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NOTES ON THREE GROWING FORCES AMONG SINGAPORE CHINESE:

POLITICAL PARTIES, STUDENTS, AND WORKERS

A Report from A. Doak Barnett

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This year, for the first time, party politics have come to life in Singapore. Previously, although there were a few elective positions in the colony's Legislative Council and City Council, these bodies had appointed majorities and exercised only advisory powers. As long as Singapore remained a typical colony, there was very little incentive for people to be interested in local politics. A few men, notably a small group of Indian and European intellectuals and some of the "Straits Chinese," played at the game of politics, but it was little more than a game, and the local rules required use of the English language. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Chinese-speaking majority was largely indifferent. That is not to say, however, that the Chinese were nonpolitical. A small group of revolutionaries supported the Malayan Communist Party (the language of communism in Singapore and Malaya, incidentally, is Chinese), and the large majority of the Chinese in the colony directed their political interest and energy either toward affairs within the Chinese community or toward the Kuomintang-Chinese Communist rivalry which reflected politics in the homeland.

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POLITICAL PARTIES

This situation began to change as soon as steps toward partial self-rule were taken, and it became clear that local political parties might be able to exercise considerable real power. Even though some of the rules of the game were not yet altered, and knowledge of the English language was still required for all candidates for election to the new representative body, a sizable number of Chinese, including the traditional community leaders, decided it was time for them to enter the arena of local politics.

The new representative body was the logical outgrowth

of a series of steps taken by the British since the end of World War II. It is in accordance with their basic decision to grant Singapore and Malaya first self-rule and then, at some still unspecified future date, complete independence.

When Singapore was constituted a separate colony in March 1946 (before the war it had been joined with two other colonies in the Straits settlements), provision was made for a Legislative Council of 22 members. It was decided, however, that only nine of the representatives were to be "elected," three by the Chinese, Indian and European Chambers of Commerce, and six by registered voters. When registration of voters took place in 1947, only 25,000 people took the trouble to get their names on the register, so that the March 1948 election aroused little interest. By the time the second election was held in March 1951, the number of "elected" members (including three from the Chambers of Commerce) had been raised to 12, the total membership had been raised to 25, and the registered electorate had risen to 43,000 (of whom only 25,000 actually voted). Throughout this period, the Council's functions were purely advisory.

Three years ago, in July 1952, the Legislative Council set up a committee to consider increasing the number of elected members, and its report, made in February of the following year, recommended doubling the number from nine to eighteen. Five months later, on July 21, 1953, a major step was taken when it was announced that a commission would be appointed to carry out a "comprehensive review" of Singapore's constitutional position. The Rendel Commission, consisting of eight Legislative Council members and a chairman brought out from England, worked on the assumption that the party system of politics should be fostered and that the active electorate should increase its existing roll of registered voters--which even by this time amounted to only 70,000.

The Rendel Commission published its report on February 25, 1954. It was decided that a "bold step" and a "calculated risk" should be taken, and the report recommended formation of a new Legislative Assembly with an elective majority of 25, out of a total of 32 seats. The Assembly would be authorized to choose a responsible Council of Ministers, with six portfolios for elected Legislative Assembly members and three reserved to "official" members of the government. Instead of voluntary registration, the plan proposed that any British citizen (including local-born or naturalized persons) aged 21 or over should automatically be placed on the voters' list. English remained the only official language, however, so candidates for election still had to be English-speaking. These recommendations were accepted, and Singapore prepared to cross "the watershed from the colonial type of government to representative responsible government."

The powers of the new Assembly and Council of Ministers

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were to be extensive, covering all fields except those specifically reserved to the Governor and colonial administrators, namely, foreign affairs, security, defense, and over-all finance. Even in these reserved fields the elected representatives could make proposals, and since they would have the backing of public opinion they would carry considerable weight, despite the Governor's veto power. In effect, the new government would exercise, with a few limitations, self-government in internal affairs. An official report stated: "Singapore will take its place as one of the most constitutionally advanced British colonial territories"; it would have a transitional form of government preparing the way for independence.

In the previous 1948 and 1951 elections, few Chinese had registered as voters or participated in the elections. The Indians, who made up less than one-tenth of the population, had provided about half of the voters, two-thirds of the candidates, one-third to one-half of the persons finally elected, and most of the political energy and enthusiasm. In 1948, despite the 10-to-1 population ratio, one Chinese and three Indians were elected; in 1951, three of each were successful. The Chinese who took part in politics, furthermore, were almost exclusively "Straits Chinese."

The basic situation was changed last year when the colony was divided into 25 election districts, and a new electoral roll, based on automatic registration of all eligible voters, was drawn up. The new electorate consisted of 300,000 persons. Of these, 181,000, or 60 per cent of the total, were Chinese. It was estimated that 112,000 of these Chinese, or almost 70 per cent of all Chinese voters, were not literate in English, but this did not bar them from voting, even though the candidates had to be English-speaking. For the first time, the Chinese were drawn into local politics on a mass scale. Because the new government was to be a responsible one with much more than advisory power, the Chinese had an incentive for political participation.

It took some time, however, for these facts to sink into the Chinese consciousness, and most Chinese were a little slow to participate in the organization of political parties which followed the decision to implement the Rendel report. It was not until just before the election that a strictly communal Chinese party was organized. In the months immediately preceding the election, however, almost all the parties increasingly turned their attention to the unknown Chinese voters and tried in various ways to appeal to them.

Of the six parties which put up a total of 69 candidates (there were also 10 independents) on nomination day, February 28, 1955, the oldest was the Progressive Party. Founded in 1947 to contest the first Legislative Council elections, the Progressives faced almost no organized Chinese opposition in 1948 and 1951. The party was noncommunal in membership, and included

quite a few Europeans, Its top leadership, composed of men like C. C. Tan and Eric Wee, and a large percentage of its rank and file consisted of pro-British, conservative "**Straits Chinese.**" The party had a reputation for standpat support of the status quo. Its 10 branches and 5,000 registered members made it larger than any other organized political party at the time of the election--an indication of how little party politics had developed. Few of the members were in positions to control any votes but their own. The Progressives were the most conservative of the parties participating in the election; they fully supported the gradual evolutionary moves toward self-rule which the British had proposed, Despite the fact that perhaps 65 per cent of their members were Chinese (mostly "**Straits Chinese**"), the Progressives were the only major party that opposed the introduction of multilingualism (i.e., the use of languages other than English) in the Assembly--a position which party leaders later admitted was a major mistake in election tactics. A great many people in Singapore believed, however, that the Progressive Party would win the election with little difficulty,

Persons who knew the Chinese-speaking community best disagreed. They were convinced that the Democratic Party, even though it was the last party organised, would come out on top, Their reasons were logical enough, The Democratic Party was frankly communal, representing the traditional leaders of the Chinese who, after all, made up the majority of the voters, Formed less than two months before the election, it was, however, hardly a political party; it was simply a small group of business leaders from the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Critics labeled it the "**party of millionaires**" and the "**Chamber Party.**" But its potential power was respected, nonetheless, because it had the financial backing of Chamber of Commerce leaders, such as Tan Lark-sye, who had been able to lead the Chinese-speaking community in the past. Even though the Democratic Party had almost no organization of its own, many people expected that it would be able to capture votes by utilizing the traditional community institutions to which a majority of the Chinese belonged,

The other parties were not expected to make much of a showing against the Progressives and Democrats. The Labor Front, for instance, was not regarded as a serious challenge, As its name implied, it was not a unified party but a small group of mixed nationalities, representing various shades of left-wing socialist views. Its leader, David Marshall, was a local-born Iraqi Jew who had achieved prominence as a lawyer. Most of its members were socialists who had belonged previously to "**parties**" such as the Labor Party and the Socialist Party, which in reality were little more than left-wing discussion clubs,

Persons who underestimated the Labor Front ignored two facts. First, it ran on a platform designed to appeal to people in favor of change, It was strongly anticolonial, favoring rapid moves toward complete self-government, It proposed termination of the Emergency Regulations, under which, ever since 1948, the

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government has had the power to imprison communists without open trial. It proposed creation of a welfare state, with higher taxes and more social services. It also supported rapid "Malayanization" of the civil service (i.e., replacing colonial administrators with local people) and multilingualism in local representative bodies. The other fact overlooked was that the Labor Front, although lacking any real party organization of its own, had the backing of one large section of organized labor in Singapore, the Trades Union Congress (TUC). The TUC's long-time leader, Lim Yew-hock, was a leading member of the Labor Front.

The most radical party taking part in the election was the People's Action Party (PAP). It was far to the left even of the Labor Front. Although not formed officially as a party until November 1954, the PAP had begun to take shape a year or so earlier. Its leaders began by supporting equality of pay for Asians and Britishers in the civil service. Then they stepped into the case of several University of Malaya students charged with having written seditious anticolonial articles in a left-wing university magazine. Finally, they supported the Chinese students arrested last year after a demonstration protesting against national military service. The lawyer in all these three cases, a man named Lee Kuan-yew, was a brilliant Cambridge-educated "Straits Chinese." He became party leader of PAP.

At the time of the election, PAP had about 2,800 registered members, with the tightest and most effective organization of any of the parties. The conspicuous top leaders were a mixed group of "Straits Chinese" and Indians, including several who at one time or another had been jailed under the Emergency Regulations. This small group of radical English-speaking intellectuals represented only one aspect of the party, however, and was actually a sort of front.

The real strength of the PAP (largely hidden from view) lay in two Chinese-speaking groups: organized students and non-TUC laborers. Lee Kuan-yew himself had direct links with both these groups: he had not only been lawyer for the Chinese students in their trial last year, but was also legal representative for many of the unions. Because of his English accent and outlook, his tie with party supporters who had a strongly racial Chinese attitude was rather tenuous. Lee started learning kuoyu and joined the Hakka association shortly before the election, but he remained, nonetheless, a "Straits Chinese." The PAP leader who most closely linked the party with its mass support of organized Chinese workers and students was a young twenty-two-year old Chinese radical named Lim Chin-seong. Lim, who himself had been a Chinese student leader, quit the Chinese High School in 1950, was detained briefly by the police in 1951, and later entered the field of labor organization. He was in constant direct contact with the most militant Chinese students and workers; he was in fact one of them himself. As secretary of the Factory and Shop Workers' Union, he had for some months before the election been pressing with considerable success an organizational drive among

nonunionized Chinese workers and non-TUC unions.

At election time, not too much attention was paid to the PAP, because it ran only four candidates. This was due to a deliberate decision by the party leaders to make only a token showing at that time, and to spend the next few years building the party machinery with which to contest the next elections.

Two other parties, neither of them very important, also ran. The tiny Labor Party put up only one candidate. The Malay Union Alliance, a coalition of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), was an offshoot of the largest and most important party group in the Federation of Malaya, but it had never developed very wide support in Singapore,

In the weeks immediately preceding election day, a real touch of election fever hit Singapore, to the surprise of those who thought the population was nonpolitical. Posters blossomed all over the city, and mass rallies were held. Because strict enforcement of the Emergency Regulations limiting public meetings and free speech would have made campaigning nothing more than a travesty, restrictions were eased, and there was comparative freedom to criticize the British, colonialism, and almost everything else.

Finally, on April 2, the people of Singapore went to the polls. Over 160,000 people, or 53 per cent of all registered voters, took part. (In view of the automatic registration, this was a higher figure than most people anticipated.) Although there are no figures on the racial breakdown of those who voted, it was clear that large numbers of Chinese turned out. The proportion of Chinese who exercised their voting right, however, was probably lower than that of the Indians.

It was an orderly, honest, and well-run election. The result was a complete surprise to almost all the political experts in Singapore. The Labor Front, which put up 17 candidates, won in ten districts, capturing two-fifths of all elective seats and gaining the right to form a government. The victory of this party seemed to indicate that the majority of voters, who were not yet brought into party organizations, rejected conservatism and supported the general left-wing program of anticolonialism and welfare-state socialism which the Labor Front promised in its campaign statements. Six of the party's successful candidates were Chinese. The Progressives and Democrats were both badly defeated. The Progressives ran 22 candidates and won only 4 seats; the Democrats ran in 20 districts and won in only 2. Apparently, neither the conservative "Straits Chinese" nor the traditional Chamber of Commerce leaders of the Chinese-speaking community were able to capitalize on their leadership in an election where balloting was free and secret. The Alliance did fairly well, winning in three out of five districts where it ran candidates; considerable Malay support helped them. The Labor Party's one

candidate lost,

The party which was second only to the Labor Front was the PAP. It surprised even its own leaders. It ran four candidates, thinking it might win one seat. Actually, three PAP candidates were successful, all Chinese, including Lee Kuan-yew and Lim Chin-seong. PAP's single Indian candidate was the only one who lost. The PAP candidates, furthermore, won with spectacular majorities. The reasons were obvious to anyone who toured Singapore, as I did, on election day. In the districts where PAP candidates were running, there was an impressive show of skilled organizational ability. Hundreds of Chinese students and, to a lesser extent, young workers had managed to get fleets of private cars which bore the party symbol--a flash of lightning striking into a circle--and toured around picking up voters to take them to the polls. The PAP won a significant victory, and as a result its leaders moved up the timetable for party development.

On April 6, David Marshall of the Labor Front formed his government, in alliance with UMNO and MCA; the Progressives, Democrats, and PAP formed the opposition. From the very start, PAP began playing an aggressive opposition role, not only within the Legislative Assembly but also, more effectively, through mass action of unions and students allied to the party. It set out to discredit Marshall's moderate left-wing government and to build up PAP support through militant action.

Singapore politics since April have consisted essentially of a contest between the Labor Front and the PAP. The Progressives have tried to reorganize their party, but few people think that either conservatives or "Straits-born" Chinese are likely to be the political leaders of the future. The Democrats have slipped into the background as a party, and many people think the Chinese Chamber of Commerce leaders were too shocked by their defeat to try to keep their party alive. PAP, on the other hand, has become increasingly active and militant. Underground communist elements, however, are playing a large, albeit covert, role in PAP's activities,

In its struggle against the government, PAP still does not have a very large party membership of its own. Its strength lies largely in the Chinese student and labor organizations which support it. These are the most important mass organizations in Singapore; and an element of Chinese nationalism and communalism, as well as an element of ideological class struggle, underlies them both. It is obvious that PAP, and the communists in the background, believe they can ultimately defeat the Labor Front and win power by organizing and utilizing these groups.

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CHINESE EDUCATION AND STUDENTS

Perhaps the most explosive single element in the present political situation in Singapore is a group of about 10,000 students in Chinese middle schools who, under the leadership of a small communist minority, have been organized into a force which since May 1954 has been capable of intimidating teachers and school authorities, defying the government and police, organizing illegal mass demonstrations, fomenting labor unrest, and turning strikes into violent riots. A short while ago, the top colonial administrator in Singapore said: "The situation in these Chinese middle schools is the most serious problem that faces Singapore. The youth in them is being corrupted and perverted through skillful use of Chinese nationalism and propaganda into a dangerous weapon for the Malayan Communist Party."

One of the most serious long-range political problems in Singapore is the question of Chinese education. About one-half of the colony's huge number of school-age Chinese children is being educated in institutions that are almost wholly oriented toward China and do virtually nothing to develop a sense of loyalty rooted in Singapore. Neglect of Chinese education in the past has made the Chinese community extremely sensitive to any attempts to change or control their privately-supported educational institutions, and "preservation of Chinese culture" is an issue on which the whole Chinese-speaking population in the colony is easily aroused.

The educational system in Singapore is a complicated one. Government statistics divide the colony's schools into several categories: government, government-aided, or nonaided schools, and English-language, Chinese-language, Malay-language, or Tamil-language schools. However, ignoring the government and government-aided Malay and Tamil schools, which altogether have only about 12,000 pupils, the main distinction is between the English-language and the Chinese-language schools. The majority of the former are either run by the government or receive full government financial support. There are no government schools in the Chinese-language category, and although a majority of the Chinese schools now receive some government aid, it is on a much lower scale than aid given to English-language institutions,

British policy toward Chinese education in the past was a simple one: let the Chinese set up and run their own schools, with a minimum of government aid or interference. This is exactly what the Chinese did. After the turn of the century, they developed one of the most extensive Chinese school systems existing anywhere overseas. Many of the schools were organized and supported by regional associations or management committees composed of community leaders; others were commercially-run institutions. Almost all of them were supported by the Chinese themselves without government assistance.

After the war, the colonial administration began to



take a greater interest in education, and the Chinese, because of financial difficulty in supporting their schools, began to take a greater interest in government aid. But the British devoted their attention largely to developing the English-language school system, which expanded from 18,000 to 56,000 pupils in the period 1946-1952, while the Chinese-language schools increased in the same period from 29,000 to only 49,000. In 1947, a ten-year plan was introduced, aiming at free, noncompulsory, primary education in any language of the parents' choice, but this soon gave way to a five-year plan putting all the emphasis on increasing the number of English-language schools and attracting Chinese to them. At the end of 1953, emphasis shifted once again: the educational authorities decided they would encourage bilingual education, with English as the second language in **all** vernacular schools, and "**Malayanization**" of the curriculum.

At present, of the 178,000 students attending registered schools in Singapore, 82,000 (46 per cent) are in Chinese-language schools run by the Chinese themselves, compared with 84,000 in English-language schools (80 per cent of the latter are Chinese children, too). There are 277 Chinese-language schools, compared with 204 English-language schools.

Government aid to the Chinese schools is still relatively small. Of S\$9.5 million in aid granted to nongovernment schools last year, almost S\$6 million went to 44 English schools, while only S\$3.5 million went to 203 Chinese schools.

Late in 1954, the government decided it would give full grants-in-aid, providing in effect all current expenses and one-half new capital expenditures, to any Chinese school accepting the normal conditions for such grants. It set aside S\$12 million for this purpose. By this time, many Chinese had begun to be extremely suspicious, and feared that the move **was** motivated by a desire to control, and possibly to eliminate, education in the Chinese language. The conditions for receiving a full grant-in-aid involved accepting government regulation of teachers and curriculum. These controls actually could be a basis for restricting further development of Chinese education. Therefore, despite government denials that it had any such intention, about three-quarters of all eligible Chinese schools, including the most important middle schools, declined the offer of full aid. What the Chinese school authorities then began requesting was full government aid without any government controls. Out of this situation a stalemate developed.

The leaders of the Chinese community, with some justification, now assert that Chinese-language education is being given unequal treatment, and, suspicious of government policy, they rally to all calls to defend "**Chinese culture.**" Government leaders, on their part, are worried about the fact that about half of the school children in the colony are receiving an education in a foreign language which orients them toward China rather than Singapore. There is good cause for concern: the curriculum

and textbooks in the Chinese-language schools contain strong doses of Chinese nationalism and produce students who clearly look to China as their homeland. The Chinese point out, however, that the English-Language schools also use a foreign language and foreign textbooks which, because they concern themselves primarily with Britain, are just **as** alien to Malaya as the Chinese. They have a legitimate argument. In actual fact, at present neither the English nor the Chinese schools in Singapore are effective institutions to turn out local citizens. The task of developing a school system which does achieve this end is one of the main problems in the colony, particularly as it moves toward self-rule.

There is one basic difference, however, between the English and Chinese schools. Although the **curriculum** in the former is far from ideal, these schools do not present a political problem. Their students are not politically **active--if** anything, they are accused of being too docile. By contrast, the Chinese schools produce students who are virulently nationalistic and militantly radical.

Nationalism and radicalism in the classrooms of Singapore's Chinese schools is by no means a new issue, **but** since last year--May 13, 1954, to be exact--it has mushroomed into a problem of alarming proportions. Until last year, the **effects** of student activities were confined largely to the schools themselves. Now they affect the whole colony.

Infiltration of Chinese schools in Singapore has been a major objective of the Malayan Communist Party. The communists have concentrated on the middle schools, and they have had remarkable success. Only a handful of students are Communist Party members, but they are able to lead, control, or intimidate most of the others. Appealing to the students' strong feelings of Chinese nationalism (which apparently have increased steadily since the establishment of the Peking regime, the Korean War, the Geneva Conference, and the Bandung conference) and arousing them on issues of immediate local concern, the communists have converted the students of Chinese middle schools in Singapore into a potent political force. The most important schools--which have become, in the eyes of the police, "veritable Marxist academies in Singapore"--not only provide the Malayan Communist Party organization in the colony with a large percentage of its recruits, but also perform many functions outside the schools for the communists,

The school committees, principals, and teachers have been thoroughly intimidated by the students, who do not hesitate to issue threats or employ violence, such as throwing acid in the faces of unfriendly teachers. The police, who have conducted numerous raids but have not been able to root out all the communists, cannot control the situation. Several factors work in the students' favor. Partly because World War II almost stopped operation of schools for several years, two-thirds of the 8,500

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junior middle school students and 1,800 senior middle school students in Chinese schools are above average age; in senior middle schools, 361 students are over 20, and a few are as old as 25. Hidden among the eldest are "professional students" who purposely stay in school to carry on agitation. The size of the schools is in itself a problem; they are so large that it is difficult for the school authorities to control the students. The two main tenters of the student movement, Chung Cheng High School and Chinese High School, have 4,700 and 2,300 students respectively.

Small communist cells exist in the key Chinese middle schools (although 10 middle schools teach in Chinese, only seven are centers for the student movement), but most of the students themselves don't know of their existence. It is believed that altogether the cells have less than 20 members, and, even if one included the professional agitators, the number would be only about 60. In short, the communist nerve centers for the student movement consist of perhaps half a dozen students per school. The organizational network which they control, however, includes most of the 10,000 students in Chinese middle schools,

Many kinds of student organizations are used by the communist leaders. One of the most important is the Student Aid Committee. In Chung Cheng High School, according to students who described the organizations to me, every student must belong to the Student Aid Committee and must contribute S\$2 per term to it. Once a year, three representatives from each of the hundred-odd classes in the school are elected to an assembly which chooses an executive committee. This committee disburses about S\$10,000 a term to approximately 300 students, using the funds to buy over poor students to radical views and to support those who already hold such views. There are also hsueh hsi, or study groups, modeled after those in Communist China. For example, in the Chinese High School there are several such groups, each containing six persons, under an appointed leader. They hold two-hour sessions three times a week and study communist or procommunist literature.

Malayan Communist Party literature circulates in the schools, despite heavy penalties if the police discover it. Chinese Communist and pro-Peking literature circulates more freely; most of the Chinese newspapers in Singapore, in fact, are pro-Peking, and the Sin Pao (Hsin Pao), which the majority of students read, follows a straight Chinese Communist line, using the output of the New China News Agency. The students learn the yang ko, a dance publicized by the Communists in China, and songs such as "Unity Is Strength," which students in Peita (Peking National University) used to sing when I was in Peking during the period before the Communist take-over. Singapore's Chinese middle school students are in almost every respect imitating the Chinese student movement which existed in China before 1949 and which had a significant political influence. But the students in Singapore impress me as being more radical, militant and disciplined than

any comparable group of students that I knew in China during the period 1947-1949.

Following the example of their models in China, the Singapore Chinese students fastened upon one "incident" as symbolic of their whole "struggle." In China it was the "May 4th Incident" of 1919. In Singapore it is the "May 13th Incident" of 1954.

Until last year, the students in Singapore did most of their agitating among themselves. Since May 13, 1954, however, they have moved on to the general political stage. The "May 13th Incident" grew out of student protests against national military service. The government at the time was attempting to register students for a newly-introduced scheme requiring a selected number of youths between the ages of 18 and 20 to take part-time training for either the armed services or civil defense. The Chinese students publicly protested; to the government they said the system would interfere with their education, but among themselves they said that Chinese should not fight for the colonialists against the Chinese (Communists) in the jungle. Although refusing to grant Chinese students any blanket deferment, the government promised to consider deferment in certain specific cases. This did not satisfy the students. They sent a delegation to the government, and a large group of about 1,000 students went along to demonstrate and back them up. The police ordered them to disperse, but they refused. Violence and rioting then broke out, and 48 students were arrested. The students responded by barricading themselves in one of their schools and, despite the intervention of some of the leading Chinese community members, they continued to agitate and defy both school and government authorities for 10 days. Seven of the 48 students arrested were finally convicted. They appealed. Despite a well-publicized defense trial conducted by the well-known pro-Communist British lawyer, Pritt, assisted by Lee Kuan-yew, their short jail sentences were confirmed, and they had to serve them.

The "May 13th Incident," the national service issue, and the trial served the purpose, however, of mobilizing and uniting the students and making them increasingly radical, nationalistic, and defiant of all outside authority. Since then, student leaders have found one issue after another on which to arouse student opinion and organize mass meetings or demonstrations. In the early fall of last year, it was opposition to a modification of the Registration of Schools Ordinance which, they claimed, was a step toward instituting control aimed at "eliminating Chinese education." Then it was agitation against "yellow culture"--i.e., the influence of Hollywood movies, comic books, and Western sex movies. For a while they concentrated their interest on Nanyang University, which was being organized in Singapore as the first university for Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. At first they did all they could, to support it, since it was to be a citadel of "Chinese culture"; later they played an important role in attacking Chancellor Lin Yu-tang,

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who **was** known for his anticommunist views. When the People's Action Party **was** formed in the late fall, they threw their support behind it, and from the very beginning played a prominent part in its public meetings and organizational activity.

Student organization improved with each campaign or demonstration. At the time of the 1954 protest against national service, representatives from the seven important Chinese middle schools (four of which were girls' schools, unaffected by the issue of military service) set up a joint organization called the Chinese Middle School Students' National Service Exemption Delegation. This group, with 55 members and a presidium of nine, became for a time the co-ordinating body for all Chinese student activities. In the spring of 1955 another organization grew out of this body: the Students' Union Preparatory Committee, composed of about 35 members. The committee applied to the government for registration as a legal organization, but was refused. The students would not accept the refusal and protested against it. Another issue was added to many which the students, in their militant mood, could use as a basis for demonstrating or protesting.

There is little doubt that, as this year's election approached, the Chinese middle school students became increasingly aware of their own strength as a political force. They had a political party, the PAP, which they felt they could support, and they took an active part in campaigning and electioneering. They also began to turn their interest toward labor. Although the majority of the students are under age and cannot vote, they plunged directly into political affairs. As a result, they have played a major role in political developments--including riots and labor disorders--since the April elections,

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## WORKERS AND UNIONS

The importance of organized labor as a political force is a relatively recent development in Singapore. For a brief period immediately after World War II, however, communist-controlled unionism was used for political ends and presented a serious threat to the authority of the Singapore Government. Declaration of an Emergency situation in 1948 eliminated that threat temporarily, and from 1948 until a few months ago the labor movement in Singapore developed along basically non-political lines. But in recent months politics and industrial strife in the colony have once again become intertwined, and developments in the labor field will have a great impact on Singapore's future political evolution.

Singapore is not primarily an industrial city. The colony is a major entrepot trade center and naval and military base. Its economy depends to a large extent, therefore, upon

commerce, its port and its naval base, Supporting industries have developed considerably during recent years, These are mostly **small-scale enterprises--for** every factory employing over 100 men, there are 25 smaller **ones--but** their workers have become an important part of Singapore's manual labor force,

At present there are roughly 120,000 manual workers in the colony; they comprise about 10 per cent of the total population and 35 per cent of the gainfully-employed population of 433,000. In contrast to the prewar period, when many workers in the colony were migratory, this labor force is now stabilized, Of the 120,000 manual workers, 57,000, or almost one-half, are employed in manufacturing. Other fields of **large-scale** employment are transport, with 18,000 workers, and construction, with 17,000. Altogether, 162 different industries employ manual workers in Singapore, but the majority of them are very small, and nine-tenths of the manual workers are employed in 56 industries having some 400 laborers each, The largest industries include those connected with ship-building and repair, construction, the manufacture of machinery, management of the harbor, transport of goods, government services of various sorts, **repair** of vehicles, and rubber-milling, One of the peculiarities of employment in the colony is the fact that the government and armed services employ close to half of all manual workers, leaving only 77,000 in the employ of private enterprise,

Although the Chinese, as one might expect, make up the majority of manual laborers in Singapore, the **Chinese** as a group prefer to go into commerce, In proportion to their total numbers, therefore, they are underrepresented in manual labor by comparison with both the Indians and **Malays**. Of all manual laborers (as of late 1953), 62 per cent **are** Chinese, 23 per cent Indians and Pakistanis, and 15 per cent Malaysians (Malays and Indonesians). Although only 8.5 per cent of all Chinese are manual workers, however, 31 per cent of all Indians and 12.5 per cent of all Malays are engaged in manual labor. Therefore, although almost two-thirds of the manual labor force is Chinese, **it** is the Indians who, as a group, are most characteristically engaged in manual labor,

In the distribution of Indian and Chinese laborers, there is a division which is very significant for **the** labor movement. Most of the Indians work for the government or armed services, where they **outnumber** the Chinese almost two to one. Most of the Chinese work for private enterprises, where they outnumber the Indians by over nine to one. The manual workers employed by the government and armed services include 20,000 Indians and 13,000 Chinese, while private enterprises employ 60,000 Chinese and only 7,000 Indians.

The rapid growth of modern labor unions among this working force is a wartime and postwar development, In recent years, both the stabilisation of the labor force and the government's paternalistic policy of fostering nonpolitical unionism have

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encouraged the labor movement. Before the war, Indian laborers were very largely unorganized. Chinese workers had long been involved in guilds and secret societies, but it was not until the 1920's that modern forms of workers' organizations began to be established on a significant scale. By 1940, there were probably about 50 such organizations.

The first big push toward union organization took place at the start of the war and was, in part at least, politically motivated. The Malayan Communist Party, composed mostly of Chinese, took the lead in active local resistance to the Japanese, and in the labor field it established a Trades Union Federation containing about 70 unions in Singapore and Malaya.

Immediately after the war, the communists easily resumed their role of leadership and again started to push unionization. By early 1946, they had established a strong Singapore General Labor Union, linked to their Pan-Malayan General Labor Union. A wave of labor unrest and strikes accompanied the communists' drive. At the start, economic issues were more important than political ones. In 1946, Singapore had 41 strikes, chiefly for higher wages, and 36 of them were successful. The communists, who at this time were operating openly as a legal party, achieved undisputed control over the labor movement in Singapore, and the movement grew from eight unions with 19,000 members in 1946 to a peak of 126 unions with 96,000 members in 1947. As their control and power grew, however, the communists began increasingly to manipulate these unions for purely political purposes, and partly for that reason their support had begun to decline in early 1948. In that year they planned open insurrection, which was to begin with labor agitation. As violence, lawlessness and terrorism began to increase, however, the government declared a State of Emergency, first in Malaya and later in Singapore. The communist leaders of the unions in Singapore took to the jungles, where they joined rebel guerrilla forces, and the union structure which they had built collapsed.

During the seven years since 1948, the labor movement in Singapore has been slowly reconstructed under the benevolent but watchful eye of the government. The government has genuinely tried to foster nonpolitical unionism, while rooting out attempts at communist subversion, but the movement has had many difficulties. Among other things, the Chinese have felt that they were under suspicion, because of the fact that the Malayan Communist Party which formerly controlled labor was predominantly Chinese, and until recently they have been wary of taking part in active unionism. This has contributed to a situation in which Indian leadership has predominated in the Singapore labor movement during this period. It is not surprising, therefore, that unionism has been more strongly entrenched in the fields of government and military employment, where Indians are in the majority, than in private enterprise and manufacturing, where the workers are largely Chinese. The leadership of a large proportion of the unions which have developed since 1948, furthermore, has been

English-speaking, whether the leaders were Indians or Chinese, and the gap between union leadership and membership has been a serious one, weakening the strength of the movement.

In 1951, a Singapore Trades Union Congress was formed, linking 28 unions and about 24,000 workers. By 1953, however, the TUC's membership had dropped to 24 unions, and it has never developed into a very effective or strong organization. Some of the largest unions in the colony have stayed out of it, and the gap between the English-speaking leadership of the Congress and the non-English-speaking rank and file has been particularly serious. Nevertheless, it has remained to the present the most important grouping of labor unions in the colony. Three other union groupings have also developed, all in the field of government employment: Federation of Services Union, Federation of Unions of Government Employees, and City Council Labor Unions Federation, containing 3, 16, and 11 unions, respectively,

The low point in union membership in Singapore was in 1949, after declaration of the Emergency, when there were only 93 unions, with 47,000 members. The movement has recovered slowly but steadily since then, and at the beginning of 1955 the colony had 136 unions, with over 76,000 members. Of these, about one-third, or 25,000, work for the armed services. In this field are the only two really big unions in the colony: the Naval Base Labor Union, with 7,600 members, and the Army Civil Service Union, with 10,700. The membership of the latter, although mixed, is predominantly Indian. There are some 20,000 union members in manufacturing and 15,000 in transport, both of which employ mainly Chinese,

Most of Singapore's unions are still small and weak organizations, close to half of them being "house unions" confined to one place. Only 12 unions have a membership of over 1,000, while three-fourths have less than 500 members, and about half have only 50 to 250 members.

Between 1948 and 1954, the struggling labor movement in Singapore was fairly immune to political manipulation. In 1951, moreover, the Malayan Communist Party changed its tactics and began to devote major attention once more to infiltration of unions, but vigilant police action against subversion, prohibition of union political funds, and other factors, limited its success.

Since the turn of 1955, however, politics has begun to loom large again on the labor scene in the colony. In the middle of last year, a union called the Singapore Factory and Shop Workers' Union was established, as a breakaway group from the Singapore Workers' Union. This new group, now led by young Lim Chin-seong, began to organize and link together many of the small, predominantly Chinese unions, particularly in the field of manufacturing and transport. Its leaders worked slowly at first, but as the election approached they speeded up their activities,



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and Lim, together with a handful of Chinese and Indians in the People's Action Party, became the moving force behind a major organizational drive. On the surface, because of the mixed Chinese-Indian leadership of this group, their activities appeared to be noncommunal. In fact, however, the vacuum in the labor movement which they began to move into was largely in small-scale private enterprises which employ principally Chinese and are weakly unionized or completely unorganized. It was clearly the Chinese-speaking Chinese who had the power to call the tune in this PAP group. (This was indicated in due time when one member of the group, an Indian heading the Naval Base Labor Union, was unable to carry his union with him in an attempted general strike.) Strong elements of Chinese nationalism and communalism, as well as elements of antiwhite racialism, anti-colonialism, and class struggle entered into the picture. Students were also drawn into the situation in support of the Factory and Shop Workers' Union, and this student-worker alliance became the mass base of the PAP.

Almost immediately after the election, labor unrest of a serious nature began to erupt in Singapore. Part of it was a natural result of the existing political and economic trends. But PAP and the Factory and Shop Workers' Union stepped in to take advantage of the situation for political ends.

In many of the industries in the colony, the workers have legitimate economic grievances. Although laborers here have one of the highest standards of living in the Far East and are protected by relatively enlightened labor legislation, the cost of living has increased faster than wages in many industries, and the Emergency Regulations have inhibited protests or strikes to improve conditions. Furthermore, unemployment is slowly on the increase: in the past year, the number of jobs has declined steadily (by about 4,000), while the potential working force has increased fairly rapidly (by about 16,000). In this situation, tenure of employment has become a matter of serious concern to the workers. Perhaps most important of all, the atmosphere at the time of the election was one in which, as one labor leader expressed it to me, "the lid was lifted on the restrictions of the past seven years." When a Labor Front Government was elected, many workers decided that this was the time to do something about their grievances.

As a result, the period following the election was the greatest period of labor unrest in Singapore since 1948. In all of 1954 the colony had had only eight strikes. Within a short period after April 1955, that figure was considerably exceeded, and workers all over the colony began making demands, some reasonable and some not, on their employers. Student forces of the PAP Factory and Shop Workers' union moved into this situation and exploited it for political purposes. The first major result of their activities was the riots and bloodshed in mid-May. This was followed by a politically-inspired attempt to paralyze the city with a general strike.

The strength of the Factory and Shop Workers' Union has increased rapidly during this period. When I visited its dingy little office during the general strike, a spokesman for the union told me that its membership had increased from 2,000 to 15,000 in the last six months. That may be an exaggeration, but its membership is certainly between 7,000 and 8,000 now, which would make it the second or third largest union in Singapore. It is clear that the Factory and Shop Workers' Union is attempting, with considerable success to date, to build up a powerful union group which can overshadow the existing weak federations such as the TUC, and which can ultimately have a controlling voice over organized labor in Singapore. It has already shown, furthermore, that one of its primary motives is political.

There are communists working in the background of the Factory and Shop Workers' Union. One of the union's leaders has recently been arrested under the Emergency Regulations, and government officials have openly accused the union of being used as a tool by the communists.

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