CHAPTER III

POLITICAL PARTIES AND ELECTORAL POLITICS
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Party system is an important component of democracy. Though Singapore is popularly known as a one-party state, there are several political parties existing in Singapore. Unlike other democratic countries, the party system in Singapore has a peculiarity of its own. The opposition parties have very little political role to play. The People's Action Party (PAP) is the only stable and organised political party ruling since 1959. This may be considered quite antithetical to the concept of democracy. Due to the absence of a strong and capable opposition, the people have no choice but to vote for the People's Action Party (PAP). In order to have a comprehensive understanding of the nature of political system in Singapore, it is necessary to analyse the nature, role and organisation of the PAP and other political parties. The reasons for "one-party"¹ rule and the failure of the opposition parties to organise themselves and get popular support need to be properly studied.

Officially by 1980, there were eighteen political parties. Noteworthy among them were People's Action Party (PAP), Barisan Sosialis (Socialist Front), Workers' Party, Singapore Indian Congress, People's Front, People's Republican Party, Parsatuan Malayu Singapura, Singapore Chinese Party, United Front, United National Front, United People's Party,

¹ Chan Heng Chee, Dynamics of One Party Dominance: The PAP at the Grass-roots (Singapore, 1976), p.3.
People's Action Party

Of all these parties, the PAP was the most significant one, ruling over Singapore for more than three decades without any opposition. The PAP was established in 1954. Its leaders came from the ranks of legal professionals, trade unionists, journalists and teachers. "Democratic socialism" was the proclaimed ideology of the party. It was described as a "dynamic philosophy of positive social and political action towards revolutionary social and economic goals". It was a highly disciplined and elitist party. PAP claimed to draw support "from all races and from different social sectors".

The party's objective was to end colonialism. Since its establishment in 1954 the party had to fight on two fronts. On one hand, it had to fight against colonialism and on the other hand, it had to ensure that the communists do not

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6 Chan Heng Chee, n.1, p.10.
capture the leadership of the party.\(^7\)

Organizationally, the Chief Executive Committee (CEC) was the apex body of the party. There were two kinds of membership - ordinary and cadre.\(^8\) Ordinary membership was open to all and cadre membership was secretive and limited. Cadre members were chosen by the CEC. The CEC composed of twelve members elected by the cadre members. The cadre members formed the "core group" of the party.\(^9\) The Party's chairmanship was nominal. The real power was vested in the hands of the Secretary General Lee Kuan Yew. The party's first headquarters was established in Tan Jong Pagar.\(^10\) The relationship between the party and the branches was not centralised. Each branch was encouraged to be financially self-sufficient and to solve the local problems in the constituency. The party held weekly sessions to meet people at the grass-root level and understand their problems.\(^11\) It tried to foster a sense of community feeling through para-political institutions.\(^12\) The major

\(^7\) Chan Heng Chee, "Succession and Generational Change in Singapore", *Pacific Community* (Tokyo), vol.5, no.1, October 1973, p.145.


\(^9\) Chan Heng Chee, n.2, p.159.

\(^10\) Le Poer, n.3, p.194.


Para-political institutions were Citizens' Consultative Committees (CCC), Resident Committees, and People's Associations. These institutions were controlled by the Prime Minister's office. People's Associations were formed in 1960 with Prime Minister as the Chairman of its Managing Committee. These para-political institutions provided social and recreational facilities for the people. PAP tried to spread its ideology to every nook and corner of the country. In 1965 PAP sought to maintain grass-root links with the people.

In 1965 Citizens' Consultative Committees were set up in each electoral district. They acted as mediators between the people and the government. Resident Committees were to provide a sense of security and protection from crime, drugs, and other anti-social activities and to encourage a sense of neighbourliness and racial harmony among the residents through sports and social and cultural activities. The development of community centres suffered a setback during the split that occurred in the PAP on 26 July 1961 when majority of the members of the People's Association joined the Barisan

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13 Seah Chee Meow, "Para-Political Institutions" In Jon S.T. Quah and others, n.2, p.


15 Chan Heng Chee, n.2, p.183.
Sosialis. The government built new centres in rural areas to speed up the programme. It was through the efficient implementation of these programmes that the PAP achieved political stability and economic development of the country.

In 1970 the PAP tried to infuse new blood into the parliament to maintain the continuity of party's policies. On 31 March 1970 Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew announced the resignation of four members of parliament to give a chance to the younger generation. In 1978 he announced the resignation of another seven ministers. In 1980 he announced the stepping down of eleven members. The opposition members took it as "an act against the spirit of democracy". It was clear that Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's "word was law and that a person's standing in the party depended not on his strength in a particular constituency but on Lee Kuan Yew's estimation of him".

By 1980 the party's administration was completely placed

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20 Josey, n.4, p.68.
21 George, n.17, p.24.
in the hands of the younger generation. They were given a chance to participate in the administration and were raised to ministerial ranks. "Old guards became deputy Prime Ministers to guide them".

Opposition Political Parties

The political party next in importance was Barisan Socialis. It was established on 23 July 1961. When the PAP split into two groups, the left wing of the party led by Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan established Barisan Sosialis. The party's objective was to establish an independent Malaya including Singapore "free from foreign troops and control, to strengthen the trade union movement, to improve the status of Chinese educated, and to improve more favourable policies affecting the welfare of the lower income groups". The party claimed to represent the interests of the "workers, farmers, taxi drivers, students, small businessmen and all the oppressed and the underprivileged". The party had other


ancillary organisations like Singapore Hawkers’ Associations, Singapore Rural Resident’s Association, Singapore Country People’s Associations and Old Boys’ Associations.

On 8 December 1965 when the Parliament was convened after independence, the members of the Barisan Sosialis absented themselves from the parliament. They came out with three reasons justifying their action. These were: they felt that the Parliament was convened

1) "to give a legal seal to departure from Malaya which was a neo-colonialist plot to divide and rule,
2) to use it as a legal cover for the government’s abuse of public funds, and
3) to use it as a platform to cheat people".26

They decided "if we oppose them (PAP) we must resolutely expose the PAP and the falseness of their democracy and their antipeople’s views". They described it as a "sham democracy"27 and decided to fight from outside the legislature.28

However, not all the members agreed with the decision to boycott the parliament. For instance, the leader of the Barisan Sosialis Lim Huan Boon resigned from his party saying that "by boycotting we have broken faith not only in democracy

26 Cited in Josey, n.4, p.50.
27 Ibid.
but also the people who elected us". 29 Three days after his resignation, two more members resigned from the party.

Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew criticised the boycott as "undermining the system instead of trying to improve and change it". 30 On its part, the Barisan Sosialis accused the PAP of having killed democracy by not consulting the people and the opposition parties about Singapore's separation from Malaysia, some thirty Barisan Sosialis cadres and supporters were arrested for creating civil disorder. In the subsequent byelections, the PAP candidates were elected to the seats vacated by Barisan Sosialis members.

Though Barisan Sosialis posed a threat to PAP at the outset, the periodic arrests of its leaders weakened the party. In 1970 the party claimed that five raids were made on Barisan Sosialis headquarters and several branches. 31 After the boycott of elections the Party lost the public platform to detest the government. It took the leaders of the Barisan Sosialis six years to recognise the realities on the ground.

The Barisan sosialis led by Lee Siew Choh decided to participate in the 1972 elections. 32 The decision was taken by five men in the Central Committee within four in favour and

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29 Straits Times (Kuala Lumpur), January 6, 1966.
30 George, n.17, p.52.
32 Chan Heng Chee, n.1, p.199.
one strongly opposing it.

The major weaknesses of the party were its failure to recruit candidates for elections, lack of central control by the party, and lack of unity within the party. Stringent policies of the government coupled with its (Barisan Sosialis) own weaknesses led to the end of Barisan Sosialis as an organised constitutional opposition. It could not play a major role in the subsequent elections.

Another important party was Workers' Party established by David Marshall in 1957. This happened after his departure from the Labour Front government. The party's platform was "Merdeka (independence), democracy and socialism". Workers' party supported the idea of merger with Malaya. Nevertheless it objected to the idea of blank votes being counted as votes for merger. In 1963 David Marshall broke ties with the party over its position on the issue of referendum. David Marshall stated that the Workers' Party would abide by the decision of the electorate in the referendum. But the Party's Vice President branded the referendum as "dirty, dishonest and undemocratic".

The party remained inactive until J.B. Jeyaretnam, a

33 George, n.17, p.10.
35 Chan Heng Chee, n.2, p.164.
lawyer, took over the leadership in 1971. He virtually rewrote its platform and objectives. According to him, the major objective was the attainment of a fully democratic socialist society. Workers' party supported the capitalist economy and the presence of foreign capital in Singapore. It was committed to repealing of Employment Act and replacing it with more suitable legislation. It also sought to work for annual review of Press licences, to work towards a system of profit sharing and equity participation with the employees, to seek amendment of the Internal Security Act and to ensure bilingualism. It also pledged to establish a strong and independent judiciary.

The infusion of two lawyers, an architect, an engineer and a publisher boosted its image and attracted the attention of the English educated people.

From 1972 onwards though the party could not win elections, it emerged as a major opposition party. In this election, of all the opposition parties, the Workers' Party obtained the best results.

Labour Front was also one of the significant political parties in the 1960s. The first Chief Minister of Singapore

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37 Straits Times (Singapore), August 3, 1971.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., p.166.
had hailed from this party. The party was formed by David Marshall as early as 1954 with the objective of achieving independence from the British rule. 41 In 1956 David Marshall became the first Chief Minister of Singapore. In the same year he led an All-Party Delegation to London to discuss the future of Singapore with the British authorities. But the refusal of the British to give up control over security matters or to set a definite period for granting independence disappointed him. 42 Upon returning home, David Marshall resigned on 30 April 1957 as Chief Minister. It was due to his failure to achieve his earlier promise of gaining independence for Singapore. In the 1959 elections, the party put up three candidates and all of them were defeated. This led to dissolution of the party. 43

Another political party - Peoples Front was established on 25 March 1971 by an ex-Barisan member of Parliament Kow Kee Sery and two other ex-PAP branch secretaries. 44 The objectives of the party were to establish a United Malayan Democratic Republic that included Singapore and to establish a society with the objective of promoting equality of liberty and justice. It also sought to repeal the Internal Security

41 Shee Poon Kim, n.23, p.4.
42 Ibid.
43 Chan Heng Chee, n.1, p.191.
44 Ibid., p.212.

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Act, the Employment Act and the Criminal Ordinance.\textsuperscript{45} The party's growth was hindered by internal squabbles and stringent policies of the PAP.

Lee Kuan Yew's remarks in Helsinki that one of the prominent members of the People's Front was an agent of the PAP had created chaos in the party. Zakaria Bagharib was believed to be the person and his expulsion from the party was demanded by other members. The Secretary General of the party resisted the move and resigned along with Zakaria Bagharib.\textsuperscript{46} Five months later the party Vice Chairman also resigned. In 1972 the party purge was conducted and its financial irregularities were exposed. This led to resignation of other office bearers of the party.\textsuperscript{47} After this the party virtually became defunct.

Still another party, United National Front (UNF) was established on 28 April 1969.\textsuperscript{48} In 1970 it was registered as a political association. The party was the outcome of a merger of three political parties - Singapore Chinese Party, Angkatan Islam and Persatuan Malayu Singapora.\textsuperscript{49} The UNF's objectives were to work for a neutral foreign policy, closer relations

\textsuperscript{45} Straits Times 26 April 1971.
\textsuperscript{46} New Nation (Singapore - Daily) 29 August 1972.
\textsuperscript{47} Chan Heng Chee, n.5, p.215.
\textsuperscript{48} Straits Times (Singapore daily) 29 April 1969.
with China, abolition of compulsory national service and repeal of Land Acquisition Act. It also aimed at reunification of Singapore with Malaysia, to build a multiracial society and to strengthen unity and goodwill among the people. The party also stood for complete freedom of Press and association.  

Most of its leaders were not much known to the people. Also the party failed to recruit candidates for elections. So it could not make an impact on the politics of the country.

Pertubohan Kebasaan Melayu Singapora (PKMS)

The party was called United Malays National Organisation before Singapore became independent. In 1967 it was renamed PKMS. Its members composed of Arab businessmen, school teachers, fishermen, journalists, small shopkeepers, clerks and a handful of non-governmental Malay professionals. Before 1966 it had 14000 members and eighty one branches. By 1972 it was reduced to 4000 members and twenty branches. After independence the party had formed its own identity and policies. The legal requirement that only citizens could become members reduced its membership. Many Malays in Singapore were not citizens because their parents failed to register the births of their children. Intellectuals and highly qualified Malays were in civil services and were banned

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50 Chan Heng Chee, n.6, p.212.
51 Straits Times (Singapore) 20 March 1967.
52 Chan Heng Chee, n.1, p.207.
from taking active part in party politics. When the Electoral Delineation Committee redrew electoral boundaries, its chances of winning elections became almost nil.

**Electoral Politics**

Electoral system has a significant role in the functioning of the democracy. Voting gives the people the right to choose their government. The periodic elections ensure the accountability of the government to the people. The Singapore's electoral system was based on single member constituency and universal adult franchise with elections held at regular intervals. A strong opposition makes the ruling party vigilant in order to win the next election. But unlike other democratic countries, in Singapore the People's Action Party had been winning all the elections held since 1968 till 1980 without a single opposition member getting elected to the parliament.

For a period of fifteen years since 1965 there had been no single opposition member in the parliament. It was during these years of unopposed legislative power that the PAP consolidated the one-party state apparatus to suppress all


54 Le Poer, n.3, p.177.

kinds of opposition. The PAP tried political consolidation at two different levels:

a) strengthening the economic and political development and raising the standard of living of the people, and

b) controlling mobilization and participation of the masses.

In all these years PAP had done remarkably well. For a decade from 1959 to 1969, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Singapore had increased by nearly two and half times. Singapore's GNP growth rate in 1980 was 14.4 percent. The PAP government launched a massive low cost housing programme. In the first five year plan from 1960 to 1965, the Housing Development Board (HDB) built 50,000 houses and another 60,000 units were built in the second plan in 1966-1970. By the year 1980, sixty eight per cent of the people were living in HDB flats. The island had by then become a regional centre for oil industry. This had happened when Singapore was not producing a drop of oil. By 1970s, Singapore had achieved full employment. The Community Centres established by the government provided education for children at minimal cost.

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56 Tremewan, n.11, p.155.
58 Chan Heng Chee, n.1, p.29.
60 Amina Tyabji, "The Economy" In Jon S.T. Quan and others ed., n.2, p.34.
They also provided recreational facilities and games. The PAP tried to popularise its policies in every nook and corner of the country.

Besides these positive economic and social welfare measures undertaken by the government for the purpose of consolidation of its power base, it also continued to pursue suppressive policy measures in order to eliminate the opposition. In 1967 the Government Delineation Committee drew new electoral boundaries on the grounds of uneven economic development in various constituencies. 61 Actually it was done on the basis of political expediency in order to split the areas with substantial population of any single ethnic race so that it could be impossible for ethnically oriented candidates to be elected. 62 There was no single opposition member in the Committee. This showed the PAP government’s lack of interest in respecting public opinion. The pleadings of the opposition parties were just ignored. Singapore Malays National Organization criticised the PAP for the absence of opposition members in the Committee. This clearly indicated the government’s misuse of authority in order just to eliminate opposition.

Even Internal Security Act was used for this purpose. Under this Act any person could be arrested and detained


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without trial and without any reason being given. It was targeted at the political organisations and persons who refused to conform to the PAP and could directly undermine the PAP's political hegemony. The left wing leaders of the PAP were detained under this act from 1959 to 1963 to obstruct popular left leaders from standing for elections. Throughout 1963 around 130 opposition organisers and communist leaders were arrested. According to the Amnesty International report "from 1963 to early 1970s the membership of political prisoners fluctuated between a maximum of two-fifty (two hundred and fifty) and a minimum of seventy..." The government even resorted to third degree methods to discipline a person. After inflicting mental and physical torture, the prisoner could be released only after obtaining a forced confession through television. He could even lose his citizenship, which would be the ultimate blow to his political ambitions. In 1967 the leader of Barisan Sosialis Lim Chin Siong was forced to write a letter saying "I have completely lost confidence in the international communist movement and communism is not as dear as (we) think it is".

63 Tremewan, n.11, p.199.

64 James Minchin, No man is an island: A Portrait of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew (Sydney, 1986), p.63.


66 Cited in George, n.17, p.118.
The government also used mass media to eliminate the opposition. The report on the affairs of the opposition parties were kept to the minimum and their short comings were highlighted. The government fully owned the radio and television and closely supervised the newspapers. The government closed down all the newspapers that criticized the government on various charges. In 1973 three major newspapers - Singapore Herald, The Eastern Sun and Nanyang Siang Pau were alleged to be under the influence and manipulation of "black operations". The government used radio and TV for election campaigning. But the opposition political parties were not given such facilities. In 1980 elections only the United Front and Workers' Party were permitted to make political broadcasts. Each of them was allotted two minutes radio time compared to the one hundred and twenty three minutes allotted to the PAP.

The PAP tried to spread its ideology through Community Centres. The Citizens' Consultative Committees established since 1963. The managing committee members of these institutions were appointed by the Prime Minister's office. The functions of these institutions were dissemination of

67 Le Poer, n.3, p.214.


government policies and consequent feedback of People's reaction to such policies.\textsuperscript{70} The PAP sought to maintain grass-root links with the people.\textsuperscript{71} In their "meet the people sessions", the PAP members met the local people to hear their grievances.\textsuperscript{72} The opposition party members were completely excluded from these government controlled organisations which monopolised local affairs in each constituency. The community centres became "institutionalised channels of communication where the norms of the political community envisaged by the PAP leaders would be fostered".\textsuperscript{73} The Citizens' Consultative Committees acted as channels of political communication and control. They incorporated local influential figures into the PAP government machinery. The difference between the PAP and the government got blurred.\textsuperscript{74} The whole system was organised in such a way that local people were involved in PAP activities and there was no room for the opposition parties to get into grass-root contact with the people and popularise their ideas.

The PAP government controlled the working class that

\textsuperscript{70} Like Foo Yee (Dy Director of Peoples' Association) and Tan Kim Hian (Assistant Director) "Community Development in Singapore", \textit{The Mirror}, vol.131, no.24, June 13, 1977, p.76.


\textsuperscript{72} Linda Quen Ching Lim, n.69.

\textsuperscript{73} Seah Chee Meow, "Para Political Institutions" In Jon S.T. Quah and others, eds., n.2, p.117.

\textsuperscript{74} Tremewan, n.11, p.48.
constituted the majority of the total electorate. The subjugation of trade union movement went hand-in-hand with the elimination of the opposition parties. During the merger with Malaysia, the trade unions once controlled by the Barisan Sosialis were deregistered and in their place arose National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) controlled by the PAP. It "enjoyed virtual monopoly in the Trade Union field and acted as a pliable wing of the party". The NTUC was made the sole legal trade union confederation. It was the only legitimate channel through which labour was represented. The NTUC became a part of the "PAP state" with PAP leaders assigned top positions in it.

Compulsory urban resettlement also provided the PAP with an opportunity to break up the establishment and potential of opposition electoral community. The slum areas had been breeding grounds for dissatisfaction. The PAP government not only removed them but systematically dispersed the ethnic groupings.

The ballot papers for elections were numbered which would reveal the names of the candidates voted against the PAP government. People were apprehensive that voting against the

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76 Minchin, n.64, p.120.
77 Tremewan, n.11, p.33.
78 Linda Quen Ching Lim, n.69, p.183.
PAP would jeopardise their future.\(^79\)

The opposition parties were not given sufficient time for campaign for election. There was just ten days gap between the nomination and the polling day which was just one day more than the minimum time limit provided by the electoral rules of the country, the maximum being sixty days. Therefore the opposition parties were not well prepared for elections.\(^80\)

The PAP used "party state" apparatus to suppress all forms of organized dissent outside parliamentary politics. The Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act provided that the relevant minister, if satisfied that some person was associated with activities of criminal nature, might detain the person for a period of one year.\(^81\) The period was renewable. Targets of this law included unions, educational institutions, student movements, the print media and professional societies.\(^82\) The frequent prosecutions were aimed at keeping the opposition political parties impoverished and at criminalising opposition leaders.

In 1976 immediately after the election, Leong Mukhwai, the Secretary General of the People’s Front was arrested on

\(^79\) George, n.17, p.191.

\(^80\) Tremewan, n.11, p.153.


charges of defaming the Prime Minister during the election campaign by alleging that a legal firm owned by the Prime Minister’s wife had "received large conveyance charges on government built property".\textsuperscript{83}

Workers’ Party General Secretary J.B. Jeyaretnam was sued by the Prime Minister for defamation. He charged the Prime Minister with nepotism and corruption. In 1978 the High Court found him guilty and fined thirteen thousand dollars on damages to the Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and to pay cost of his action for "uttering a very grave slander".\textsuperscript{84}

This was a clear indication as to how the Prime Minister sought to eliminate his opponents on the pretext of defamation and stirring racial feelings. It was this sort of approach adopted by the PAP leaders that the opposition parties never succeeded in getting any of their candidates elected to parliament.

Role of the Opposition

In all the elections held between 1965 and 1980, the opposition parties did not win a single seat in the parliament. All of them had their own inherent weaknesses. They lacked unity and failed to form an electoral front against the PAP and most of the opposition candidates were

\textsuperscript{83} Keesing’s Contemporary Archives (Willington), vol.23, no.1626, 25 March 1971, p.28256.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., vol.26, no.1696, 12 September 1980, p.30460.
unknown to people and were with "dubious backgrounds and criminal records". They were incompetent and were unable to recruit sufficient number of candidates for elections. In 1968 general elections the opposition parties contested only seven out of 58 seats, in 1972 elections, 57 out of 65 seats, and in 1976, 53 out of 69 seats and in 1980, only 38 out of 75 seats. These weaknesses of the parties opposed to the PAP, however resulted from the stringent measures applied by the PAP government. These measures were initially introduced to combat pro-communist opposition, but the "non-communist opposition parties became casualties in this process".

Though the opposition political parties never won the elections they were not completely inactive. During the elections they campaigned against the policies of the government. In 1970 byelections United National Front’s General Secretary Vetrivelu pledged to eradicate five evils. These were: ISA, Criminal Law Ordinance, Land Acquisition Law, the suitability certificates for students and PAP control over TV and radio. He criticised the authoritarian laws created by the government to eliminate opposition. The 1970 bye-elections for the five constituencies were announced by the

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85 Chan Heng Chee, n.1, p.219.
87 Josey, n.4, p.74.
88 Ibid., p.87.
PAP government to give a chance to younger generation leaders to get elected. The workers' party boycotted the election saying that elections in these five constituencies did not reflect the discontent of the electorate in fifty eight constituencies. The opposition parties criticised the PAP government for compulsory national service, stringent citizenship laws, strict control over trade union activities, arrest and detention without trial and stifling freedom of speech and dissent. Barisan Sosialis boycotted the election saying that it was a trick played by the PAP. United National Front aimed at fighting for democracy and reunification of Singapore with Malaysia.

Reacting to the misuse of ISA by the government, in 1975 five opposition parties demanded the release of more than hundred political detainees and speedier justice for common criminals. The UNF, Justice Party, Singapore Chinese Party and Persatuan Malay Singapura issued a joint statement denouncing the police as "corrupt, lazy, inefficient bullies and tyrants who did not want to prove the case in the court against innocent detainees".

However, the political hegemony of the PAP failed to suspend the dynamics of party activity altogether. Since 1972 shifts had taken place in the relative strengths of the opposition parties. In 1972 general election Workers' party

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89 Bangkok Post, 2 February 1975.
90 Hindu (New Delhi), 20 December 1976.
emerged as the major opposition party. It fielded 27 candidates and polled twelve per cent of the votes cast.  

Both in 1976 general elections and 1979 by-elections it appeared that the appeal of a credible independent candidate was more effective than many of the established opposition party candidates. Chiam See Tong, a lawyer and newcomer to electoral politics won 31.3 percent of popular votes and in the 1979 by-elections he won 32.4 percent of votes. Workers' party General Secretary J.B. Jeyaretnam polled better than his party average. In 1972 and 1976 elections he polled 22.7 percent and 39.3 percent of the votes cast and in 1979 byelection he gained 38.1 percent of the votes.

The next elections were held on 23 December 1980. Opposition parties were given only ten days time for campaigning. For the opposition, lack of freedom and the government disregard for human rights were the rallying points. Lack of independence of the Judiciary was also criticised. United Front and United Democratic Front called for the release of all the political detainees and the repeal of Internal Security Act (ISA). In this election, thirty seven out of seventy five constituencies, PAP candidates won unopposed. In the remaining thirty three constituencies there were straight contests between the PAP and the opposition

92 Chan Heng Chee, n.2, p.164.
parties. Only in five constituencies there were triangular contests. J.B. Jeyaretnam's was the best performance among the opposition party candidates. He won 41.2 per cent of the valid votes. Chiam See Tong of Singapore Democratic Party won 41 per cent of the votes cast.

Although the opposition parties mustered between twenty and twenty five per cent of votes in all the elections, they obtained no representation in the legislature. The major difficulty of the opposition parties was that there was a dearth of politically appealing alternatives to the PAP government. The opposition parties would have to show their capability to specify some changes and be able to convince the voters that the changes suggested by them would alleviate the situation. In view of the growing level of economic development and in providing services under the PAP rule, it was difficult for the opposition parties to demonstrate to the electorate that they could do better in a way different from the PAP.

Absence of opposition could be interpreted in two different ways. First, it could be intolerance of the government towards the opposition parties, secondly, it could

95 Chan Heng Chee, n.2, p.164.
be popular support for government's policies. Many pointed out to government's intolerance that eliminated the opposition. Some observed that it was the efficiency of the government that attracted popular support. "Singaporeans are Pragmatic people" observed a keen Singapore watcher "if they have been electing one and the same party to administer the country... voting its candidates to each and every seat in the country's parliament, they certainly have a valid reason for doing so. It is an undeniable fact that under this party... Singapore has achieved remarkable political stability, unprecedented economic prosperity... It is therefore quite understandable why they are reluctant to vote in any party even for a change".97

There were several reasons to which the government interpreted its electoral success. These were -

1) people have acknowledged the ability and efficiency of our (PAP) government in carrying out its policies,

2) single-minded roughness of our leaders in implementation;

3) credibility of People's trust in PAP; and

4) honesty and integrity of the government collectively and individually.98


98 Encik Rahim Ishak (Minister of State for Foreign Affairs) "Democracy in Singapore" The Mirror vol.19, no.8, February 26, 1993, p.8.
Yet it is clear that the PAP suppressed opposition in all aspects. It controlled and won elections without its having a wide mass base. "Deregistration, banning, withholding and revocation of citizenship, police intimidation, and detention without trial became a part of PAP's repertoire."99 Opposition parties had been badly ill-treated. The Prime Minister ridiculed them as "Jokers" and they were charged with having foreign funds and engaging in "black operations".100 Also defamation suits had been filed against them.

Elections became a mechanism for legitimization of PAP rule and its policies. In 1968 only seven out of 58 seats were contested. This clearly shows there was a sense of fear among the people. The political parties did not come out with contestants. PAP claimed it to be an endorsement of labour laws, which had in fact deprived the workers of their rights.101 The following table shows the electoral successes achieved by the PAP in the elections from 1968 to 1980.

99 Tremewan, n.11, p.29.
100 Ibid., p.155.
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</tbody>
</table>

These figures show that in these four elections held in 1968, 1972, 1976 and 1980, the opposition vote declined from thirty percent to twenty five percent. The number of uncontested seats increased from 8 in 1972 to 37 in 1980. This was misinterpreted by the PAP as growing popular approval for its policies. The Chairman of the PAP Toh Chin Chye described it as "unusual expression of faith in the PAP government".\(^{102}\) It is difficult to say how far it is correct. In fact these figures demonstrated intensified control and fear that had been generated among the people.

In liberal democracies, voting process makes the people play a significant role. It indicates "the renewals of promise by the government to act according to people's wish".\(^{103}\) But in Singapore voters had to be accountable to the government. They had to demonstrate their obedience to the government by

\(^{102}\) Josey, n.4, p.55.

voting for PAP out of fear. Election was made compulsory to give legitimacy to PAP rule.

In order to see that the percentage of the people who voted against PAP candidates in the elections from 1965 to 1980 the figures in the following table would be useful.

**General Elections 1968-1980**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Votes against PAP</th>
<th>Seats won by opposition</th>
<th>Seats won by PAP</th>
<th>Total seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>15.57</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>30.98</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>24.45</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that the PAP won all the seats in the elections held between 1968 and 1980.\textsuperscript{104} The opposition parties not winning a single seat was a major anomaly in a democracy. From 1972 the opposition parties always won over twenty four to twenty five percent of voters without winning a single seat in the parliament. This indicated PAP government's control over the electoral process. Results suggest voters' submission rather than consent. The PAP

extracted party loyalty through housing, education, control over media and labour at work place.

PAP extended its organisation in the form of branch offices, state sponsored People's Association, Community Centres etc. "The entire working class and middle class had the party apparatus imposed on them directly in their localities". The Singaporean also resented increasing government control. But the "voters have no choice but to demonstrate personal dissatisfaction by voting for the opposition candidates regardless of their credibility".

But by using various means to eliminate opposition parties and instilling fear in people's minds against voting for the opposition parties, the PAP virtually established a "de facto one-party system". The opposition parties have not grown in Singapore as it generally happens in liberal democracies. The government took various measures to suppress the opposition parties. The government controlled the populace in such a way that they were forced to vote for the PAP. This resulted in the absence of opposition parties in the Parliament which is contrary to the principles of democracy.

105 Chan Heng Chee, n.1, pp.224-225.