretnam alleged in parliament that Judge Khoo's transfer had been politically motivated. A commission was set up to investigate the claim, with a pro-establishment judge as the sole commissioner. According to the commission's report, there was no truth to the claims: "The wholly unfounded allegations of Mr. Jeyaretnam were scandalous statements that should never have been made" (Seow 1999, 111). Jeyaretnam filed a motion to have the report rejected, which was denied. Further, parliament found him guilty of contempt of committee and of parliament, fining him S\$1,000 (Seow 1999, 111). He was also found guilty of contempt for publishing five "offensive" newsletters relating to the incident, and fined S\$5,000 for each. On top of this, Jeyaretnam was fined S\$10,000 for writing an article in the Workers' Party newspaper about his mistreatment (Seow 1999, 111). After refusing to pay, the attorney general sued him and obtained judgment of the total sum of S\$35,000 (then approximately US\$17,500), plus court costs (Seow 1999, 111). Jeyaretnam's subsequent appeal to the Privy Council was dismissed out of hand.

In the debate on Khoo's transfer, Law Minister Jayakumar dismissed Jeyaretnam's remarks as the "jaundiced view of a person who has not had satisfaction in the courts as he would have liked" (Hansard Parliamentary Debates 1986, col. 718). He justified the legal results by asking, "how many countries are there in the world that he can refer to where there are appeals to the Privy Council...other than Singapore? That is the litmus test of our judicial system" (Hansard Parliamentary Debates 1986, col. 718).

Some vindication was in order: after being disbarred, Jeyaretnam appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in England, which condemned the Singaporean courts for their legal reasoning. In the decision, the Privy Council declared that Jeyaretnam suffered a "grievous injustice," and had been "fined, imprisoned and publicly disgraced for offenses" of which he was clearly "not guilty" (*J.B. Jeyaretnam v. Law Society of Singapore* 1988, 425, 434).

### THE PAP REIGNS IN THE COURTS

"I can only express hope that faith in the judicial system will never be diminished, and I am sure it will not, so long as we allow a review of the judicial processes that takes place here in some other tribunal where obviously undue influence cannot be brought to bear. As long as governments are wise enough to leave alone the rights of appeal to some superior body outside Singapore, then there must be a higher degree of confidence in the integrity of our judicial process."

Lee Kuan Yew 1967 (Hansard Parliamentary Debates 1967, cols. 1294-95).

"With the crucial decision regarding Jeyaretnam, the Privy Council sealed its own fate" (Seow 1999, 112). In 1989, Minister of Law Jayakumar motioned in parliament to abolish appeals to the Privy Council. While three years ago he had

praised the Council as the defender of justice, Jayakumar now decried it as "'interventionist' and 'out of touch' with local conditions" (Seow 1999, 113). When asked in 1995 about the abolition of appeals, the new Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong responded that the Council had "gone outside its prescribed role" and was "playing politics" in the Jeyaretnam case (*Straits Times* 1995). Though this is one of the worst injustices Singapore has seen, there have been others.

The subjugation of the judiciary began in 1969, when Lee abolished the jury system on the basis that it was borrowed from Western society, a move former Chief Minister David Marshall characterized as "the last nail being driven into the coffin of our basic freedoms" (*Straits Times* 1969). Juries were replaced by a panel of three judges, which eventually dropped to two because of a shortage of justices. The number dropped to one in 1992 (Seow 1999, 109). In 1995, Jayakumar praised the system for its speed and efficiency:

"We now have reached the stage when criminal cases can be disposed by the high court in about six months. Criminal appeals are disposed of by the court of appeals in about six months. And condemned prisoners can be disposed of by the prison authorities in about six months."

Shanmugam Jayakumar (O'Kane 1995, 20).

This system, where an individual's fate rests on the integrity of one judge, cannot be considered conducive to justice and due process, because Singaporean justices are clearly fallible. There are other examples of injustice. Strategic case assignments (where sensitive cases are given to certain justices to ensure an outcome in the PAP's favor) deny justice, as shown in the case of Francis Seow, an opposition politician running for parliament in 1988. The government brought a tax case against him, and a date was scheduled in court. After receiving "higher instructions" (Seow 1999, 116) the registrar brought the date of the trial forward. If the original date had been kept, the trial would have happened long after the general election; but because the trial was announced and held just days before the election, voters were warned that it was "useless" (*Straits Times* 1988a) to vote for Seow, who "if elected, would have to vacate his seat in December after his conviction for tax evasion" (Seow 1999, 116). In this case, not only was injustice created through manipulation of the legal system, but any conception of democracy, the most popular definition of which "equates it with regular elections, fairly conducted" (Schmitter and Karl 1991, 78), was circumvented by disadvantaging the opposition candidate. This clearly violates Dahl's 2nd polyarchic criterion of free and fair elections.

On the democratic merits of Singaporean courts, two other policies are notable. The first deals with the premise that "adequate economic monthly salaries payable to judges have long been recognized as a condition conducive to a free and independent judiciary" (Seow 1999, 118). But is there a point where this government stipend ceases to ensure judicial

integrity? Consider that in Singapore, high court judges receive S\$700,000 (about US\$380,000) per year plus a minimum bonus of three months' salary, besides the perks of a car and a government bungalow at economic rent (Seow 1999, 118). Compare this to the salaries of U.S. justices: Federal District Court Judges receive \$150,000/year, while the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is the highest paid at \$192,600/year (Walsh 2002, A8). As one lawyer asked, "is this kind of money a salary or an income of permanent bribery" (Glen How, QC, quoted in Seow 1999, 118)?

Another valid principle is that "courts in a democracy...should be accessible to all litigants" (Seow 1999, 119). However, this has not been the case in Singapore, ever since Chief Justice Yong imposed a graduated hearing fee scheme as a "fiscal measure" in 1991. "The courts," he said, "will have to be run as efficiently as the best businesses" (*Singapore Law Review* 1991, 16), and because court time is a scarce resource, it must be allocated efficiently. After one free day, a fee of S\$1,500/day is imposed in the high court, increasing to S\$3,000 per day after ten days (Seow 1999, 119). This clearly hurts the lower and middle classes' ability to both pursue litigation and defend themselves from it.

In short, Singaporean courts are no longer the check on arbitrary power that Lee described them as in 1967. Opposition candidates have been harassed in court, and not only were appeals to the Privy Council abolished, so was the democratic safeguard of trial by jury. Additionally, it's likely that the PAP's discretion over judges' salaries equates bribery. Finally, equal access to the courts has been denied to the lower and middle classes through the graduated fee scheme for time in court.

Additionally, there is an inconsistency between the PAP's extravagant salaries for high court justices and the need to charge litigants for court time. Given that both policies exist, it is inexplicable to claim that the courts simply do not have enough resources. If this were the case, resources could simply be reallocated from salaries to operating costs. But because justices continue to be paid so extravagantly while potential litigants are left without access to the courts, ulterior motives are likely at work. It is much easier to believe a scenario where the PAP has engineered the court system to serve its own interests; extravagant salaries and in-kind benefits provided to justices ensure that when PAP interests are on the line, decisions will be made in its favor. Additionally, charging for court access excludes poorer citizens from engaging in the legal process. Considering that minority groups (such as Singapore's Malay population) constitute a disproportionately large number of the lower and middle classes, policies such as this are further tainted because they serve to marginalize these already disempowered groups.

Thus, either one of two conclusions can be drawn. First, that the Singaporean government is using a standard (albeit a double standard) of economic efficiency in formulating the court hearing fee policy, and thereby placing justice (as the

product of a free and fair judicial system) second to financial considerations. A second possibility is that money is not really a factor, but merely an excuse for the PAP dominated government to further exclude marginalized groups from the political process. In either case, the result is the same: democratic ideals such as justice and fairness are subjugated to the will of the dominant party. Regardless, the court hearing fee scheme is only one part of a broader judicial policy formulated by the PAP to subjugate the court system to its will and use it as a tool to harass and undermine its perceived "enemies," whose only crime is opposing the dominant party (and not necessarily its ideology).

#### THE PAP'S DOMINANCE OF PARLIAMENT

"If I were in authority in Singapore indefinitely, without having to ask those who are governed whether they like what is being done, then I have not the slightest doubt that I could govern more effectively in their own interests."

Lee Kuan Yew, 1962 (Selvan 1990, 247)

I noted that the PAP retained complete control of parliament for the thirteen-year period between 1968-1981, when Jeyaretnam was elected. How was this dominance established? Beginning in 1965, citizens' consultative committees were set up in each electoral district, and though they were designed to be independent of party organization, they inevitably became organs of the PAP, "a means of supporting the party and attracting new blood to its ranks...they were sounding boards for public opinion, not vehicles for criticism or opposition" (Turnbull 1989, 308). With its monopoly of patronage and power, "the party could co-opt or neutralize potential dissenters" (Turnbull 1989, 307), and it was in this way that the PAP established its political hegemony. Additionally, "the power structure was extremely centralized...characterized by a top-down style" (LePoer 1991, 196), meaning that "power was gained through skill, performance, and demonstrated loyalty to the leaders and their policies" (LePoer 1991, 196). Therefore, once the PAP's political dominance was established, it would not be easily dislodged.

The Singaporean government likes to paint a more equitable picture of the distribution of power: in its official publication on Singapore (intended for foreigners and tourists), *Singapore Facts and Pictures* (1995), the government has a list of all 23 political parties that have been registered since the end of World War II. Lacking, however are any statistics on the number of MPs from each party, any note on the repression of certain parties (like the Barisan Sosialis), or an explanation of other matters that would clarify the actual political situation in Singapore.

This refusal to provide relevant political information might result from the PAP's idea that the general public need not involve themselves in politics, because the political elite can do the best job. In support of this idea, some claim that PAP candidates are given IQ and psychological tests intend-

ed to eliminate candidates who are not completely dedicated to the state (Clutterbuck 1984, 352). Regardless of this supposed political elitism, many steps were taken in the 1980s to change the structure of political representation in Singapore, or at least provide a façade of change. In reality, what did these policies accomplish?

**POLITICAL CHANGES SINCE THE 1980s.**

One of the first changes was a participatory initiative that allowed for non-constituency members of parliament (NCMPs) with restricted voting rights. This allowed up to six of the highest vote-getting opposition losers in the general election to participate in parliament. This was viewed as an attempt to ease tensions with opposition parties, while showing political tolerance (Rodan 1993, 84). Lee also said that having the NCMPs in parliament provided a means of dodging accusations of government corruption (Quah 1988, 142), because the NCMPs would be the scapegoat for any potential PAP failures.

In an important way, this does help democracy: opposition members are at least able to debate in parliament. However, without full voting rights, their input is ignored and their influence is negligible. What is more telling is that such a policy was needed in the first place. The NCMP policy would never have come about if opposition members were actually being elected to parliament. The fact is that they simply aren't.

**Table 2**  
**PAP Control of Parliament**

Parliament	63-68	68-72	72-76	76-80	80-84	84-88	88-91	91-96	97-01	01-
Total Seats	51	58	65	69	75	79	81	81	83	84
PAP	37	58	65	69	75	77	80	77	81	82
Opposition	14	0	0	0	0	2	1	4	2	2

Source: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2001, pg. 11

Ever since 1968, the PAP has maintained an overwhelming majority in parliament. However, 40 percent of the popular vote consistently goes to opposition candidates (Singapore does not have a proportional representation system, but rather a system of single-member constituency voting districts. This is not facially undemocratic, unless other corrupting influences are at work). NCMPs exist because 40 percent of voters are consistently being denied representation in parliament (Neher 1999, 51). However, they cannot replace actual elected representation.

Other measures summarily instituted include: the establishment of the Feedback Unit, a public opinion body designed to channel and address public grievances, in 1985. Town councils were introduced in 1986 to provide greater voice for the public. This was followed in 1987 by the introduction of Government Parliamentary Councils, which were

to review policy decisions made by parliament, but basically constituted a PAP rubber stamp for its own policies. All of these changes have the potential to open up and democratize governmental institutions, because they deal with giving a greater voice to the public in the decision making process, thereby increasing freedom of expression (Dahl's 5th criterion). However, these policies only have an impact if there are elected officials willing to act on this input. If there are no opposition MPs, no one will take action on behalf of the opposition. Conversely, the majority need not give its input because PAP MPs already command a supermajority beholden to no one. Thus, if there does exist any free exchange of ideas, a tyrannical majority makes this exchange pointless.

Most significantly, in 1988 the Group Representative Constituency (GRC) replaced Single Member Representative Constituencies (SMRC) in some voting districts, a move that combined 39 former SMRCs into 13 GRCs, each with three representatives that ran on a party ticket (amendments have since raised the number of MPs per GRC to 5-6). This move drew fire as an attempt to dilute the electoral clout of ethnic minorities (especially Malays), even though at least one member of each GRC must be of either Malay or Indian/Tamil descent.

According to Lily Zubaidah Rahim, this merely continues the history of political repression of Singapore's Malay community. She notes the development, beginning in 1963, when the PAP started an ambitious urban resettlement plan which "splintered the Malay electoral strongholds by dispersing the Malay community into the newly established public housing estates throughout the island" (Rahim 1998, 74). Through the enforcement of ethnic population quotas, the Malay community remained scattered until the mid-1980s, when they began to congregate once more in the east-coast districts of Bedok and Eunos.

This trend gained the PAP's attention in the 1988 election, when the ethnic Malay opposition received 45 percent of the total vote in Bedok, and 49.1 percent in Eunos (Straits Times 1988b). The PAP had two solutions for this: first, establishing housing quotas that prohibited "racial enclaves." The injustice and hypocrisy of this policy is clear: "by this logic, a block which has 87 percent Chinese residents is not a racial enclave but a block which has 26 percent Malay residents is a racial enclave" (Tremewan 1994, 66). The second solution was the aforementioned GRC: predominantly Malay voting districts such as Eunos, Bedok, and Kampong Kembangan were consolidated into three different GRCs, forcing the Chinese community to dilute the electoral strength of the Malay community (Rahim 1998, 78).

The question remains, is this democratic? For Schmitter and Karl (1991, 79), "successful democracies tend to qualify the central principle of majority rule in order to protect minority rights," and it is clear that minority rights were violated. Further, "the most common way of protecting minorities...lies in the everyday operation of interest associations



and social movements" (Schmitter and Karl 1991, 79). When the government outlawed the consolidation of the Malay community, it killed a truly grassroots, interest-based movement. In addition, realizing that "dominant political forces are more inclined to negotiate, make concessions, and are generally more accommodating to a minority community when it is lobbying from a position of political strength" (Baker 1983, 41), the principle of governmental accountability is gutted when a group's electoral power is gerrymandered away. A final note on the effectiveness of GRCs in eliminating political opposition: no opposition party has successfully contested the PAP in a GRC district (Rahim 1998, 79; National Democratic Institute for International Affairs 2001, 11).

This discussion brings up the case of Jeyaretnam mentioned earlier. Schmitter and Karl outline another principle of democratic elections: "In a democracy, representatives must at least informally agree that those who win greater electoral support or influence over policy will not use their temporary superiority to bar the losers from taking office or exerting influence in the future" (1991, 82). But this is exactly what the PAP did – refusing the legitimacy of Jeyaretnam's victory, and resorting to litigation to keep him out of power.

In defense of the PAP's political hegemony, Lee Kuan Yew has argued that strong opposition parties are not essential to democracy and in fact promote disharmony (Neher 1999, 45). Prime Minister Goh considers a two-party system "idealistic," and argues that Singapore should be controlled by one strong party, with "many small parties to keep us on our toes" (Ibrahim 1992, 20). The PAP strives constantly to maintain power, resorting even to economic intimidation: during the 1997 campaign, Goh upgraded the traditional PAP campaign threat of withholding government-funded improvements from opposition constituencies. He went so far as to threaten that those districts that did not vote PAP "might become 'slums'" (Haas 1999, 33).

Other questionable tactics have been used. As a parliamentary democracy, the Prime Minister can dissolve the government at any time and call for a new election. This provision was manipulated in the 2001 election to give the PAP an advantage in the parliamentary elections. PM Goh called for new elections on 18 October 2001, 10 months before the five-year parliamentary term was up. He announced that the elections would take place on 3 November, leaving only 16 days for preparation. Additionally, Goh allowed only nine official campaign days during this period, conferring a substantial advantage on the incumbent PAP MPs because they needed less preparation time, whereas opposition candidates were caught unawares (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs 2001, 6). Partly because of the short preparation time and partly because there just aren't many qualified opposition candidates, the four opposition parties contested only 29 of the 84 parliamentary seats (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs 2001, 5). In the end, they won only two.

It is indisputable that the PAP's political dominance is not merely the outcome of an impartial democratic process. Rather, the party uses every means at its disposal, regardless of the apparent injustice, to maintain its stranglehold on power. Elections are not fairly conducted (as the experiences of Jeyaretnam and Seow, as well as the 2001 election illustrate) violating Dahl's 2nd criterion. Given the PAP's treatment of opposition candidates, it would be highly dubious to say that Singapore meets Dahl's 4th criterion of the right to run for office. For if the PAP is interfering in campaigns, thereby keeping candidates from running or even being considered, this standard is not actually being met. The 5th criterion of free expression is not being met, because not all citizens are being heard, let alone represented, while people like Jeyaretnam and Seow have been punished for their merely expressing their views. Lastly, developments in the representative sphere have denied Dahl's 7th criterion of associational autonomy. Another facet of PAP policy that ensures continued dominance is the denial of basic civil liberties.

#### DOMINATION OF THE PRESS AND OTHER CIVIL LIBERTIES

"Is this an open, or is this a closed society? Is it a society where men can preach ideas...where there is a constant contest for men's hearts and minds on the basis of what is right, of what is just, of what is in the national interest, or is it a closed society [in which] men's minds are fed with a constant drone of sycophantic support for a particular orthodox political philosophy?...If your ideas, your views cannot stand the challenge of criticism then they are too fragile and not sturdy enough to last...I am talking of the principle of the open society, open debate; ideas, not intimidation; persuasion not coercion..."

Lee Kuan Yew, 1964 (Davies 1999, 80)

"I will hit you where it hurts. Then we will see your commitment to a free press."

Lee Kuan Yew, 1985 (Davies 1999, 78) in a discussion on targeting the finances of owners and publishers

Lee's thoughts on the role of the press have clearly devolved over the years. Most would argue that this has led to a non-democratic press in Singapore: two of Dahl's seven procedural minimum conditions for modern representative democracy deal with the existence of a free press (#5 – freedom of expression, and #6 – alternative information). According to Dahl, a free press consists of citizens having the right to "express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined," and to "seek out alternative sources of information," where these "alternative sources of information exist and are protected by laws" (Dahl 1989, 221). Singapore does not qualify under these criteria.

The government began to infringe on the press in 1974, with the Newspapers and Printing Presses Act (NPPA), which increased governmental supervision. The NPPA was given tangible power by a 1977 amendment that "forbade any individual to hold more than 3 percent of a newspaper's ordinary shares" (Davies 1999, 88). The idea is that shares in the

paper are divided into two types, ordinary and management. When all newspapers were forced to go public, private parties invested in ordinary shares while the government invested in management shares. The result was less control for the individual owner and more control for the PAP, which now had a voice on the board of directors, meaning that “subversive” material would not be published. However, there are other ways in which the press is controlled.

Lee forced the two main Chinese-language newspapers (*Nanyang Siang Pau* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh*) to merge, forming a new English-language paper, the *Singapore Monitor*, to challenge the sometimes critical *Straits Times* (Davies 1991, 89). The PAP also appointed one of its members, S.R. Nathan (former boss of Security and Intelligence at the Ministry of Defense), as the chair of the Straits Times Group, effectively curtailing its sovereignty in making publishing decisions (Davies 1991, 90). Afterwards, “Lee ordained more deaths and reincarnations,” by closing papers, opening new ones, and combining existing papers to create media holding companies (Davies 1991, 90).

Restrictions on the foreign press were introduced as well. A 1986 amendment to the NPPA allowed the government to control the inflow of foreign journalism (Perry et al. 1997, 64), and at one time or another, *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, the *Economist*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Asiaweek*, the *London Financial Times*, and others have been either subject to quotas or banned outright (Davies 1991, 91-103).

These foreign publications enjoyed huge popularity because “the dull and lifeless Singaporean media rarely debated important issues...but reproduced official handouts. The sad fact was that foreign publications sold well in Singapore because Singaporeans read them not merely to know what was going on in the world or the region, but also to find out what was really happening in Singapore itself” (Davies 1991, 97). As one Singaporean reporter noted, “faced with good-news stories about the ruling party, no matter how journalistically justified and truthful, readers are incredulous, thinking they are being served propaganda and that something is being concealed from them” (George 1992, 111). Predictably, the PAP has an entirely different conception of the press; for Lee, the media’s role is “to inform people of government policies,” rather than to question these policies (Loong, 1990, 2).

One story in particular demonstrates the attitude of the Singaporean government on civil liberties. The Internal Security Act, which had been used to kill the writ of habeas corpus in the 1970s, was invoked in May 1987 to arrest a group of 22 activists whom the government characterized as a Marxist network (Turnbull 1989, 322). Those arrested were mainly Catholic church leaders and dramatists. *Asiaweek* (mentioned above) was restricted because it reported that Singaporean leaders had used questionable tactics (i.e. abuse, sleep deprivation, prolonged interrogation, threats, and torture) to get confessions out of the detainees (Davies 1999,

97). It was later discovered that the reason the activists were there in the first place was to help Filipina maids who were themselves being tortured, activity for which the U.S. State Department’s annual review of human rights violations had cited Singapore.

Dahl’s free expression and associational autonomy criteria (#5 and #7) are simply not met in Singapore. Singapore’s Public Entertainment Act outlaws public speaking unless it is 1) at a government-sponsored meeting, or 2) one has obtained a permit from the police. These requirements undoubtedly have a chilling effect on speech. Additionally, any public meeting of five or more requires a police permit. Further, most associations with more than ten members must register with the government under the Societies Act. This act also restricts political activity to registered political parties only, meaning that other interest groups are not allowed to lobby or speak out on political matters (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs 2001, 15-16). Clearly then, rights to free speech, assembly and protest are not protected in Singapore – a situation leaders justify by appealing to economic criteria. PM Goh argues that allowing civil liberties would jeopardize prosperity, saying “if you have...demonstrations, right away the impression is created that government is not in control of the situation – that the place may become unstable. That will have an impact on foreign investors” (Sesser 1992, 57). Thus, political freedom is being sacrificed on the altar of economic prosperity.

Civil liberties, generally considered as a necessary condition for a democratic government, either do not exist in Singapore, or exist in name and not in essence. The PAP has subjugated press, speech, assembly, protest and free association rights to the point of extinction. Through the Internal Security Act, the writ of habeas corpus has been killed, meaning prisoners can be detained for no reason at all (or on some vacuous claim of “national security”). Clearly, in the western conception of polyarchic liberal democracy, Singapore does not measure up.

#### THE PAP’S SOCIAL ENGINEERING OF THE SINGAPOREAN POLITY

“I am often accused of interfering in the private lives of citizens. Yet, if I did not...we wouldn’t be here today. And I say without the slightest remorse, that we wouldn’t be here, we would not have made economic progress, if we had not intervened on very personal matters – who your neighbor is, how you live, the noise you make, how you spit, or what language you use. We decide what is right. Never mind what the people think. That’s another problem.”

Lee Kuan Yew, 1986 (Tremewan 1994, 2)

One last area of policy that unmasks the PAP’s commitment to economic growth at the expense of democratic pluralism is that of social engineering. As Singapore gained a solid footing in the 1980s, the PAP began to concentrate less on physical survival and more on cultural survival. There was a percep-

tion that as Singaporeans became more affluent, their moral sensibilities would be corrupted by the “excessive individualism fostered by Western culture,” which was seen by PAP leaders as the cause of the decline of Western societies (LePoer 1991, 203).

“Looking ahead, senior leaders identified two major dangers to the nation: the failure of the nation to reproduce itself and the loss of national identity” (LePoer 1991, 203). As mentioned earlier, birth rates had steadily dropped since the 1970s, especially among Singapore’s best educated citizens, because many had forsaken marriage and family in order to promote their careers. In response, the government provided “material incentives for giving birth to third and fourth children,” in addition to singling out female university graduates “because of their failure...to marry and pass on their supposedly superior genes” (LePoer 1991, 204).

Lee was a staunch believer that talent was “for the most part genetically determined” (Tamney 1996, 76), and this provided the rationale for Singapore’s institutionalized eugenics. Beginning in 1983, the government gave a cash grant to poorer and less educated parents who agreed to be sterilized. Understandably, this policy received harsh criticism, and few individuals actually volunteered, leading the PAP to discontinue this policy in 1985 (Tamney 1996, 76).

On the second problem of Singapore’s national identity, public policy was designed to defend “positive traditional Asian values against the perceived threat from Western culture,” which the PAP considers hedonistic, radically individualistic, and self-destructive (LePoer 1991, 204). This meant emphasizing “Asian values,” Asian languages and promoting ethical Confucianism. In concise terms, this implies a “commitment to education and family loyalty, and a quiescent attitude to authoritarian rule,” where the government takes on a paternalistic role in guiding societal development (*Economist* 1995, 38). According to Lee, a Confucianist view of social hierarchies speeds societal transformation: as a citizen, “you fit yourself into society—the exact opposite of the American rights of the individual” (*Economist* 1995, 39).

It is likely that the biggest motivation for the push towards Asian values/Confucianism was “to shift support for a national ideology into support for the...PAP” (LePoer 1991, 204). It served as a convenient means of convincing citizens to voluntarily subjugate their personal interests to the PAP’s societal goals. In the end, this social engineering has deleterious effects on the social fabric: because “Singapore’s harmony is an illusion based on the suppression of dissent,” critical social processes such as debate and negotiation never take place (Tamney 1995, 66). This creates a society where “conservatism and respect for authority become rigidity and an inability to innovate,” because citizens’ democratic faculties are never exercised (*Economist* 1998, 23). In the end, “much-vaunted educational achievements” are reduced to “rote-learning and a refusal to question those in authority” (*Economist* 1998, 23).

In sum, the PAP has demonstrated institutionalized dis-

dain for the poorer and less-educated segments of society, and because of other PAP policies that have provided less financial and educational resources to minority groups, these intrinsically elitist eugenics policies are also tinged with institutionalized racism. On face, state-sponsored eugenics/racism is offensive to any regime that values democratic pluralism and diversity. The injustice is so glaringly obvious that even the PAP recanted after only a short time.

Additionally, the government’s attempt to control the public through the propagation of a submissive civil religion has the same deleterious effects. Diversity, in terms of a plurality of religious/ethical groups has been diminished. And one of the most crucial elements of any democracy, the willingness of the people to question the legitimacy of those in power, has suffered through the government’s paternalistic attitude towards their supposedly inept subjects. Not only does democracy not exist in Singapore, but the government is actively working to undermine any type of civil society that could give rise to democracy in the future.

Thus, the PAP has sacrificed pluralism in order to promote predictability, towards the end of an improved economy. The attempt to imbue society with Asian values only weakens the few democratic instincts that Singaporeans have left, leading to societal conformity and stagnation.

## CONCLUSIONS

When ranking Singapore against the criteria of Dahl’s polyarchy, democracy is non-existent. Of Dahl’s seven procedural minimum conditions for modern representative democracy, Singapore meets only two. That Singapore has elected officials (1) and universal suffrage (3) hardly qualifies the regime as a democracy either procedurally or substantively. The criteria which the government does not meet are: the lack of free and fair elections (2), an incomplete right to run for office (4), no freedom of expression (5), no sources of alternative information about the regime (6), and a complete lack of associational autonomy (7). Keeping in mind that all seven of these conditions are necessary but not sufficient for a truly democratic regime, the judgement that Singapore is not only undemocratic but antidemocratic seems obvious. There are countless other factors which go beyond these minimum conditions to show how the PAP leadership doesn’t possess democratic sensibilities, and how this treatment of the populace diminishes the chances that democracy will develop anytime soon.

For Robert Dahl, the central premise of guardianship is that it is “preposterous” to assume “that ordinary people can be counted on to understand and defend their own interests – much less the interests of the larger society” (Dahl 1989, 52). The PAP falls squarely within this definition. It claims that “important issues do not embody value conflicts,” justifying public input, “but that the main decisions to be made are technical ones” (Tamney 1995, 73), and as such, only government leaders “who...possess specialized empirical knowl-

edge" (Dahl 1989, 67) should make these "technical" public policy decisions.

Dahl's guardian makes judgements about trade-offs between different values. For example, "high wages versus international competitiveness, savings versus consumption, short-run gains versus long-run gains," etc. (Dahl 1989, 75). The PAP takes this responsibility upon itself when it subjugates political openness to a stable economic environment. What then, is the conflict between the PAP's guardianship and true democracy? The key is that in the case of Singapore, absolute authority is not exactly delegated to the PAP. While elections used to serve as a vote of confidence in the PAP, after decades of political manipulation, the legitimate authority to rule has been alienated from democratic safeguards (Dahl 1989, 76). This is tantamount to a usurpation of governmental authority by a group of totalitarian elites who exercise paternalistic control over the Singaporean people.

This trend should be rejected, because just as paternalism in individual decisions stunts individual moral capacity, so too does guardianship in government "stunt the development of the moral capacities of an entire people" (Dahl 1989, 78-9). From Joseph Tamney (1995, 65), "in Singapore democratic formalities, such as elections, do not indicate the existence of a democratic society. The absence of an independent civil society, the Government's refusal to recognize human rights, and the climate of fear are far more accurate clues to the actual conditions."

To reiterate, the PAP government has constantly prioritized a stable economic environment over political openness. Given the vital role foreign investment has played in the development of a viable Singaporean state, this should not come as a surprise. It was through great efforts of the early PAP that a favorable investment climate was established, which brought in foreign direct investment and ensured Singapore's political existence by virtue of its economic importance. Indeed, in the years following independence, opposition groups like the Barisan Sosialis did present a tangible threat to Singapore, making it easier to rationalize political repression. However, as of the 1980s, international norms had recognized the permanence of Singapore as a vital economic center, and thus the PAP's undemocratic attitudes seem misguided. So real democracy doesn't exist, but what are the prospects for the future?

PM Goh has declared that Singaporeans have "rejected a Western-style liberal democracy and freedoms," that of "putting individual rights over that of society" (Haas 2000, 34). However, Singapore's increasingly affluent citizens are frustrated by the conflict between the state's goals and their quest for a better life, the marvelous progress made by the PAP notwithstanding. "Modern Singaporeans are drawn toward democracy because they are alienated by puppeteer politicians and because they want greater control over their lives" (Tamney 1995, 77). What, then, is the alternative?

Possibly, if Singapore's purpose is strictly economic, then

this development can continue without government coercion of the populace. "Democratization in itself threatens only the reign of the PAP and not the ruling ideas of the dominant ideology: growth and order. The opposition parties accept the importance of economic development and social order...thus democracy no longer threatens the business elite" (Tamney 1995, 82). As long as there are no immediate threats to Singapore's economy, the leaders may eventually accept a larger degree of political rights for the public and the opposition, and in the end they might realize that political participation is not the threat to economic prosperity that they have understood it to be. However, if the political elite fail to realize this, then only a reversal of current trends and a revitalization of civil society will catalyze the development of true democracy in Singapore.

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