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Singapore 'Exceptionalism'?
Authoritarian Rule and State Transformation

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ABSTRACT

The capacity of the People's Action Party (PAP) of Singapore to continually reproduce an authoritarian regime stands in sharp contrast with the situation in Taiwan and South Korea. Yet there is nothing theoretically exceptional to this case. Singapore's political institutions, as elsewhere, are the product of dynamic social and political interests, conflicts and coalitions. However, analysis must not only take account of how various interests and coalitions relate to the state, but also how they may be embodied in the state, or selectively excluded from it. Processes of state transformation are integral to the analysis of political regimes and associated institutions. The durability of Singapore's authoritarian regime owes much to the mutual transformation of state and party that availed the PAP of new instruments and bases of power. The pervasive social and economic roles assumed by the PAP state have undermined the basis for independent, oppositional political coalitions to emerge. Importantly, the regime is not without ongoing tensions and contradictions and has undergone significant political change over time. Thus, rather than asking why democracy has not arrived in Singapore, the question is what direction political change has taken and why? The approach taken here has general implications for the understanding of the prospects and nature of political transitions.

INTRODUCTION

In sharp contrast with the experiences of Taiwan and South Korea, the erosion of authoritarian rule has not accompanied capitalist development in Singapore over recent decades. On the contrary, while democratic transitions in the former countries have forced former ruling elites to adapt to party-political competition, the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore has adapted the political system to increasingly insulate itself from effective competition. Given its origins in the emerging political pluralism and competitive party politics of the 1950s, the PAP's consolidated power monopoly appears all the more exceptional.

In *The Third Wave*, Samuel Huntington looked to leadership as the missing ingredient to explain the absence of democracy in Singapore. So favourable were the preconditions, according to Huntington (1991: 108), that 'a political leader far less skilled than Lee Kuan Yew could have produced democracy in Singapore'. Underdeveloped as this observation was, it nevertheless resonated with the more sustained analysis by transition theorists on the role of elites and the politics of bargaining in the determination of regimes (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). However, with the collapse of so many authoritarian regimes, attempts to theorise the consolidation of democratic transformations have dominated the literature. Here the importance of institutions and their effects on political actors has received considerable attention (Diamond 1999, Diamond et al. 1997), with increasing focus now on the quality of democracy in emerging democracies. This research agenda seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of political institutions against values and principles of democracy – including the accountability and responsiveness of governments, and political expression and participation by voters and citizens (Powell 2004, 2000; Beetham 2004a, 2004b; Altman and Pérez-Liñán 2002; Schmitter 2004).[1] Meanwhile, the political regime in Singapore has been consigned to the 'hybrid regime' category, described as a 'stable semi-democracy' (Case 2002). However, this residual category does not so much explain the regime in Singapore as accord it – and other apparently exceptional cases – greater respect for demonstrated durability.

The analysis of political institutions, then, has been an increasingly thematic and important feature of these different phases of modernisation and transition theory. Yet if the Singapore case continues to confound, this may have less to do with Singapore exceptionalism and more to do with the limits of prevailing institutional analysis and the questions driving it thus far. In particular, preoccupation with identifying the pressure points that will ultimately deliver the transition to democracy,

and its consolidation thereafter, has diverted analysis from identifying and evaluating the form and significance of political change within authoritarian regimes. Despite its continued reproduction, the authoritarian regime in Singapore is not devoid of tensions and contradictions that require management. Indeed, constant refinements are undertaken precisely for that reason. Thus, instead of asking why democracy has not arrived in Singapore, the question should be: what direction has political change taken in Singapore and how do we explain this?

Political institutions in Singapore and elsewhere are the product of dynamic social and political conflicts and coalitions. Attempts to relate political institutions to broader state-society relations involving dynamic coalitions of interest take us a significant way towards a framework for capturing this (Pempel 1990, 1998). However, it is no less important to analyse the respects in which various interests and coalitions are embodied in the state, or selectively excluded from it (Robison & Hadiz 2004). In this approach, processes of state transformation are integral to the analysis of political regimes and associated institutions. This includes, but goes beyond, examination of the social bases of political parties and how the exercise of state power influences their electoral fortunes. It invites broader consideration of how the state is constituted to protect and advance certain interests, and a locating of the role of parties and political institutions within this broader analysis.

Why, then, has the PAP been able to respond to pressures and challenges accompanying capitalist development so successfully, whereas counterpart parties in Taiwan and South Korea were found wanting? The answer resides in significant part in the very transformation of the state itself. Singapore's political elites consolidated their hold on power by dismantling the old party structures and methods of electoral mobilisation in favour of a merger of party and state. This mutual transformation of the state and party availed the PAP of new instruments and bases of power. Moreover, the pervasive social and economic roles assumed by the PAP state have undermined the basis for independent, oppositional political coalitions to emerge, in spite of the dramatic socio-economic transformations that have occurred.

In Taiwan and South Korea, from the 1980s, private capitalists became assertive in trying to break the economic dominance of the state (Koo 1993, Chu 1994). This did not, of itself, generate pressure for democracy, but it represented an arena for conflict over state power that could be exploited by various democratic forces – sometimes in coalition with independent private business interests (Bellin 2000). However, in Singapore the PAP contained and circumscribed the domestic

bourgeoisie's development as a matter of political strategy, since it suspected links in the early 1960s between elements of this class and oppositionists (Rodan 1989: 98). The statutory boards and government-linked-companies (GLCs) supplanting much of the domestic bourgeoisie's role have fundamentally defined Singapore's political economy. Through them various forms of social and economic dependence on the state have been cultivated, translating into the political vulnerability of domestic business and citizens alike.

The institutionalisation of official ideology championing state political paternalism and the role of technocratic policy elites, at the expense of ideas of representation and citizenship rights, is a further factor in effective regime reproduction. The persuasiveness of such ideology has also been enhanced by material improvements experienced by Singaporeans under PAP rule, rising inequalities of late notwithstanding.

Crucially, though, regime reproduction in Singapore has been a dynamic process. Contemporary refinements to the political regime are two-pronged: shoring-up the systematic obstruction of genuine political competition; and, where possible, co-opting new social forces to PAP-controlled institutions and values. Recourse to security laws to detain critics and opponents has long been replaced by intimidation through the courts, clever use of administrative law, and assorted legislation to constrain collective political action. Meanwhile, a host of creative institutional initiatives have been introduced to give substance to PAP rhetoric about opening up avenues for political expression and consensus.

However, through such 'opening up' it is not the political space of civil society but that of the PAP state that is expanding.[2] Ironically, even if political participation is on the increase, political pluralism is not. New forms of political participation exclude collective, independent attempts to challenge the PAP. A liberal civil society requires a liberal state to institutionally support a sphere for independent political contestation over the exercise of state power (Rodan 1996; Held 1987, 1989; Keane 1988). In the absence of such state support, including support for party political competition, associational life can become an alternative to politics (Berman 1997: 426-7). In Singapore, new forms of political participation and engagement are indeed being championed by the state as an alternative to a liberal civil society and polity.

In elaborating on the above points, the following discussion identifies and analyses different phases in the transformation of the state and associated coalitions

and the implications for political institutions. These phases do not involve neat, mutually exclusive periods of political change, but they do represent significant qualitative shifts and tendencies characterising the dynamics of the authoritarian regime.

The first involves the emergence of a state party, which supersedes the party's previous organisational importance in mobilising political support and acting as a conduit between social groups and the state. This transformation entails a middle class PAP elite not only deploying crude means of political repression through the state apparatus, but also the cultivation of broad electoral appeal through social and economic policies harnessing state powers. In the second phase, beginning from around the early-mid 1980s, more technocratic, administrative and legalistic techniques and ideologies of state political repression and co-option emerge. These new instruments of control reflect a change in the class character of the PAP itself as state capitalism takes firm root and the party's structures are refined to service the reproduction of a technocratic elite. The final section of the paper examines emerging tensions between state capitalism and neoliberal globalisation since the late 1990s. Whether these tensions presage a third phase in transformation in the way the PAP is organised within the state is too early to ascertain, but there are new challenges that will at least further test the capacity of existing institutions and ideologies.

FROM PARTY TO STATE PARTY

The PAP was a marriage in 1954 of temporary political convenience, born out of the struggle for independence. On the one hand it comprised the well-organised leftist and nationalist grassroots organisations, whose socialist rhetoric and inclusion of communists alarmed colonial authorities and other elements of the Singapore establishment.[3] On the other hand, the PAP involved English-educated middle class nationalists such as Lee Kuan Yew and a number of others who shared membership of a 1949 discussion club of Malayan students in London known as the Malayan Forum (Yeo 1973: 117). Lee's faction recognised that leftist and radical leaders had an indispensable capacity for mobilising mass electoral support through their organisations. The leftists, by contrast, reasoned that with Lee and his comparatively moderate cohorts providing the public face of the party, the risk of proscription of their organizations and personal intimidation would be lessened. The problem in this strategy for the leftists was that the executive of the PAP was for the time being largely controlled by Lee's faction. The incumbents exploited this advantage to

reform the party structure to further centralise power in their hands before the 1959 election for self-government. This included the requirement that cadre members – the only category of members who could elect the Central Executive Committee (CEC) – had to be approved by the CEC (Turnbull 1982: 266).

From the outset of government, there were internal tensions to the PAP.[4] Ultimately, though, it was the issue of merger with Malaya that brought factional differences to a head. Given the right-wing political complexion of the Federal government in Kuala Lumpur, the left feared the prospect of security swoops that could obliterate their organisational bases, especially within the trade unions. After the Malayan Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, publicly mooted merger in May 1961, the two factions were on a collision path that finally resolved itself in July 1961 with the breakaway faction forming a new party – the *Barisan Sosialis* (BS), or Socialist Front. Along with this new party went the vast grassroots organisational structures and community leadership that had been so important to the PAP's electoral success in 1959. Lee and his English-educated middle class faction may have suddenly enjoyed an uncontested supremacy within the PAP, but it remained to be seen if and how the PAP could achieve its electoral survival.

Building the State Party

The essence of the PAP's short-term response to this dilemma was to simply harass and intimidate its opponents and to set about dismantling their social and organisational bases within civil society. The trade union movement was a prime target but journalists, student leaders and others felt the heat. The most dramatic instance of this was through the use of the security forces in what was code-named 'Operation Cold Store'. In this particular swoop in 1963, 111 people were arrested by Special Branch under the Internal Security Act (ISA), legislation inherited by the British and giving authorities the power of detention without trial.[5] This decimated the BS leadership. There were numerous other periodic arrests under the ISA that received little or no publicity.

Sustained pressure was applied thereafter to further whittle away the viability of the Singapore Association of Trade Unions (SATU) and militant independent trade unions generally (Deyo 1981). Measures were also taken to neutralise universities as institutions through which academics and students could challenge the PAP (Puccetti 1972).[6] The political logic behind these and other forms of intimidation was crystallised in refinements in 1967 to another piece of legislation inherited from the

British, the Societies Act. This now barred 'political' engagement by organisations not registered with the Registrar of Societies for that specific purpose. In effect, this deemed pressure groups illegal and enforced a channelling of all political challenges through electoral politics. But the suppression of an independent civil society also robbed opposition parties of their social foundations and ability to develop policy programmes drawing on them. The PAP was blatantly trying to limit the risk of elections for it.

However, the PAP was by no means hostile to the concept of social organisation. On the contrary, it wanted to replace independent grassroots organisations and structures with those that it controlled. This was part of a broader project of corporatist institution building that was facilitated by a fusion of party and state instrumentalities at least as important as the emasculation of civil society.

As soon as the split occurred, the PAP rapidly transformed the relationship between the party and public bureaucracies. Policy formation was now completely removed from any wider party organization and instead became the total preserve of the PAP executive in consultation with senior civil servants (Bellows 1973: 28-9). Lee's faction had already endeared itself to these people by dissolving the City Council resulting in a transfer of power to the civil service. The political conservatism of relatively privileged English-educated upper echelon civil servants also meant that they were sympathetic to Lee's faction in the ensuing political struggle. The PAP exploited new appointments to entrench political control over the state apparatus. Indeed, over time – as the state-party nexus deepened – the upper echelons of the civil service became the predominant route to political leadership (Worthington 2003).

With a politicised public bureaucracy in place, grassroots parapolitical state institutions such as the People's Associations, Community Centres and Citizens' Consultative Committees (CCCs) – all linked to the Prime Minister's Office – became avenues through which support for the PAP could be fostered and party ideology disseminated (Seah 1973, Pang 1971). State-owned media also became critical arms of party propaganda in the turbulent 1960s. However, the single-most important achievement in state-sponsored forms of social organisation involved the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) that was affiliated with the PAP.

The NTUC became a pivotal institution in the implementation of the PAP's policies and the mobilisation of party support. In effect, the PAP fostered a political 'coalition', of a sort, with strategic elements of the working class through this structure. Yet it had to be serviced by way of material benefits to the working class –

something the PAP did not feel comfortable leaving entirely to market forces. Thus it introduced the tripartite National Wages Council (NWC) in 1972, which not only afforded the government a significant degree of influence over wages but also brought capital into corporatist arrangements. Additionally, the government significantly increased the compulsory contributions to the national superannuation scheme – the Central Provident Fund (CPF) – it had inherited from the British. This involved no contributions from government, yet it gave the government considerable capacity to shape production costs and consumption patterns as well as providing a ready source of capital for state infrastructure development.

Developmental State, Welfare and Political Paternalism

The PAP recognised early that without substantial improvements in the social and economic conditions of Singaporeans no amount of repression or ideological rhetoric could guarantee power. After all, it had promoted the idea of a trade-off between political liberty and economic and social development – a social contract, in effect. Consequently, expansive social and economic roles by the state included major public investments in education and public housing even before the export-oriented industrialisation (EOI) programme took off in the late 1960s, in an attempt to shore up electoral support from the working class.

Significantly, though, from inception, many public investments were administered in a paternalistic fashion that also happened to avail the PAP of a capacity for extensive social control and engineering – especially as this involved housing (Tremewan 1994, Chua 1991). The percentage of the population housed by the state rose dramatically. This not only brought with it a host of conditions and limits on how property could be used (Chan 2005). It also enabled the PAP to harness estate development and resettlement programmes during the 1960s and 1970s to the exercise of diluting the electoral impact of political opposition – notably by politically fragmenting the working class as an independent force, especially as it involved ethnic Malays (Rahim 2001: 74-5).

The state's economic role was decisively bolstered both by the roles of the bureaucracy and state instrumentalities in the provision of infrastructure supporting the EOI programme and in direct investment. The latter was initially justified as necessary in view of the under-developed nature of the domestic bourgeoisie in manufacturing and the urgency of the economic problem. However, one of the greatest political achievements of the PAP was to translate the heavy dependence on

the delivery of services through bureaucracies and state instrumentalities that were indistinguishable from the PAP into an electoral advantage: improvements in social and economic conditions were more easily identified as outcomes of PAP rule.

Importantly, the new set of power relations that blurred the distinction between the ruling party and the machinery of the state was accompanied by a variety of ideological rationales. Arguments about the security vulnerability of city-states, the special circumstances of Singapore's multiculturalism, economic uncertainty and others were submitted in defence of a powerful, organic state and in opposition to political pluralism (Leifer 2000).[7]

Elections and the Party

Yet in contrast with many authoritarian regimes elsewhere, in Singapore elections were retained and viewed as functional for the purposes of political legitimacy. Their retention also reflected the specific historical circumstances out of which the party came to power, a process in which the PAP – at least in its original incarnation – championed the case for free elections. The PAP's English-educated, middle class leaders may have emasculated political pluralism, but they have also continually sought to rationalise such a condition and insist – especially to international audiences – that electoral competition is free and fair. Such defensiveness about the regime persists among present day leaders, who are no less anxious than their predecessors about keeping the myth of political competition alive.

In phase one, then, the PAP as a party was radically transformed. It would be misleading and simplistic to depict this as the replacement of a mass party by a state party. After all, from the outset, the PAP's cadre system placed limits on the influence of ordinary members (whose membership was not automatic either) over the election of office bearers and policy formation. Even before the 1959 elections, Lee's faction was also effective in reforming the party to further undermine democratic principles of internal party accountability. Nevertheless, party membership, branches and affiliated grassroots networks were at that time still fundamental to the PAP's strategies of electoral mobilisation and for this reason they had to be nurtured.

After the split, though, state-based institutions largely supplanted party structures, leaving branches with minimal functions, resources or status within the PAP. With no say in the choice of candidates or government policy, the role of branches was primarily reduced to assisting candidates in local campaigns during election time. Indeed, one of the PAP's senior figures, S. Rajaratnam, declared as

early as 1969 that the party no longer played a significant role in Singapore's political system (Mauzy and Milne 2002: 49). In place of the party – and indeed parliament – ideas and policies were now principally exchanged between political and bureaucratic elites within the state. As we have seen, this included strategies and structures to manage and mobilise social groups for political purposes. Significantly, this ruling coalition excluded the domestic bourgeoisie. Indeed, it was founded on the notion of supplanting it.

TECHNOCRATIC CLASS, TECHNOCRATIC CONTROLS

Substantial as political change had been, during the 1980s, the so-called 'Old Guard' leaders were progressively replaced by leaders lacking conventional political skills or experience of oratory, organisation, and mobilisation, but who were imbued with technical or managerial skills functional to the economic interests of the party state. This was not simply the triumph of political elitism for its own sake, nor simply the luxury of a de facto one-party state that had obliterated opposition. Rather, it was symptomatic of the heightened structural importance of statutory bodies and GLCs to Singapore's political economy.

Instead of abating once Singapore's industrialisation strategy took off largely under the aegis of international capital, GLCs and statutory bodies were to dominate the commanding heights of the domestic economy (Low 1998). Moreover, state control over vast amounts of capital became heavily concentrated through interlocking directorships and other arrangements that gave the political executive considerable direct or indirect power over investments affecting the domestic economy (Worthington 2003, Hamilton-Hart 2000). A virtual class of state capitalists had been created, and now its consolidation and reproduction assumed priority for the PAP. Ironically, initiatives towards this objective extended to modifications in party structures to assist with the identification and co-option of technocrats.

It was in this context that a new emphasis on legal and administrative means of curbing political opponents emerged. The harnessing of institutions historically associated with liberal democracy towards authoritarian ends has been a hallmark of the regime's increasing sophistication. From the 1980s onwards this came to assume a growing importance, as legal and administrative techniques were developed to consolidate the one-party state. This gathered momentum after adverse international reaction to the ISA arrest in 1987 of 22 social activists (Asia Watch 1989).[8]

Meanwhile, Singapore's leaders were anxious about the possible political implications of the accelerating social pluralism accompanying the city-state's rapid economic transformation. They were keen to pre-empt any translation of this dynamic into pressures for a genuinely independent civil society through which the PAP's absolute political control could be challenged – a view only reinforced with the advent of political liberalisations elsewhere in the region and beyond where capitalist revolutions had also affected major social transformations. Accordingly, the PAP embarked on a series of creative, pre-emptive institutional initiatives meant to steer change in Singapore down a preferred path of political co-option rather than political contestation. This led to new forms of political participation and related ideological discourse emphasising political consensus.

Class and Party

The conscious phasing out of Old Guard leaders may have been apparent in 1976 when the first wave of 'second generation' leaders was recruited and boasted a strong emphasis on technocrats. However, during the 1980s this gathered rapid momentum, starting with the PAP's decision in 1980 to retire some 11 MPs. In 1984, a further 24 second generation recruits soon translated into their overall numerical dominance in parliament, cabinet and the CEC. Indeed, by 1988, Lee Kuan Yew was the sole remaining Old Guard member of cabinet (Mauzy and Milne 2002: 45).

In the process, the criteria for selecting candidates and the social strata represented in the party had significantly narrowed. Credentials that were once valued – such as an ethnic Chinese education and/or an ability to communicate with and mobilise grassroots organisations – were not important now. Instead, a university degree and a track record of professional excellence was a minimal prerequisite. Thus, whereas the 1976 cabinet included three journalists and a party professional, by the end of the 1980s the PAP leadership at all levels had strikingly similar socio-economic characteristics and lack of previous involvement in political activity. This narrowing of the profile of the party leadership, incidentally, was entirely consistent with the further integration of the PAP state. Accordingly, from the mid-1980s, the PAP began incorporating military elites into the party, civil service and GLCs (Mauzy and Milne 2002: 44-8).[9] In effect, while the coalition between political and bureaucratic elites remained the basis of the political regime, the internal complexion of that coalition underwent some refinement during this phase.

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However, the comprehensive takeover of the party by technocrats did not occur without a measure of internal resistance and resentment. Part of the deeper institutionalisation of technocratic dominance over the party state included the so-called 'cross fertilisation' between the NTUC and PAP, beginning in the late 1970s. This involved both increased representation of the PAP within the NTUC as well as the appointment of Lim Chee Onn as NTUC secretary-general in 1979. However, in April 1983, Lim was dismissed by Lee Kuan Yew, who acknowledged the depth of discontent within the NTUC in declaring that: 'the process of meshing in scholars and professionals with rank-and-file union leaders was not progressing well' (quoted in Leung 1983). This was something of a last hoorah for the Old Guard and their ilk in resisting the tide of change. After all, another technocrat, former architect and second generation leader Ong Teng Cheong, was quickly appointed to replace Lim.[10] Meanwhile, the intermeshing of technocrats within the NTUC and the state gathered momentum, with some 18 NTUC appointments to statutory boards and other state economic enterprises by 1980 (Mauzy and Milne 2002: 31).

Predictably, the hollowing out of party organisation and its diminished importance drove membership down. Yet in the attempt to enhance the capacity to identify and socialise suitable technocrats, there were initiatives in phase two of the regime towards adapting party organisation to that end. This was not a revival of the party structures and influences so much as their further subordination to centrally determined goals.

Goh Chok Tong, as First Secretary-General of the PAP, instigated the first significant steps in this direction during the mid-1980s. This involved the establishment of the PAP Youth Wing, which included all party members between the ages of 17 and 35 years. However, by 1993 this membership was actually declining and a new attempt was made to boost membership. Re-named Young PAP, it opened up to those up to 40 years of age and sharpened its target on professionals and recent university graduates. Towards this objective, a Policy Studies Group was formally established to enable members to engage in policy discussion. YP members were also given a brief to surf the Internet to defend and advance the views and interests of the PAP in cyberspace. However, none of these changes compromised the highly centralised control over the party. They were instead designed to enhance the party's capacity to expose prospective MPs and ministers to grassroots experience and socialisation (Henson 1993, Worthington 2003: 29-30). By 1999, 20 per cent of the PAP's 81 MPs had been members of YP (Mauzy and Milne 2002: 41-2), a

development that helped shore up – not threaten – the stranglehold of the technocrats on the PAP. Meanwhile, though, new candidates continued to be parachuted in at pre-selection time from outside the party, but generally from within the state or the broader PAP establishment.

Legal and Administrative Controls

As the character of the PAP changed with this absolute control exerted by technocrats, so too did the techniques of political control. From the mid-1980s, the legal system became pivotal to the political persecution of the PAP's most formidable opponents and to the intimidation of the international and independent media. This has been accompanied by the increasing use of administrative law and associated legislation to indirectly narrow the grounds and avenues for political contest, and to empower bureaucrats to greatly complicate lawful political competition. In effect, rule by law has replaced rule of law (Jayasuriya 1999, Tremewan 1994).[11]

The structural conditions under which the Singapore judiciary operates provide channels through which political influence can be exerted. This includes the granting of short-term appointments to the Supreme Court that may or may not be renewed at the government's discretion and the potential for untenured lower court judges to be transferred between judicial and government service (Tremewan 1994: 193).[12] The office of judicial commissioner in the Supreme Court is similarly untenured and the political executive can dismiss judicial commissioners. The strategic appointment of chief justices is another avenue. More generally, as Worthington (2002: 498) observes, 'the structure and nature of the Singaporean judiciary is such that it is clearly under what is effectively a sovereign executive which, exercising power through the Attorney-General, the Legal Services Commission, the legislature, the presidency or the Chief Justice, can control appointments to and dismissals from the courts'. His study of appointments to the Supreme Court since 1987 documents the frequent use of temporary appointments, the appointment of career civil servants with close ties to the government, and even the appointment of PAP cadre members and other close affiliates of the PAP (Worthington 2002: 498-500). The active discouragement of a professional judiciary within the subordinate courts also serves to ensure that these courts adopt the 'characteristics of the civil service including implicit support for the political executive and its power arrangement' (Worthington 2002: 497).

The widespread exclusion of judicial review for either administrative decisions or the decisions of the political executive is another crucial technique that blunts the potential use of the courts to scrutinise or restrain the exercise of power by the political executive. Yet another opportunity exists to limit the likelihood of the courts being harnessed to challenge or embarrass the ruling party through the judgements of the police and public prosecutors, who have the discretion to decide whether or not to proceed with cases for prosecution (Worthington 2002: 513).

Although Lee Kuan Yew had begun taking legal actions against opponents and critics in the 1970s, from the mid-1980s the damages awarded by the courts started to dramatically escalate. By the 1990s, other members of the PAP had begun to follow Lee's example too.[13]

Since the mid-1980s, the international media have also been the targets of a string of punitive court actions and have operated under tightened legal limits. These methods have supplanted the expulsion of journalists as a means of discouraging critical reporting. Amendments to the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act in 1986 have been central to this. They gave the Minister for Communications and Information the capacity to restrict the circulation of foreign publications deemed, by the Minister, to be engaging in domestic politics. A series of actions soon followed in which the government's assertion of the right to unedited replies to critical articles was a dominant theme. Defamation, contempt of court and other actions have also been brought against guest opinion piece writers and journalists, with publishers, distributors and printers all getting caught up in damages claims. More so than the hefty fines involved, though, costly losses of access to circulation and advertising markets have succeeded in foreign publishers reconciling themselves to a more cautious and circumspect reporting of Singapore affairs (Seow 1998, Rodan 2004).

Meanwhile, existing and new laws covering the administrative processes of political engagement have been applied to further impair the activities of party political opponents. These vary, but include a wide range of laws and regulations covering the licenses and permits required for public rallies,[14] the dissemination of political materials and other matters. So effective has this been that in early 1999, a frustrated Chee Soon Juan deliberately breached the Public Entertainment Licensing Act to highlight the problems. Chee made public speeches in the heart of Singapore's central business district without first obtaining the necessary permit, but insisted he was doing no more than exercising his constitutional right to free speech. He pointed out that he and his party's past compliance with licensing requirements had resulted in

a host of conditions that effectively obstructed his law-abiding attempts to engage with the public. Chee was also arrested in May 2002 for trying to hold a May Day rally outside the presidential palace, the Istana, without a permit. Chee's application for a permit had earlier been rejected. Both arrests resulted in his imprisonment.

Importantly, the new emphasis on legal and administrative controls from the mid-1980s was possible because the state-party fusion now embodied a vast network of informal political connections and appointments (see Worthington 2003). Indeed, this is part of the reason why Lee Kuan Yew could stand down as Prime Minister in 1989 and still exert considerable political influence within the state. In any case, through informal networks, political repression could now take more indirect and sophisticated forms, with the hand of the political leadership less conspicuous in the process.

Increasing Political Participation

Meanwhile, there have been other initiatives to more overtly extend the political reach of the state – initiatives not so much meant to block opponents and critics as to develop new political institutions consistent with the one-party state. Insistence on the retention of a virtual one-party state was to increasingly be accompanied by rhetoric about consultation and initiatives at political co-option meant to obviate the need for more elected opposition MPs, or an independent civil society. This new strategy was informed by an understanding that Singapore's dramatic economic and social development had the potential to translate into pressures for political change – a PAP view that crystallised following a 13 per cent swing against the PAP in the 1984 general election, but was subsequently reinforced by democratic transitions in Taiwan and South Korea (Rodan 1993).

In the context of rapid capitalist development, two different tensions symptomatic of the existing authoritarian regime were discernible. One involved the contradiction between the official elitist technocratic ideology that heralded meritocracy, and the dearth of opportunities for so many middle class professionals to play a political role. The other, and much more significant force behind the electoral shift, concerned the inability of corporatist labour unions – or any other organisations under state sponsorship – to adequately represent the concerns of the less privileged to government, especially as this related to rising material inequalities.

One of the first measures taken by the PAP to increase this sort of non-competitive political space was the establishment in 1985 of the Feedback Unit. This

extra-parliamentary body within the Ministry of Community Development receives input from the public on policy issues, both through open forums and via direct correspondence. The introduction of Government Parliamentary Committees (GPCs) in 1987 was more specifically designed to incorporate professionals with specific policy expertise into the political process. The following year, the creation of a think tank, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), was similarly meant to serve as a non-partisan avenue for work on public policy issues. In addition to these moves, a wide range of individuals has also been co-opted onto various public sector committees of inquiry. However, the most significant initiative was the amendment to the Constitution in 1990 to create a new category of parliamentarians – nominated MPs (NMPs). This was meant not just to absorb professionals and other middle class elements, but a wider range of interests.

Initially this provided for up to six MPs, each for a potentially renewable two-year term and with limited voting rights. This was extended to up to nine MPs following the 1997 election. The President makes NMP appointments on the advice of a special select committee decided by the PAP-dominated parliament. Rhetorically, the initial emphasis was on the way in which such a system could draw on talented individuals and people with specialist expertise. However, from the outset the appointments were in fact weighted towards functional representation of discrete interests, including of domestic business, labour, women's and ethnic organisations. This implicitly recognised the inadequacy of existing structures of political representation. The concept of functional representation was subsequently explicitly acknowledged and is increasingly being broadened to include a range of professional organisations and other interests (Ng 1999).

Significantly, individuals from emerging, non-government organisations (NGOs) – such as the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) and the Association of Muslim Professions (AMP) – were among the early NMP appointments. This was against the background of some cautious but not insignificant steps from the late 1980s towards a measure of social activism by these and a few other independent organisations, including the Malayan Nature Society (renamed the Nature Society of Singapore in 1992). The political moderation of these groups, most of which were characterised by middle class leadership and membership, was not so much a concern for the PAP as the fact that they were genuinely independent. Through the NMP scheme they were encouraged to take their politics down a non-partisan path through a PAP-controlled institution.

This new range of structures for political co-option was accompanied by adjustments to state ideology. A new cultural rationale for authoritarian rule thus emerged via the notion of 'Asian values', the timing of which coincided with the rising economic status of China. A central theme of Asian values was the idea that liberalism was characterised by institutionalised friction and conflict. This was supposedly alien to Asians, whose cultural traditions predisposed them to consensus politics (Zakaria 1994, Mahbubani 1995). Political institutions for ascertaining consensus, though, were conspicuously absent in authoritarian Singapore (Chua 1995). As Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong thus fuelled anticipation that under his leadership there would be more opportunities for consultation and involvement in the political process. Consensus rhetoric had the added value for Goh of product differentiation from his predecessor, Lee Kuan Yew.

However, over time, the ideological utility of linking these structures to ideas about Asian values diminished. For one thing, the government's critics at home and abroad were never persuaded that the Asian values concept was anything more than an attempt to dismiss legitimate opposition to the PAP. But the concept also suffered from the onset of the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 when the 'Asian way' became too closely associated with corruption and economic mismanagement. In this context, the ideological emphasis shifted towards the articulation of particular notions of civic engagement that favoured non-competitive politics.

This new conceptualisation of state-society relations by the PAP first manifested itself in detailed form in the government's *Singapore 21* vision statement, released in April 1999. The central theme to this parliamentary committee report was the need to complete the process of nation building and the prescription of a social and political model that more effectively incorporates citizens into public life. The loose model contained in the report emphasised the partnership between government, the private sector and the people. The instrumental nature of this 'partnership' was most explicitly explained *vis-à-vis* the discussion of 'civic groups' and how they could be harnessed to the national interest. The encouragement of 'active citizenship' by the government had little to do with the acknowledgement of any rights to involvement in public decision-making by Singaporeans. It had much more to do with the purported technical benefits of wider expertise being drawn on to help the government develop its policy, and the political benefits in terms of regime stability of people having a sense of involvement in the policy process.

As Prime Minister, Goh emphasised that it was those with good knowledge of a subject who could help form policy that were principally being invited into the political process (Chua 1999). Goh (quoted in Chua 1999) further explained that 'While Singaporeans will have more space for political debate, it does not mean that the Government is vacating the arena'. He added that those without a 'hidden agenda' need not fear rebuttals from the Government, but those out to undermine the Government or wrest political control from the ruling party can expect 'an extremely robust' response (quoted in Chua 1999).[15] There have been attempts by organisations and individuals to try and test and exploit PAP rhetoric about the need for a more consultative and inclusive politics. However, these have been easily snuffed out or pose little threat to the PAP's political hegemony.[16]

Refinements to the authoritarian regime in this phase have thus not just involved the attempt to restrict political competition to a narrow sphere, severed from civil society. They have also involved the creation of new avenues for political participation and an ideology that champions the avoidance of political competition altogether.

STATE CAPITALISM AND NEOLIBERAL GLOBALISATION

Although the second phase in the transformation of the state is arguably still in train, since the 1997-98 Asian crisis, economic restructuring has been promoted through a fuller PAP embrace of neoliberal globalisation. This is generating new tensions, while compounding others. First, there has been unprecedented critical scrutiny from elements and champions of international capital of GLCs, economic governance regimes and state capitalism more generally in Singapore. The diverse and internationalising interests of state capital also pose new challenges for centralised control over the party state. Second, greater exposure to global market forces for the domestic workforce is accentuating strains on the existing social contract and broadening the arenas of potential social conflict.

In succeeding Goh Chok Tong as prime minister in 2004, Lee Hsien Loong recognised that refinements to political structures and ideologies are required to reproduce the PAP state in a rapidly changing economic and social environment. In his swearing in speech, Lee declared that: 'Our people should feel free to express diverse views, pursue unconventional ideas, or simply be different. We should have

the confidence to engage in robust debate, so as to understand our problems, conceive fresh solutions, and open up new spaces' (Lee 2004a). However, he has been clear on the conditional nature of the spaces he intends to open up. Reviving a concept PAP colleague George Yeo adopted in the 1990s, Lee projected that: 'The Government will therefore continue to do its utmost to build a civic society' (Lee 2004b). Unlike 'civil society', this does not entertain independent organisations engaging in political acts, but the building up of social organisations functional for the fine-tuning of, and cooperation with, the government's policy agenda. Moreover, where there is 'criticism that scores political points and undermines the government's standing', he warned oppositionists that 'the Government has to rebut or even demolish them, or lose its moral authority' (Lee 2004b).

In effect, the PAP is trying to develop multifaceted forms of political co-option in trying to pre-empt the emergence of independent political spaces. The key question for the medium to longer term is whether this proves an adequate response to the tensions discussed here, or whether those tensions create the need or opportunity for new coalitions within or beyond the PAP state that might lay the basis for quite different political institutions?

GLCs, Globalization and Governance

By the early 1990s the PAP government was emphasising the strategic importance of the 'external economy' to the city-state's future. This direction was impossible to disentangle from the interests of the PAP state, since the state holding company Temasek and the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC) were principally leading this offshore investment drive.[17] The advent of the Asian economic crisis only bolstered the government's view that Singapore's continued success in a rapidly globalising economy necessitated a lead role for GLCs. In 1999, Prime Minister Goh emphasised the importance of developing 'world-class Singapore companies' to transform Singapore 'from a regional economy to a first-world economy' (Goh 1999). He also acknowledged that the successful globalising of the Singapore economy would necessitate 'strategic alliances or mergers with other players' (Goh 1999). The PAP thus committed itself to reforms to both attract external investments in high-technology processes and knowledge-based industries and enhance the capacity of GLCs to compete in the global market place.

With the simultaneous pursuit of these two goals, a new chapter in the political economy of contemporary Singapore has been opened – especially in the relations between the state and international capital. One dimension of this is the increasingly institutionalised and specialised nature of state-business consultative mechanisms.[18] Another dimension, however, was the emergence of criticism of state capitalism and GLC dominance from elements of the international business community – something that was conspicuously absent in previous decades. Calls to prise open more of the domestic market, to avail the private sector of increased access to national savings controlled by the state, and/or to remove impediments to a level playing field have gathered momentum within sections of the international business community. International fund managers, business executives, financial and business journalists and the International Monetary Fund have been among the reform advocates (Rodan 2004a, Lian 2000).[19]

Significantly, critical attention has extended to the intermeshing of political and bureaucratic elites and its implications for governance and regulatory regimes in Singapore. The appointment of Ho Ching – wife of the then Deputy Prime Minister and head of the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), Lee Hsien Loong – to the executive directorship of Temasek in 2001 has been among the issues arousing concern.[20] Negotiations over the United States-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (USSFTA) during 2001-2002 also included critical attention to regulatory and governance regimes in Singapore as well as market access issues.[21] The final version of USSFTA incorporated market access concessions for select U.S. banks, insurance companies, and other service industries (see Rodan 2004b). It also incorporated a range of commitments to improve the transparency and independence of decisions by regulatory authorities and a commitment to establish a Competition Commission.[22] However, the exact form and timing of some of these commitments was imprecise, meaning that further contention on such issues may yet resurface. Under Singapore Competition Act which came into effect in 2005, for example, key sectors dominated by GLCs and statutory bodies – such as telecommunications, media, postal services, transport, power generation, water and waste management – are exempted from its scope.

Another significant by-product of the expansion and internationalisation of state capital is the threat this poses to the capacity of the political executive to exert control through formal institutions of power. Worthington's (2003) path-breaking study of state enterprises has empirically detailed what is now a diverse and complex

set of interests within the state. Yet when he interprets the increasing intra-state friction that this has translated into as evidence of five discernible PAP factions (Worthington 2003: 238), Worthington overstates internal PAP differences and misses a more profound structural development in Singapore's political economy. That is, the national and international accumulation strategies of the different fractions of state capital are inevitably generating competing interests and more diverse centres of power within the state. The contentiousness of the Monetary Authority of Singapore's exchange rate policies, on which interests in the manufacturing and non-tradeable sectors seriously disagree (Teo 2004), is but one recent illustration of how difficult it has become to simultaneously satisfy all the different interests of state capitalism. Moreover, increasingly specialised relationships between statutory bodies, GLCs and civil service departments commensurate with the dynamics of state capitalism is at the very least complicating the political executive's central control over state power.

In the second phase of Singapore's state transformation, the political executive forged a tight political coalition with the bureaucratic elite. The risk for the PAP could now be that the dynamics of state capitalism will fragment political power within the state so that different, if not competing, centres of power will emerge.

Moreover, given the functional relationship between Singapore's brand of state capitalism and the PAP's capacity for social and political controls, sustained critical attention to the developmental state and associated governance systems is potentially serious for the authoritarian regime. What matters is whether international capital is primarily seeking a greater share of the domestic market, and adjusting regulatory regimes to facilitate this, or whether there will emerge a concerted attempt to challenge the strategic control of GLCs and statutory bodies over the domestic economy.

If the former proves the case, selective reforms towards greater economic liberalism at home might accompany an intensified international accumulation strategy by GLCs,[23] neither of which necessarily enhances the prospects of new coalitions in opposition to authoritarian rule. However, if the latter were to transpire, the room for manoeuvre without injury to the underpinnings of political paternalism would be limited. Neither the creation of proxy state capitalists as per the Malaysian model, nor the substantial privatisation of state companies can deliver anything like the current levels of social and political control that the PAP state affords.

Economic Restructuring, Social Contract and Political Consensus

Since the early 1990s, there has been an increasingly unequal distribution of material rewards associated with Singapore's economic development. Between 1990 and 1997, for instance, Singapore's bottom 10 per cent of households suffered an average income decline of 1.8 per cent while all other households, to differing degrees, experienced increases (*Straits Times* 2000).[24] However, the Asian crisis and the fuller embrace of globalisation have bolstered this trend. Cuts and restraint in 1998–99, for example, meant wage costs were reduced by 5.8 per cent and the relative unit labour costs fell a dramatic 19 per cent, taking them back to 1990–91 levels (Ng 2000). Subsequently, rising structural unemployment has been joined by reforms to link wages more directly to market forces and productivity. GLCs retrenching workers have also generated consternation among employees and officials within the NTUC (Tan and Chia 2003).

It is in this context that NTUC Secretary-General Lim Boon Heng has called for a 'new compact' whereby employers accept greater responsibility for boosting employee skill levels to cope with a changing economy, in return for which workers must cooperate in the ushering in of wage flexibility and productivity-based measures (*Straits Times* 2004). This does not mean that the now acutely technocratic leadership of the PAP is indifferent to the plight of the needy. Indeed, in the 2006 budget a S$2.6 billion Progress Package of benefits was announced, skewed in favour of lower-income Singaporeans (Koh and Kwek 2006). However, the emphasis is very much on promoting 'self-help' and the preservation of a paternalistic political relationship, and certainly not an acknowledgement of any rights that the disadvantaged have to a claim on the state. The embrace of neoliberalism and its attendant ideology has also been functional for extending the PAP's promotion of the CPF system for increased private provision for education and health services (Asher 2004). Yet the rationalisation of the state's welfare role has to be balanced against the need to also preserve state dependence. Threats at the last two general elections by the PAP to discriminate in public housing services and infrastructure provision against electorates that support opposition candidates underline that the flip side of state paternalism remains state intimidation (Chin 1997, Restall 2001).[25]

Thus far, the dominant theme to the political initiatives by the PAP to manage conflict emanating from the heightened, selective embrace of neoliberal globalisation has been the refinement and extension of previous techniques of control and cooption, rather than radically new measures. Updating the controls over media has been a

thematic aspect of the former, to ensure that the capacity for mobilisation of critical opinion and opposition to the PAP does not benefit from new technologies.[26] Amendments to the Parliamentary Elections Act in 2001 have effectively superimposed on the Internet the spirit of the Societies Act. They bar websites that are not registered as political organisations from political promotion or campaigning during elections. The use of mass email messages containing political advocacy by individuals is also potentially under scrutiny, to prevent such messages circumventing the restrictions on organisations. In 2001 the Singapore Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill also brought foreign broadcasters into line with regulations for printed media, barring them from 'interference in domestic politics'.[27]

A Political Donations Act also came into effect in 2001 requiring public record of donors giving more than S$5,000 in a financial year. In itself, this constitutes improved political transparency (Koh 2001). However, in a context where fear of political persecution is high, the legislation represents additional intimidation that could hinder the opposition's already meagre fund raising capacity.

At the ideological level, the new PAP 'consensus politics' has become increasingly central to the PAP's attempts to try and pre-empt and manage the conflict emanating from neoliberal globalisation. This was especially evident in the deliberations and report of the Remaking Singapore Committee – a broad 'review of social, political and cultural policies, programmes and practices' premised on the notion that Singaporeans need to 'meet the challenges arising from our economic restructuring and the stresses on our various social faultlines' (Remaking Singapore Committee 2003). The Committee consulted a wide range of Singaporean individuals and organisations inside and outside the city-state.

The final report contained as many as 74 recommendations, of which the government accepted 60. This included measures to simplify registration by social groups – a change that did not extend to political discussion and activist groups. Indeed, the most profound statement of political direction to be found in this document is in the appendix, which identifies proposals without consensus and therefore not incorporated into the Committee's recommendations. These included: changes to defamation laws to enhance free speech; liberalisation of the media to improve the range and accessibility of information; and changes to the political playing field, including that electoral boundaries be announced a reasonable time in advance of elections and that a transparent process of redrawing electoral boundaries be introduced by an independent electoral commission.

CONCLUSION

The analysis above emphasises that the merging of state and party has been paramount in defining and sustaining the authoritarian regime in Singapore. This did not come about by mere political will, but was the product of complex historical forces and conjunctures. The analysis also emphasises that the PAP state has been constantly refined to enable the regime to effectively anticipate, accommodate and even shape pressures for political reform. This has not just involved increasingly sophisticated measures to block political opponents and critics, but also creative measures to expand the political space of the state through new forms of political cooption. So far, this has enabled the high degree of relative political autonomy of the state to be effectively reproduced without the need to cultivate new political coalitions with emerging social forces. Part of the reason for that is that the PAP's own policies have ensured that neither a powerful domestic bourgeoisie, nor any other independent social force, has emerged. In other words, the nature of the state and the related functioning of political institutions is rooted in Singapore's political economy.

From the theoretical perspective taken in this essay, there is nothing exceptional to the explanation for Singapore's political journey under the PAP, even if it departs significantly from the pattern elsewhere in the region. Indeed, we could ask why ruling political elites in Taiwan and South Korea did not affect a reconstitution of state power as in Singapore to pre-empt engagement with competitive party politics? Answering that question not only requires analysis of the dynamic conflicts and coalitions shaping state-society relations, but also how states are constituted as a result of these dynamics.

Any prospect of democratic political institutions in Singapore rests on a conjuncture of forces that have a material interest and political will in transforming the state. The argument here is not to dismiss this as a possibility at some point in the future, but to instead emphasise that analytical priority should be given to understanding the nature and determinants of political change in Singapore. That exercise suggests that other forms of political change are more likely in the foreseeable future – a point that is instructive for the study of political regime dynamics everywhere.

NOTES

* My thanks to Kanishka Jayasuriya and Edward Friedman for their constructive criticisms and comments on a previous draft of this paper.

[1] The relative merits of presidential and parliamentary systems, majoritarian and proportional electoral systems, and different constitutions and forms of rule of law are among the issues thus far considered in this literature. See Powell (2000), Stokes (2001) and O'Donnell (2004), for example.

[2] Civil society involves not just collective independent action by voluntary groups, but political activity by those groups. On this basis, we can distinguish between mere social activity and genuine civil society activity. Civil society thus necessarily involves political competition (see Ehrenberg 1999).

[3] Key figures among these groups were Fong Swee Suan and Lim Chin Siong, respectively the General-Secretaries of the Singapore Bus Workers' Union (SBWU) and the Singapore Factory and Shop Workers' Union (SFSWU) – the most significant of the radical unions known as the 'Middle Road Group'.

[4] Initial disappointments by the left included such issues as the government's attempts at the curtailment of industrial action and wage restraint, Chinese education policy, as well as delays in the release of political prisoners. The announcement of *The State Development Plan, 1961-64* that championed the private sector and emphasised the need for industrial conditions to suit capital's needs also strained the relationship.

[5] Those arrested included 24 BS executives, 50 executives of thirteen trade unions affiliated to the Singapore Association of Trade Unions (SATU) sympathetic to the BS, five left-wing journalists and eleven Nanyang University students.

[6] The appointment of Deputy Prime Minister Toh Chin Chye as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Singapore dispensed with any pretence that government should be at arms length from this institution.

[7] This 'administrative state' was depicted as an apolitical state of affairs and one in which powerful elites were a matter of technical necessity for good government (Chan 1975). It was a deeply elitist and normative view that defined away political contention as menacing and a threat to 'nation building'. Such ideology conveniently left the PAP in the exclusive position of deciding the values guiding this nation building.

[8] Those arrested were allegedly engaged in a 'Marxist conspiracy' to bring down the state. This appears to have been the last time the ISA was used to apprehend activity associated with domestic politics. The next arrests were in 2001 and involved suspected terrorists (*AFP* 2002).

[9] The fact that Lee Kuan Yew adapted the psychological tests employed by Shell in the selection of its executives for the purposes of evaluating political suitability in candidate and ministerial selections further underlines the technocratic values pervading the PAP. See Lee (2000: 741).

[10] According to Mauzy and Milne (2002: 45), what was remarkable about Lim's case was not that there was resistance, but that Lim proved incapable of containing it.

[11] Incidentally, just as the PAP did not abandon the electoral process, nor did it abandon the constitutional process. On the contrary, it had endorsed recommendations of a 1966 Constitutional Commission including rights to freedom of speech, assembly and association, religious freedoms and freedom of movement. However, since constitutional amendments could be passed by a simple majority of parliament – later modified in 1979 to require a two-thirds majority (Thio 1997: 102) – the PAP's parliamentary supremacy meant that it could change the Constitution at will. Furthermore, the actual assertion by citizens of the rights spelt out in the Constitution ultimately rested on the interpretation of the Constitution by the courts.

[12] In 1986 Senior District Judge Michael Khoo was suddenly transferred to the Attorney General's chambers following his acquittal of J.B. Jeyaretnam on all but one charge brought against him. For further details of how this decision was reversed see Seow 1999.

[13] The political career of J.B. Jayaretnam – the Workers' Party MP who broke the PAP's parliamentary monopoly in 1981 – is testament to the magnitude and ultimate effectiveness of this technique. After scores of legal actions in which he has had to pay more than US$900,000, he was finally declared a bankrupt in 2001 following default on a defamation payout. This rendered him ineligible for parliament (Lydgate 2003). Much of his political life in the last decade had been preoccupied with the task of raising the funds to stay out of jail, diverting energy from productive political activities. Two of the opposition's other most combative figures in recent times, Workers' Party candidate at the 1997 election Tang Liang Hong and the SDP's Secretary-General Chee Soon Juan, have also been hit with massive writs. Tang, for example, was sued for US$2.9 million following his accusations that Prime Minister Goh and ten other PAP MPs had lied by referring to him as 'anti-Christian' and a 'dangerous Chinese chauvinist'. In another case against Chee, arising out of the 2001 election, both Goh and Lee Kuan Yew filed for aggravated damages for alleged defamation after Chee raised questions about a government loan offer to Indonesia, which it turned out had not proceeded (Ahmad 2001).

[14] To illustrate one of the problems this poses, the Singapore Democratic Party had to cancel a planned rally in August 2001 for which approval came only four days before the event was scheduled. The application had been made more than five weeks earlier. See *AFP* 2001.

[15] A similar theme had been expressed in late 1994 when Goh dealt forcefully with novelist Catherine Lim for her critical public comments of his government. At that time it was explained that there were limits to the political space Goh was expanding and that periodically the government might need to react in ways that clarified the 'out of-bounds' markers (or 'OB' markers as they quickly became known in the local political discourse) defining that space.

[16] One interesting case of PAP rhetoric overtly used to substantiate the need for political change involved the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP). In 2000 it revived its challenge to the monopoly right of *Mendaki* – the PAP-dominated council for the development of the Muslim community – to represent Malays. It suggested there be a 'collective leadership' comprising 'independent non-political' Malays to break the supremacy of government MPs – aspirations presented as consistent with the spirit of 'active citizenship'. The proposal prompted a stern rebuke from Prime Minister Goh who warned the AMP against straying into the 'political arena'. After a protracted dispute (Siti 2000), the AMP finally publicly announced that it 'never had any desire to step into the political arena' and challenge *Mendaki* (Ahmad 2000).

[17] By 2003, Temasek owned S$180 billion (or nearly US$110 billion) in assets and had an investment portfolio estimated at about S$90 billion (Temasek Holdings 2004). Through the GIC, whose Board Lee Kuan Yew has continued to chair, huge amounts of public funds were also invested abroad.

[18] The establishment in 1998, for example, of the International Advisory Panel (IAP) and the Financial Centre Advisory Group (FCAG) brought the MAS and heads of major international finance companies into comparable structures to those earlier fostered with manufacturing capital (Rodan 2004a: 62).

[19] Singapore's recession in 2001 – its worst since independence in 1965 – was also seized on by these reform advocates.

[20] In early 2002, email circulation to international journalists of a document under the pseudonym 'Tan Boon Seng' that reflected wider concerns. It provided an in-depth listing of the extensive interests in GLCs held by present and former cabinet ministers and their relatives; active and retired senior military personnel; and serving and former members of the PAP (see Tan 2002). This exercise was an intrinsically political act, presumably seeking to embarrass the government into reforming aspects of the developmental state and associated power structures.

[21] During the same period, a FTA was also negotiated with Australia and this too involved some contention over governance regimes in Singapore. See Rodan 2004b for details.

[22] Major additional commitments by the Singapore government in the USSFTA included, first, to divest its interests in SingTel and Singapore Technologies Telemedia and, second, to provide annual information to the United States on Singapore government enterprises with substantial revenues or assets.

[23] Temasek has declared that it expects one-third of its investment portfolio over the next 10 years to be within Singapore, another third in the rest of Asia and the remainder in OECD and other countries (Temasek Holding 2004: 12).

[24] Even the Department of Statistics' chief statistician, Paul Chueng, conceded: 'We are observing the beginning of a trend of increasing income disparity in Singapore and the gap may remain' (quoted in *STWE* 3 June 2000:1).

[25] In the 2001 election campaign, then Prime Minister Goh complemented the threats by promising the upgrading of flats in those individual precincts within the opposition constituency of Potong Pasir where more than half of the voters supported the PAP. This promise was delivered on. See *Straits Times Interactive* (2006).

[26] Since the mid-1990s, extensive regulations and prohibitions on the use of the Internet have been introduced. This includes the requirement for websites that propagate, promote or discuss political issues relating to Singapore to register with the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) and abide by its content and other regulations. If authorities can't stop the passage of information and views on the Internet, they intend to hold to account the authors and facilitators of messages that transgress established standards in other media. The technical capacity for surveillance through government-owned Internet service providers, demonstrated in incidents in 1996 and 1999 (see Rodan 2000), also encourages caution in the use of this medium.

[27] The amendment made true a threat by former Information Minister George Yeo in 1999. This followed cable television coverage of Singapore Democratic Party's Chee Soon Juan, who had attracted attention after being jailed for speaking in a public place without a permit. Yeo declared that before the next election measures were necessary to limit the capacity for foreign television stations to be utilised by government critics.

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