SINGAPORE CHANGES GUARD

SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DIRECTIONS IN THE 1990S

EDITED BY GARRY RODAN
Singapore changes guard: social, political and economic directions in the 1990s.


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INTRODUCTION: CHALLENGES FOR THE NEW GUARD AND DIRECTIONS IN THE 1990S

Garry Rodan

Singapore’s transformation since independence in 1965 has consistently attracted attention disproportionate to the city-state’s size and international stature. Much of this has to do with the fact that, along with the other newly industrialising countries (NICs) of East Asia, it achieved remarkably rapid industrialisation when so many other developing countries languished. Added interest stems from the fact that in the 1960s the island’s political status was precarious, with grave doubts both inside and outside Singapore about its viability as a separate nation.

Singapore’s achievements are not in doubt, nor at risk of a sudden and dramatic reversal, but Singapore is nevertheless at a critical juncture that is forcing its policymakers to reassess the objectives and strategies of the development process. It is increasingly evident that the political and economic formulae that proved so effective in the past cannot simply be superimposed on today’s circumstances.

At the political level, the ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) has undergone a sustained electoral decline since the early 1980s despite concerted attempts to stymie this trend. The PAP now concedes that the days of its total parliamentary monopoly are over. But how much parliamentary opposition
the ruling party is able to tolerate, how much contestation (parliamentary and non-parliamentary) it is prepared to sanction and what form oppositional politics will take into the next decade are not clear. These issues are all the more interesting because they are being addressed by the so-called New Guard leadership which is now formally in charge of government. Lee Kuan Yew is the sole remaining representative in government of the Old Guard, the generation of PAP leaders that laid the foundation of modern Singapore. While Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and his colleagues have openly recognised the need for changes to accommodate social and political pressures, it remains to be seen whether this carefully groomed elite can adequately reflect the aspirations of a more socially diversified electorate without fundamental revisions of its predecessors’ approach.

At the economic level, the city-state’s gains from the export-oriented industrialisation (EOI) strategy appear to have peaked. Customary rates of industrial expansion are difficult to sustain now that the more labour-intensive and semi-skilled phase is largely behind Singapore. Moreover, the recession of the mid-1980s highlighted the problems of acute external dependence on manufacturing and set in train an urgent pursuit of sectoral diversification involving closer integration with other Asian economies. This attempted redirection requires the nurturing of a more creative and cosmopolitan workforce and modifications to Singapore’s foreign policy. It thus raises a number of social and political questions. Chief among these is whether the prevailing authoritarian political system is compatible with an economy that will rely more upon ideas and knowledge than low labour costs as the basis of competitiveness.

We should be careful not to overstate the significance of the formal political pre-eminence of the New Guard which must confront these important dynamics. Lee Kuan Yew still exerts a considerable influence over events, not just as Senior Minister without portfolio, but also less visibly through his extensive networks of control over the political process built up over decades. But the very nature of the problems confronting the new leadership are likely to force Prime Minister Goh and the New Guard to rely less on established wisdom to mount effective responses. These responses will not only reveal much about the political character of the New Guard, which has been a matter of some speculation during the leadership transition, but naturally have a critical bearing on the sort of society Singapore will be at the turn of the century and beyond. The changing of the guard will force the conscious addressing of a host of crucial questions.

In recognition of the importance of this convergence of political, social and economic pressures within Singapore, the Asia Research Centre of Murdoch University brought together a range of scholars for a conference in December 1991 under the title Political and Economic Watersheds in Industrial Singapore. The work of these scholars included a diversity of theoretical perspectives and academic styles, but there was a uniform view that in various respects Singapore was embarking on a new phase in its development. This book has its origins in that conference and while the issues addressed systemically explore the nature and direction of change in this new phase, there is no attempt herein to submit a central thesis on these issues.

Nevertheless, there are some striking themes to the various chapters. In particular, state–society relations are seen to be at the centre of pressures for a reassessment of Singapore’s political and economic direction. This theme surfaces, for instance, in relation to the emerging middle class and the implications for civil society and interest group activity, the role of the domestic bourgeoisie in Singapore’s economic redirection, the expansion of private as opposed to government sources of information, the rationalisation of the state’s social functions and the workforce requirements of a more sophisticated economy. As the essays will establish, the New Guard has already demonstrated an awareness of the critical nature of many of the pressures confronting it and the need for comprehensive responses. At the political level, for instance, we see new forms of co-optation in an attempt to broaden the sphere of state–society interrelationships. New forms of political engagement are being fostered by the New Guard as part of its self-declared softening of authoritarian rule. At the economic level, the New Guard has also taken significant initiatives, with Prime Minister Goh playing a lead role in the formalisation of the subregional economic arrangement known as the Growth Triangle which encompasses Singapore, the state of Johor in Malaysia and the Riau Islands of Indonesia. Goh has generally shown a keenness for much greater regional economic co-operation as a basis for Singapore’s economic diversification. Whether this or other economic objectives of the New Guard can be achieved without social and political changes affecting relations between state, labour and capital is examined in this book.

In the first part of the book, Politics and Ideology, the analyses of recent political changes offer critical perspectives from which to evaluate claims of an embryonic dismantling of authoritarianism. In their different ways, the essays in this part attempt to clarify the motivations behind and implications of various initiatives associated with the New Guard or the constraints within which the leadership operates.

James Cotton focuses on the legacy of Lee Kuan Yew’s rule and the implications of this for the New Guard in particular and the political system in general. He examines the constitutional change providing for an elected president and other institutional developments. Indeed, the new interest in institutional constraints on, and procedures for, government is seen as a manifestation of Lee’s concern that his legacy could be so easily lost. Despite the appearance of political change, these innovations reflect Lee’s quest for permanency in the political fundamentals. However, according to Cotton, such a project is greatly complicated by two factors: the increasing openness of Singapore as internationalisation gathers pace; and the continuing significance of patronage and patronialism within the political system that centre around Lee himself. On this latter point the author concludes, ‘However much he may wish to abstract himself from everyday politics, his personal role is still crucial. How his institutions will work without him is an issue problematic in the extreme.’
In the second chapter David Brown develops the theme of new institutional arrangements with special focus on the PAP government's handling of ethnicity. He readily concedes that there is a basis to the New Guard's claims of a shift towards greater consultation and participation in the political process, but this should not be confused with political liberalisation. Rather, given expanded occupational and interest group complexity, the prevailing corporatist political system has to be adapted to remain viable.

This involves an extension of the networks of institutionalised channels that both facilitate and manage political participation. In effect, the mechanisms of co-optation are being broadened in an attempt to continue the PAP's tight control over the political process. The harnessing of ethnicity to this corporatist objective marks one of the most important and potentially volatile elements in recent political change. The PAP government must tread a delicate path, selectively encouraging ethnic organisations as political interest groups and legitimate actors in some spheres and instances, yet on other occasions insisting they remain apolitical and embody national rather than sectional communal consciousness. Among the risks of this strategy, Brown points out it may inadvertently legitimise ethnic interest group competition for political influence and generate insecurities and anxieties around ethnic questions.

John Clammer's chapter on the New Guard's attempt to institutionalise a National Ideology, or Shared Values as it came to be known, examines a quite specific initiative intended to pre-empt social and political change. Underlying the pressure for political change, according to Clammer, is the development of a middle class 'plugged into consumption as a way of life' that enjoys an increasing degree of latitude in the public sphere. The institutionalisation of a set of Shared Values is viewed by Clammer as an attempt by the PAP to condition the forms of political change that will ensue from this process. In the new social context, blatant authoritarianism carries political costs. Since the PAP remains convinced of its need for total political dominance, other means must be employed to secure this. The ideological emphasis on 'consensus' is thus a contemporary technique applied to an established aim. Essentially Clammer portrays the Shared Values exercise as an attempt at instituting a particular political culture - one that is largely antibacterial to political pluralism. This culture is static and leaves little room for serious political participation other than that sanctioned by the PAP. In this context, 'consensus' is therefore not so much a working out of compromises between different interests and perspectives, as an ideology that represses differences per se. However, Clammer sees a serious lack of congruence between this ideology and the objective reality of modern Singapore that must undercut its effectiveness: 'National Ideology is an attempt to shore up a culture and a social structure which is no longer there, if it ever was, and may be counterproductive to Singapore's economic and political future.'

The political significance of the middle class, alluded to by Brown and Clammer, is the principal interest of chapter 4, by Garry Rodan. The author points out that the New Guard has adopted a political strategy since the early 1980s of trying to strengthen its appeal to this particular social class. The extended use of political co-optation has been directed first and foremost at this class, as have selected forms of cultural liberalisation. Yet it has become clear, particularly with the results of the 1991 general election, that a faulty premise underlies this strategy. Electoral alienation with the PAP cannot be explained primarily in terms of a disenchanted middle class seeking significant political change. Rather, disaffection is more broadly based and, in any case, the middle class's privileged social and economic positions have been well served by PAP rule. Moreover, the conspicuous consumption of the middle class has combined with elitist PAP policy orientations to produce a heightened awareness of social and economic inequalities and a consequent loss of working class support for the government. But the PAP's ability to arrest this trend is constrained by an insistence that 'meritocracy' must prevail over redistributive measures.

Chapter 5, by David Birch, also examines the significance of the middle class, though like Clammer he is interested primarily in the ideological realm. Birch argues that the 'information-rich' middle class is exposed to private sources of information, notably advertising, in which notions of the 'free' individual are actively promoted. The government, in contrast, is adopting strategies through the mass media intended to keep the information-rich operating within the dominant ideology, which is 'nation first'. At the outset Birch implicitly aligns himself with Weber in maintaining that all dominant elites, not just the current Singapore government, aim to control and manipulate, with differing degrees of success. The real difference, argues Birch, lies in the way such control is legitimated and how legitimations are enucleated into social consciousness.

The discourse of crisis has been one of the most conspicuous and constant strategies of control in Singapore. This is used to create a climate of domestic uncertainty and even a sense of fragility about the state and the economy. But in contemporary Singapore there is heavy reliance upon stage-managed 'debates' which allow a particular ideological reality to emerge as natural and dominant. This 'reality' embodies a particular construction of what constitutes citizenship that rests, however, on Singaporeans accepting as unproblematic ideas like 'political and economic stability'; Singapore's only resource being its people; the history of Singapore under colonial rule and the need to free society from such oppression and the 'fact' that this freedom has been achieved by the PAP and no other means'.

In the final chapter of the first part, Jean-Louis Margolin takes a rather different look at the role of ideology in Singapore. He traces the use of external models in the different periods of Singapore's development, showing that these have not been insignificant even if selective in their inspiration. Models have included socialist and nationalist Third World types, the Western liberal model of Britain and more recently countries like Germany, Japan and Switzerland. The shifts in emphasis reflect political dynamics within the PAP and the changing economic and social objectives to which they are applied. The currency of Third World models, for example, waned when the PAP split
in 1961 led to an exodus of the Party's more radical elements. Similarly, alienation from the British model reflected the Party's rejection of liberalism. The current interest in the Swiss experience is indicative of the ambitious economic aspirations which see Singapore as an economy which, although small, occupies significant high-technology niches.

Margolin also notes the extent to which Singapore is itself a limited model, largely because of its impressive achievements in economic development, notably export-oriented industrialisation, and its public housing programme. He detects within the New Guard a growing self-confidence about Singapore's achievements and a strengthening of the rejection of Western political liberalism, which has led to more frequent proclamations of Singapore's own virtues. But, for Margolin, if there is a lesson that can be drawn from Singapore it is 'the inflexible determination involved in policy implementation', the importance of political will.

Chapter 7, the first in the Economy and Society part, is by Cheah Hock Beng who examines the implications of Singapore's continued embrace of a global economy which is accelerating towards more complete forms of internationalisation. He argues that Singapore is like other NICs which can no longer base competitiveness on lower labour costs. Rather, Singapore must respond to a different set of imperatives, including the 'capacity for autonomous technological upgrading, developing the skills to produce, use, market and service more complex products'. However, to maintain and attract the requisite workforce, itself an international commodity in big demand, attention to non-material aspects of quality of life in Singapore will be required. This includes improving working conditions and living standards, and evolving a more open political system.

Chapter 8, by Chris Leggett, follows up this theme with reference to Singapore's industrial relations system. Leggett argues that contradictions are emerging between Singapore's integration with the global economy and its industrial relations system now that emphasis has shifted to high value-added production: the subjugation of the workforce suppresses much-needed creativity; a rigid system of discipline has a demoralising effect on the workforce; and restructuring of trade unions in emulation of the Japanese system runs up against the problem that, in contrast with Japan, few major employers are local. In short, the subjectivity of the workforce is now more vital for productivity, and the social and political control within the industrial relations system which underscored the earlier period of industrialisation are now becoming impediments. However, while reconciling these contradictions has become a major preoccupation of the 1990s, this is not likely to involve any significant institutional change. In particular, the corporatist-style structures of control, especially as they involve the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and the PAP, will continue as a central feature of the system, thereby placing reform within definite limits.

Amitav Acharya and M. Ramesh, in chapter 9, turn their attention to recent attempts by the Singapore government to foster greater integration with global economies. They argue, should be viewed as a complement to rather than a contradiction of the embrace of the global system referred to by Cheah and Leggett. This embrace has always been intended to serve economic and security objectives that cannot be attained by regionalism, and this will continue.

Acharya and Ramesh make the point that the dramatic economic downturn experienced by Singapore in the mid-1980s highlighted the vulnerability of Singapore's dependence upon the international economic system. Against this background, greater integration with the rapidly expanding regional economies naturally presented itself as a sensible direction to offset the vagaries of the global system. Out of this reassessment has sprung the Growth Triangle initiative by Singapore and a serious pursuit of economic links with Indochina. Threats of increased protectionism in the markets of advanced economies, the end of the Cold War and the consequent weakening of the USA's political motivation in supporting Asia's capitalist revolutions combined to produce the signing of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Free Trade Agreement of 1992 by the member states. Singapore is not alone in the aspiration for greater regional economic integration.

The authors caution, however, that there are significant limits to what Singapore can achieve on the economic and security fronts through regionalism. For structural reasons, its trade with ASEAN is not only modest but has declined in relative terms in the last decade. Not surprisingly, then, Singapore's attitude to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) has been positive, compared with a much more reserved and cautious stance on the East Asia Economic Grouping (EAEG) that was proposed by Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir and subsequently watered down into the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC). Bilateral relations with nearest neighbours Malaysia and Indonesia are problematic, suffering from concerns about Singapore's economic supremacy, its emphasis on the American defence umbrella and national military deterrence capability. Singapore's newfound emphasis on regionalism, argue Acharya and Ramesh, should thus be seen as no more than 'an insurance against uncertainties in the global economic environment'.

In chapters 10 and 11, Mokul Asher and Linda Low question whether the dynamics underlying Singapore's current and projected development are likely to exert pressure for changes in the social and economic rules of the state. Asher takes up in greater detail the point made earlier by Rodan about the PAP government's resistance to an expanded state welfare role. Asher observes that in other countries, including NICs, affluence has coincided with an increased emphasis in public policy on equity issues and the financing of social security. In Singapore, however, the general direction of the public sector is towards a reduction of consumption subsidies and the introduction of various cost-recovery measures. Attempts are also being made to deflect some welfare responsibilities to ethnic community organisations and the elected presidency, which involves substantial abilities to control public spending policies.

This direction, however, will have to contend with pressures of an internal and external nature. Domestically, the compulsory national superannuation
scheme, the Central Provident Fund (CPF), is likely to receive closer public scrutiny in the future. By 2030, Asher points out, two-fifths of the population will be over forty-five years of age — representing a majority of voters. Given that in all likelihood these people will have worked in an affluent society, their aspirations in retirement will be difficult to meet within the limitations of the current superannuation scheme and associated social security arrangements. Yet if the political will exists, Asher argues, the CPF system can be modified to incorporate modest forms of social insurance that would not fundamentally compromise the government’s emphasis on private provision where possible.

In any case, Asher sees Singapore’s comprehensive international economic integration as a potential force for diminished domestic autonomy in social policy. There have, for instance, been external calls for a reduction in Singapore’s compulsory savings on the grounds that the policy contributes to an undervaluation of the Singapore currency and thereby represents an unfair export advantage. The response to either internal or external pressures, according to Asher, will be guided by the needs of the ‘organic state’ which remains paramount in PAP thinking.

Linda Low takes a general look at the changing economic role of the state, noting the influence of the New Guard on changes to that role and prescribing an expanded space for the domestic bourgeoisie. Low maintains that the New Guard has been responsible for a change in the style of the public sector, notably the incorporation of much wider consultation in the planning process. But government planning itself remains strong, as reflected in the recent Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), National Technology Plan (NTP) and Concept Plan. Indeed, Low argues that macroeconomic management in general is not only likely to remain strong, but that there is little evidence that thirty years of it have been deleterious. Nevertheless, she sees potential, that should be encouraged, for the local private sector to develop stronger partnerships with the multinational corporations and to provide a counterbalance to that dependence. Like Asher, though, Low sees the strongest prospects for any retreat of the state in areas where the economics of efficiency and competition prevail for market forces to work. The restructuring of hospitals, establishment of independent schools and privatization of GLOs (government-linked companies) fall within this pattern.

In the final chapter Catherine Paix analyses the domestic bourgeoisie, providing a basis for projecting the possibilities for that class in the light of observations by Low and others about Singapore’s economic directions and the state–private sector mix. It is Paix’s argument that the economic, and for that matter political, significance of the domestic bourgeoisie has not been sufficiently acknowledged. Moreover, according to Paix it has prospects of a strategic role in any greater regional economic integration.

The distinctive contribution of the predominantly ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs derives from the specific Chinese historical and social character that embodies vast networks across economies. Instead of lamenting the failure of this class to move substantially into direct productive investment, Paix emphasises the importance of such networks to the new economic direction and indeed to the fortunes of those elements of the domestic bourgeoisie that may wish to head down the path of productive investment. Links with China by Singapore’s intermediaries, for instance, could be very helpful in opening up such opportunities. Paix’s account of local capital also challenges the view of the Singapore state as largely insulated from the political influence of the domestic bourgeoisie. Rather, she argues, proximity to state power has been exercised to consolidate commercial and financial interests in banking, real estate and hotels.

As a collection, then, the essays in Singapore Changes Guard offer perspectives not just on the nature of the current problems confronting the new leadership, but insights into the underlying social, political and economic dynamics behind current and emergent challenges to the status quo. As such, this book is directed at readers who are curious about the prospects for change in Singapore and the likely direction of it.

**POSTSCRIPT: BIOPSY AND BY-ELECTION**

Given their pertinence to Part 1, developments in late 1992 and early 1993 involving the leadership of the New Guard warrant attention before sending this book to print. Ill-health within government ranks and a commanding by-election win by the People’s Action Party (PAP) have, in their different ways, contributed to a consolidation of Prime Minister Goh’s political position within the ruling party. However, to extrapolate from the analyses of various essays in this collection, the significance of this lies in the enhanced potential for Goh’s particular strategies of co-optation to preserve the prevailing political system and its attendant order. It remains to be seen whether this proves an adequate medium- to long-term strategy in response to wider electoral disenchantment with the PAP.

On 16 November 1992, the Prime Minister’s office announced that Deputy Prime Ministers Lee Hsien Loong and Ong Teng Cheong were both suffering from cancer. The former was reported to have an intermediate-grade malignant lymphoma requiring immediate chemotherapy treatment, while the latter was said to have a slow-growing, low-grade malignant lymphoma. This remarkable misfortune for the PAP was all the more serious because Lee Hsien Loong was conceded even by Goh himself to be the party’s heir-apparent. Indeed, Goh’s assumption of the top job had been dogged by the perception that he was fundamentally a ‘waiter’ for his predecessor’s son. However, developments following the November announcement have suggested that, even in the event of Lee Hsien Loong’s recovery and return to politics, Goh is not likely to be in a hurry to relinquish the prime ministership and will be better placed to fend off any leadership challenge.
Lee’s replacement as Minister for Trade and Industry was S. Dhamalabun, a strong supporter of Goh and former Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for National Development who had resigned from Cabinet in August 1992, planning to return to the private sector. There was speculation, however, that Dhamalabun’s resignation was also linked to differences with Lee Hsien Loong (Far Eastern Economic Review [FEER], 17 Dec. 1992). Even more significantly, in December 1992 Goh was unanimously voted Secretary-General of the Central Executive Committee of the PAP. This position had been held continuously by Lee Kuan Yew since the party’s inception in 1954. It was the Senior Minister himself who nominated Goh for Secretary-General. Goh did not simply inherit Lee Kuan Yew’s influence by assuming the pivotal organisational position but, given the highly centralised and elite structure of the PAP, the secretary-general performs much more than new functions to Goh should not, however, be read as the final stage in the Prime Minister’s political demise. As Cotton argues in chapter 1, Lee continues to exert considerable influence by less formal means. In any case, he has, through the institution of the elected presidency, created a mechanism with considerable potential powers to check the direction of any government departing significantly from past PAP direction.

Indeed, December 1992 was an eventful month for the PAP and Goh. The same day as Goh became Secretary-General he announced a by-election for 19 December. He had already given an undertaking at the time of the last general election that by-elections would be held during the next term of government — a commitment intended to allay concerns that the timing of the 1991 election was designed to prevent the PAP’s nemesis throughout the 1980s, J.B. Jeyaretnam of the Workers’ Party (WP), from contesting the ballot. The actual pretext for this by-election was, however, the need for ‘self-renewal’. The sudden illnesses of Ong and Lee had focused Goh’s mind on the need to ensure a continual replenishment of young ministerial-quality people in the Party’s ranks. At the same time, it provided a perfect opportunity for Goh to seek fresh endorsement for his leadership. He could reasonably expect some public sympathy for the government’s recent setbacks. The discourse of ‘crisis’ referred to in Birch’s chapter was again in evidence. It was, in fact, the Prime Minister’s own electorate, the Marine Parade Group Representation Constituency (GRC), that was chosen for by-election. Accordingly, Goh and the three other sitting members resigned their seats in GRC. Tan Chuan-On, a forty-eight-year-old former minister and Secretary-General of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), subsequently announced his retirement, thereby making way for thirty-seven-year-old Commodore (Res.) Teo Chee Hean. The recruitment of Teo, who resigned his post as chief of the Republic of Singapore Navy to contest the by-election, testified to the growing links between the armed forces and the Singapore government, on the heels of Lee Hsien Loong and George Yeo. In the past, the PAP’s ‘high flyers’ recruits tended to boast distinguished public sector and/or professional backgrounds, with an increasing representation from the private sector in the 1980s. While the entry of Brigadier-General Lee Hsien Loong may have opened up networks between the PAP and the armed forces, it could also be that the PAP hierarchy (especially Lee Kuan Yew) sees the institution of the military as a useful nursery for leadership adept at decisive government. Lee Kuan Yew appears to have lingering doubts about the New Guard’s ability in this area.

By-elections in the Marine Parade GRC ruled out any real possibility of a PAP loss. During the 1991 general election Goh and his PAP colleagues captured 77.2 percent of the vote — the highest percentage of any constituency in Singapore. Neither the WP nor the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) bothered to contest Marine Parade in 1991. But in 1992 even a decline in the PAP share of the vote would embarrass the government in general and Goh in particular; and this time the major opposition parties would not have to weigh up where to allocate scarce resources.

The by-election resulted in a resounding win for Goh and his team. They won 72.9 percent of the total vote, the SDP picked up 24.5 percent and the other contenders, the National Solidarity Party and the Singapore Justice Party, lost their deposits. Surprisingly, the WP failed to nominate all four candidates in time, and was thereby disqualified from the contest. One view is that this was a stage-managed affair designed to spare Jeyaretnam loss of credibility from a possible heavy defeat (FEER, 21 Jan. 1993). Whatever the case, there was indiction and apprehension by the SDP and the WP in the lead up to the ballot. There was no electoral pact that could have resulted in a joint ticket, reflecting tension in the competition for the title of principal opposition party.

Beneath the surface, however, lurks a more difficult longer-term dilemma for the opposition in Singapore. We certainly could not contend, on the basis of the Marine Parade by-election, that the government has arrested the growth in support for opposition candidates since the early 1980s. Nevertheless, to advance beyond token representation in parliament and achieve a significant step towards a two- or multi-party system, opposition parties need to present the electorate with detailed policies different from those of the government. No longer able to dismiss the opposition out of hand, the PAP is now exposing this deficiency and exploiting it, portraying the opposition as fundamentally negative. To meet this challenge, opposition parties must substantially increase their organisational structures and resources. However, as is pointed out in chapter 4 by Rodan, the PAP’s general discouragement of participation in the political process by professional, interest group and non-government organisations limits the expertise and networks open to opposition parties.

Without doubt, Prime Minister Goh’s confidence has been buoyed by the Marine Parade result. A comment by Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew during the by-election campaign — that he was reassured to learn former front-bencher Tony Tan would soon be returning to Cabinet (in view of the recent leadership illnesses) — was contradicted by Goh on the night of the by-election. Tan had been Lee’s preferred choice as his successor, but after Goh became Prime Minister in late 1990 Tan resigned from the Cabinet. In
addition to that rare public difference with the Senior Minister, Goh has begun to talk not only about leading the PAP into the 1996 general election but the 2000 one as well (FEER 7 Jan. 1992).

Goh may have come to the helm a seemingly reluctant leader in the shadow of a political giant, fearful that his first mistake might see him swiftly replaced. Recent developments, however, have shown Goh to be a more determined and formidable political character than first appearances suggested. As this book illustrates, however, the leadership question is one element of a wider political economy over which neither Lee nor Goh have complete control.

NOTES

1 Jeyaretnam was not eligible to contest elections until November 1991, because of a controversial conviction relating to the management of WP funds.

2 Goh observed that: 'At present, the Cabinet is already short of Ministers — 14 Ministers for 17 jobs, with three holding two portfolios.' If no new ministers were found by the time of the next general election in 1996, Goh pointed out, the same Cabinet would have to remain until the end of the century. See 'Why the urgent need to find new pillars for the Cabinet — PM', The Straits Times Weekly Overseas Edition [ST WOE], 20 Dec. 1992.

3 Lee’s comments appeared to link Tan’s departure, and his concentration on his obligations to the Overseas Banking Corporation of which he is chairman and chief executive officer, to the need to meet his son’s educational costs at Harvard University. Goh described such comments as ‘inaccurate or maybe even unfair’ and made the point that Tan’s son had actually won a scholarship to Harvard. The Prime Minister indicated that while he had discussed a possible return with Tan when he first learnt of the illnesses of his senior colleagues, he had no immediate plans to re-appoint Tan to Cabinet. See ST WOE 20 Dec. 1992.